



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Sent by email only

21 December 2022

Dear Secretary of State.

Palestine/Israel: Prime Minister Netanyahu's annexationist policies must have consequences

We are writing to you to express our grave concern about the annexationist policies of the incoming Government of Israel, building on the policies of its predecessors which have produced a one state reality: effectively, Israel controls the lives of Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu has given the post of National Security Minister to Jewish supremacist Itamar Ben Gvir, and promised the Finance Ministry to Jewish supremacist Bezalel Smotrich. The next Israeli Government has made it clear that it will not abide by the Quartet Principles. It will pursue annexationist policies, de facto or de jure.

Already Netanyahu has promised to "legalise" outposts which are illegal under both Israeli and international law. They will, of course, remain illegal under international law. He has transferred the Border Police to Ben Gvir, thereby conferring on him a critical role in relation to the deteriorating status quo on the Noble Sanctuary/Temple Mount. He is moving the Coordination of Israeli Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) and the Civil Administration to come under Smotrich. He has created a Ministerial post in his office to promote illegal settlements.

These policy decisions are designed to advance the separate, discriminatory and unequal system (designated by leading global and local human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, B'Tselem and Al-Haq, as meeting the legal definition of Apartheid) in the occupied Palestinian territory and expel Palestinians from their land. Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney rightly declared in May 2021 that settlements constitute annexation. These policy announcements entrench and expand annexation. They must be challenged by all those in Europe who uphold the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and strive for consistency in the application of international law. In that context, please ensure that there is no repetition of the statement in the Commons by FCDO Minister David Rutley: "Any judgment on serious crimes under international law is a matter for judicial decision, rather than for Governments or non-judicial bodies". The Prime Minister and you have judged it right to accuse Russia, Syria and Iran of serious crimes against international law. We really cannot have one rule for our foes and another for our friends.

Netanyahu's annexationist and discriminatory intent is already clear, and should be opposed by all those concerned for Israel's wellbeing and international standing. The impunity and lack of accountability accorded to Israel have empowered extremism and led us down to this abysmal low point. Insulating bilateral relations with Israel from Israel's discriminatory and illegal policies

against the Palestinians is not only a mistaken policy – worse, it undermines any claim by our Government to uphold universal rights and values. This policy failure must be rectified.

We ask you specifically to

- **warn that any Israeli action** to (a) alter the status quo in Jerusalem, (b) build further illegal settlements (eg on E1) or (c) evict Palestinians from their homes will have severe consequences for our bilateral relations in deed, not just in word. In relation to Masafer Yatta, we condemn the demolition by Israel on 23 November of the Italian-financed primary school at Khirbet al-Safai al-Foqa. A shocking number of 44 more Palestinian schools are listed for demolition. School demolition is a crime committed against children – denying them an education and thus a better future. This crime must not be committed with impunity;
- **end trade in goods and services with illegal settlements**, and review all bilateral cooperation programmes to ensure that they comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2334. It is vital to differentiate between the territory of the state of Israel and the Palestinian territory which Israel occupied militarily in 1967. The occupied Palestinian territory does not belong to Israel – that fact is beyond dispute;
- **end the supply of offensive weapons** or other assistance liable to be misused to support Israeli Government-initiated violence in East Jerusalem, the rest of the West Bank and Gaza.

If the Israeli Government persists in its discriminatory policies towards the Palestinians, more areas of current bilateral cooperation with Israel should be re evaluated, leading to incremental and proportionate reduction in cooperation programmes.

Returning Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is responsible for bringing the Religious Zionism Party into the Knesset and into his Government. Despite that fact, once he gains office he will argue that he alone can exert a stabilising influence on Ben Gvir and Smotrich – and that any measures in response to acts of discrimination against Palestinians will weaken his influence. At the same time, on the evidence of his past record in office, he will threaten retaliation against any state taking such measures.

Successive Israeli Governments have acted with impunity – violating international law at will, building and expanding illegal settlements, and expelling occupied people from their land. The incoming Israeli Government has already shown that it will intensify these breaches of law. Consequences must follow. The response to protests from Netanyahu and his coalition should be that we in the United Kingdom have not sought escalation: far from it. The responsibility for any deterioration in bilateral relations with Israel will lie with those who break the law to increase inequality and discrimination, thus destabilising the region, endangering security for us all, and seeking to eliminate the possibility of a just peace.

Our Prime Minister recently told Conservative Friends of Israel that he “will oppose any actions which stand to harm the peace process and the two-state solution”. Netanyahu was Prime Minister in 2014, when the peace process was killed. His incoming Government is united in its intent to kill the two-state solution, and says so. We ask Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to be true to his word and oppose this intent, which is so harmful to all of us – Israelis, Palestinians and British alike – and to uphold international law without fear or favour.

We look forward to reading your response.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Elliott MP

Rt Hon. Baroness Tessa Blackstone

Baroness Christine Blower

Crispin Blunt MP

Alan Brown MP

Rt Hon. Lord Menzies Campbell of
Pittenweem KC

Rt Hon. Alistair Carmichael MP

Joanna Cherry KC MP

Marsha De Cordova MP

Lord Alf Dubs

Rt Hon. Lord Peter Hain

Lord John Hendy KC

Baroness Barbara Janke

Sir Tony Lloyd MP

Rt Hon. the Marquess of Lothian KC (Michael
Ancram)

Andy McDonald MP

Rt Hon. John McDonnell MP

Lord Jonathan Oates

Kate Osamor MP

Andrew Selous MP

Baroness Shaista Sheehan

Tommy Sheppard MP

Alyn Smith MP

Baroness Pola Uddin

Dr. Philippa Whitford MP

Nadia Whittome MP

Lord Stewart Wood of Anfield

*cc Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations
Diane Corner, UK Consul General, Jerusalem
Neil Wigan, UK Ambassador to Israel*