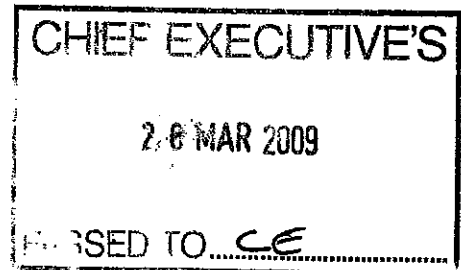


JACK STRAW, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Graham Burgess
Chief Executive
Town Hall
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB1 7DY

12 March 2009

Graham Burgess

Thank you for your letter regarding the motion regarding Gaza passed at the Council Forum on February 10.

I share many of the concerns expressed about this issue, and agree entirely with the view that a two state solution is critical to bringing peace to the region. I welcome the recognition of the Government's role in helping to bring about a ceasefire in Gaza. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary worked extremely hard to secure Security Council resolution 1860.

This resolution:

- Calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza;
- Calls for unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian supplies, welcomes the opening of humanitarian corridors and seeks greater international support for humanitarian relief and economic development;
- Condemns all violence and hostilities against civilians and acts of terrorism;
- Calls for action to prevent illicit trafficking in arms, and to ensure sustained re-opening of the Gaza crossings on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access;

- Encourages steps toward intra-Palestinian reconciliation; and
- Urges renewed and urgent efforts to reinvigorate the MEPP.

As I have made clear, the death and destruction caused during the violence was appalling and it is imperative that the ceasefire remains in place. The Government will continue to work hard to play our part in trying to secure peace in the region and build a political process which meets the needs of Israelis and Palestinians. I am encouraged that the new US administration seems determined to pursue the peace process with vigour.

On the point raised about putting economic pressure on Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza, while we share the concern expressed, the Government's view is that imposing sanctions is not the best way to engage or influence Israel. It would not advance our influence over Israel or the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Finally, the motion refers to arms exports to Israel. The Foreign Secretary has set out the Government's position on this. Where there is a clear risk of exports being used either for internal repression or external aggression, export licences are not granted. The UK's record on exporting equipment to Israel has recently undergone judicial review, and the courts found no evidence to suggest that the Government is not properly applying European Union and national export controls. It is not yet completely clear what equipment was used by the IDF in Gaza. We will take into account the conduct of the IDF in the recent conflict in our assessment of future export licences.

Yours,
Jack

JACK STRAW