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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
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Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP
House of Commons
London
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Thank you for your letter of 8 July to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

The conflict in Gaza last year took a terrible toll. As the Prime Minister said, we were all deeply saddened by the violence seen.

However the Prime Minister was clear on the UK's recognition of Israel's right to take proportionate action to defend itself and our condemnation of Hamas's rocket attacks. Israel, like any state, has the right to ensure its own security, as its citizens also have the right to live without fear of attack. But, the UK has consistently urged Israel to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties, to exercise restraint, and to help find ways to bring the situation to an end.

I visited Gaza in October 2014, and saw for myself the desperate conditions in which ordinary Gazans were living. The UK is continuing to urge the parties to give priority to reaching a durable solution for Gaza, and to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery.

In August 2014, following the outbreak of hostilities, the British Government reviewed all existing export licences to Israel. That initial review found that the vast majority of exports licensed for Israel at the time were not for items that could be used by the Israel Defence Force in Gaza in response to attacks by Hamas. Twelve licences were identified for suspension, as a precautionary measure, in the event of a resumption of significant hostilities. The Government was concerned that, in these circumstances, it would be unable to clarify whether the export licensing criteria were being met. Our assessment was that the resumption of hostilities, when Hamas broke the ceasefire, was not enough to warrant a suspension.

Following a further review of export licences for Israel, the Government announced on 14 July 2015 that there is now sufficient information from a wide variety of sources to apply standard export licensing procedures using the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (Consolidated Criteria) without any additional measures. As a result of this most recent review, this additional measure

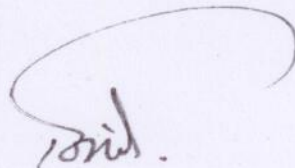
has now been lifted and the Government is confident that all export licences in circulation for Israel meet these Criteria.

We aim to operate one of the most robust and transparent arms export control systems in the world. All export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated Criteria found here: <https://www.gov.uk/assessment-of-export-licence-applications-criteria-and-policy>; and are only granted when there is no threat that they breach those criteria. We do not export equipment where we assess that there is a clear risk that it might be used for internal repression, or would provoke or prolong conflict within a country, or would be used aggressively against another country.

We will only approve equipment which is for Israel's legitimate self-defence and where we are satisfied it would be consistent with our human rights commitments and international obligations. We continue to monitor the latest circumstances in Israel and the OPTs when assessing licence applications.

I do not agree with your constituent's conclusion that sanctions should be applied to Israel. I do not believe that imposing sanctions, boycotts or a blanket arms embargo on Israel would promote the urgent progress we seek towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Only a negotiated two-state solution will resolve the conflict and end the occupation. We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show bold leadership, peace is possible. The UK is ready to do all it can to support this goal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Ellwood', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State of State