



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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Dr Beccy Cooper MP
House of Commons
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7 July 2025

Dear Beccy,

Thank you for your correspondence of 23 May to the Foreign Secretary and to myself, on behalf of constituents, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

Despite the glimmer of hope from January's ceasefire, its collapse has only deepened the suffering in this ongoing conflict. Over 50,000 men, women and children have been killed in Gaza and more than 90% of the population have been displaced, many repeatedly.

The Foreign Secretary addressed the House of Commons on 20 May 2025 on the situation in Israel and the OPTs, where he stated that we are now entering a dark new phase in this conflict. He added that Netanyahu's government were planning to drive Gazans from their homes into a corner of the Strip to the south and permit them a fraction of the aid that they need.

We strongly oppose the expansion of Israel's military operations. We believe there is no military solution to this conflict. Israel's plan is morally indefensible, grossly disproportionate, and ultimately counterproductive. Despite claims by Israeli ministers, this approach will not bring the hostages home, as nearly all have been freed through negotiation, not force.

Israel suffered a horrific attack on 7 October 2023, and like all states, has a right to self-defence. However, this plan will neither eliminate Hamas, nor ensure Israel's security. Instead, it risks perpetuating the cycle of violence, leaving a generation traumatised and vulnerable to radicalisation. Opposing a war that has killed thousands of children is not rewarding Hamas. We have been clear that Israel must ensure all its actions are in line with international law.

You raised the issue of settlements. The UK's position is unequivocal: settlements are illegal under international law, undermine prospects for peace, and pose a serious threat to the viability of a two-state solution. Alarmingly, settlement approvals are now being reviewed on a near-weekly basis, with construction accelerating rapidly alongside a sharp

rise in settler violence. The UK strongly condemns any comments proposing the annexation of land in Gaza or the West Bank, as well as the inciteful remarks made by prominent Israeli Ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. We will challenge those who undermine a two-state solution, press for a change in course and continue to act against those carrying out heinous abuses of human rights.

On 10 June 2025, I announced the UK imposition of sanctions on prominent Israeli Ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir for their role in inciting settler violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank - violence that has led to the death of Palestinian civilians and the displacement of whole towns and villages. That violence constitutes an abuse of Palestinians' human rights. It is cruel, it is degrading, and it is completely unacceptable. We have told the Israeli government repeatedly that we would take tougher action if this did not stop. It still did not stop: the appalling rhetoric has continued unchecked; and violent perpetrators continue to act with impunity and encouragement. We acted alongside Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway, all of whom announced their own measures on 10 June 2025.

We have been clear that the current levels of aid entering Gaza are wholly inadequate. Israel's new mechanisms for aid delivery are ineffective, unsafe, and politicises humanitarian relief. Aid must never be tied to political or military objectives. We call on Israel to immediately allow full humanitarian access and enable the UN and aid organisations to operate independently, safely, and impartially. Effective deconfliction mechanisms must be established to protect aid workers and ensure lifesaving assistance reaches those in need.

Regarding the issue of arms exports to Israel. We have successfully implemented the suspension decision and continue to refuse all relevant licence applications. As set out to Parliament, the only exception to the suspension is parts for the global F-35 programme, to protect its role in NATO and international peace and security. Undermining the F-35 programme would disrupt international peace and security, NATO deterrence and European defence. We have suspended direct exports of F-35 components for use by Israel. Where UK-produced parts go to the global spares pool, Israel operate a small proportion of the F-35s in the global fleet. Subject to the specific measures taken to protect the global F-35 programme, we are clear there are no export licences currently being used for military operations in Gaza.

This Israeli government's egregious actions and rhetoric are isolating Israel from its friends and partners around the world and undermining the interests of the Israeli people. Their actions are incompatible with the principles that underpin our bilateral relationship and have made it necessary to announce on 20 May 2025, the suspension of negotiations on a new free trade agreement, and we will be reviewing co-operation with them under the 2030 bilateral road map.

We are unwavering in our commitment to the security and future of the Israeli people, to countering the very real threat from Iran, the scourge of terrorism and the evils of antisemitism. However, the conduct of the conflict in Gaza is damaging our relationship with their government.

On the question of recognition, we support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people. It is essential to provide the people of the West Bank and Gaza with a credible and irreversible pathway to a Palestinian state and a new future. Our long-standing position has been that we will recognise a Palestinian State at a time that is most conducive to the peace process.

UK bilateral recognition is the single most important action the UK can take with regard to Palestinian statehood. That is why it is important to get the timing right, so it creates genuine momentum and is not simply a symbolic gesture.

The two-state solution Conference has been postponed following military escalations in the region. We will continue to work closely with France, Saudi Arabia and others to make the conference a success when it is re-scheduled.

From its first day in office, this Government has pressed for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, to free the hostages and to bring humanitarian aid to civilians who have suffered so much. A negotiated solution is the only way to ensure long term security for both Israelis and Palestinians, and we urge all parties to return to negotiations. The Foreign Secretary has visited Israel and the OPTs three times since taking office, meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as families of hostages, victims of violence and members of the humanitarian community.

The situation in the region continues to evolve rapidly. But please rest assured that the Foreign Secretary and his entire Ministerial team will continue to do all they can to push for peace.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hamish Falconer', written in a cursive style.

HAMISH FALCONER MP
Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan