

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Thursday 23 November 2023

Dear Carl Aburant

Thank you for contacting me about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

I join the Government in utterly condemning the appalling attacks on Israel by Hamas. The UK stands resolutely with Israel in defending itself against terror, while highlighting the need to act in accordance with international humanitarian law. My thoughts are with all those affected.

The UK recognises the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and supports a lasting solution for Israelis and Palestinians alike. However, Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people or their aspirations; it only offers more terror and more bloodshed. I support Israel's right to defend itself: to retaliate against Hamas, deter further incursions; and strengthen its long-term security.

The loss of every innocent life is a tragedy, and the UK Government has repeatedly stressed that Israel must take every precaution to minimise civilian casualties, in line with International Humanitarian Law. The UK Foreign Secretary has also called for discipline, professionalism and restraint from the Israeli military.

The UK Government's focus is on getting humanitarian aid into Gaza, preventing regional escalation, and supporting long-term solutions to the crisis.

The UK already provided significant aid to the Palestinian people, but in light of the rapidly deteriorating situation in Gaza, the Government has increased its humanitarian support by £30 million, more than doubling this year's existing aid commitment (£27 million). FCDO Ministers are now urgently exploring with partners measures to help increase the flow of humanitarian support. To support regional stability, Ministers have increased our military presence in the eastern Mediterranean, deploying a Royal Navy task group and bolstering our forces in Cyprus. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have also been engaging extensively with their international counterparts, to prevent dangerous escalation of this devastating conflict.

The agreement announced on 21 November between Israel and Hamas to release some of the hostages held in Gaza and to pause the fighting temporarily is a crucial step. This pause is an opportunity to ensure much greater volumes of aid can enter Gaza, and I welcome that the Foreign Secretary has urged all parties to ensure the agreement is delivered in full.

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Looking ahead, it is clear how essential a two-state solution is, and I welcome the UK's work with international partners to bring renewed energy to this effort.

Regarding calls for a ceasefire, the UK is working via all diplomatic channels—bilaterally and collectively in the region—to ensure that this conflict, which has cost so many lives already, can be brought to a halt.

However, the reality is that Hamas have no interest in a ceasefire. They have no interest in resolution, have never attempted to engage in a two-state solution and have made every attempt to collapse the Oslo process. Furthermore, a unilateral and unconditional ceasefire would simply allow Hamas to entrench their position and continue their attacks. Indeed, Hamas have reiterated their intentions, stating clearly that "we will repeat the October 7 attack time and time again until Israel are annihilated". I must therefore reiterate that Israel has the right to take action to defend itself and to recover its hostages, and the UK, while respecting that, will continue to stress the necessity of adhering to international law and taking every possible measure to protect civilians.

I will continue to follow this fast-moving situation closely.

yours faithfully
Peter Gibson

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