



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

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Medical Aid for Palestinians
33a Islington Park Street
London
N1 1QB



New Medical Aid

Thank you for your letter of 1 November to the Prime Minister about the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

Thank you for enclosing a copy of the petition and the foreword of your new report. I would like to set out our position on settlements and health in the OPTs.

The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps; Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states; and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

When the Prime Minister met Prime Minister Netanyahu on 2 November 2017, she reiterated the UK's continued opposition to settlement activity, and our firm commitment to a two-state solution as the best way to bring about stability and peace in the region. The Foreign Secretary reiterated the UK's support for a two-state solution and expressed concern about settlements and demolitions when he visited Israel and the OPTs in March 2017. I raised the issue of settlement expansion with the Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation and the Deputy Minister in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office during my visit to Israel in August 2017.

We understand the frustration at the lack of progress in the Middle East Peace Process. The situation on the ground at present demonstrates the urgency of progress towards peace. We are strongly supportive of a regional approach to peace, and we

are working through multilateral institutions, including the UN and EU, to support resolutions and policies that encourage both sides to take steps that rebuild trust - crucial for negotiations to succeed.

The long-lasting movement restrictions, and the serious constraints imposed by the occupation, impact on the health of the population as well as the further development of quality health services, especially in Gaza. Free movement of patients and medical personnel is vital to the effectiveness of care. Ambulance and permit delays can lead to missed appointments and interrupted treatments, endangering the health and lives of patients.

The availability of some medical supplies and services in the OPTs can be restricted by Israeli security procedures. A recent World Health Organisation report noted increasing restrictions, notably permit delays or denial, for patients who have been referred for further care outside Gaza and the West Bank. For Gaza the situation is particularly acute, and is compounded by the frequent closure by Egypt of the Rafah crossing, preventing urgent medical cases from seeking treatment in Egypt.

The UK contributes to medical care for Palestinians through our support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Our funding supports UNRWA to deliver comprehensive primary healthcare to over five million Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank and the region, as well as supporting access to specialised medical care. Our support to the PA in the 2016/17 financial year provided around 3,700 immunisations for children and enabled around 185,000 medical consultations.

The British Government is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We believe that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between the two parties, supported by the international community. We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show bold leadership then peace is possible. The UK is ready to do all it can to support this goal.

*Yours faithfully
Alistair Burt*

THE RT HON. ALISTAIR BURT MP
Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa