

Rt Hon David Miliband MP
Foreign Secretary
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
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Ref: SLT/Gaza/28-12-08

28 December 2008

Dear David,

Re: Israeli attacks on Gaza

I am profoundly disturbed by Israel's disproportionate attacks on Gaza and write to express my dismay at the failure of the British Government to criticise these actions clearly. I should add that I have been contacted by many constituents, some of whom have family in Israel and Palestine, who are similarly distressed by Israel's current strategy.

I visited Gaza during a trip to Israel and Palestine in April this year with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Britain<Palestine. I saw for myself the terrible levels of poverty afflicting the civilian population there, and the stranglehold that the blockade has placed on medical services. When we visited Al-Shifa Hospital, it had left barely months of basic medical supplies, with many antibiotics and other medicines banned from entering the Gaza strip. Since then the blockade has intensified, and it seems unimaginable that this hospital could cope with the level of casualties now presenting for emergency treatment.

I am well aware of the terror caused by Kassam rockets fired from Gaza on Israelis living in Sderot and Ashkelon. On our way out of Gaza our own group came under Kassam rocket fire as we left through the Erez crossing. Later in our trip I met with people living in Sderot, and witnessed the impact on this small town of constant hostilities.

Nevertheless, in seeking to defend her own citizens, Israel must adhere to the principles under international humanitarian law of proportionality and distinction. Despite the Israeli rhetoric of military targeting, it is quite clear that the consequence of their tactics has been indiscriminate killing and maiming of innocent men, women and children.

The principles of proportionality and distinction are accepted in international law for good reason. It is distressing that Israel has not learnt from its attack on Lebanon that this level of violence serves only to strengthen extremism. It is surely an epithet of common sense that imprisoning a million and a half hungry, angry people in poverty, inactivity and hopelessness will provide a fertile breeding ground for those against peace to recruit more to their cause. Slaughter of these same imprisoned families in an apparently indiscriminate way will only add greater credibility to those who argue that there can be no solution without violence.

You have said yourself that this is a dangerous moment for the Middle East. I fear - as you must - that if these attacks continue we may see a spiral of violence that may put back peace for another generation. With the US presidency now in transition it is vital that the rest of the International community speaks clearly and with one voice to give strength to the United Nations Security Council. With that in mind, as my colleague, Edward Davey MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Foreign Secretary has already called on you to do, I urge you to call a meeting of European Foreign Ministers to send a clear signal to Israel that this action is disproportionate and counterproductive.

Yours sincerely,

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