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Mair Eirian Roberts (CG)

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Dear Mair Eirian Roberts (CG),

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 December about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Ministerial and Treat Official Correspondence Team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been asked to reply.

A human tragedy is unfolding in the Middle East. Israel has suffered the worst terror attack in its history and Palestinian civilians in Gaza are suffering a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. The UK condemns the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli and international citizens. Hamas neither speaks for nor acts in the interests of the Palestinian people. Together with the US, the UK has targeted Hamas with a new set of sanctions in an effort to disrupt the group's acts of terror. We must work with our allies to provide serious, practical and enduring support needed to bolster the Palestinian Authority, because they are the best route to sweep away the terrible scourge of Hamas and all it has wrought.

The UK supports Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism in line with international humanitarian law. We have pressed Israel to ensure its campaign is targeted against Hamas leaders and military infrastructure; to allow aid to enter Gaza; to end settler violence and hold perpetrators to account; and to work with the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to improve the desperate humanitarian situation. It is vital that all parties ensure that their actions are proportionate, necessary and minimise harm to civilians.

From the start, we have said that we want British nationals to be able to leave Gaza and for humanitarian aid to reach Gaza. We welcomed the recent truce in fighting but we urgently need more humanitarian pauses to get all the hostages out and to get life-saving aid into Gaza to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. We have been consistent in supporting a sustainable ceasefire which means that Hamas must stop launching rockets into Israel and must release all hostages. We continue to press – both at the UN and directly with Israel – for unhindered humanitarian access and substantive, repeated humanitarian agreements that will allow aid to enter and British nationals to leave. We

have announced a further £30 million in lifesaving humanitarian aid for people in Gaza. The aid will go to trusted partners including UN agencies on the ground. This brings the total additional UK aid for Palestinian civilians to over £60 million since the crisis started in October.

To prevent further conflict and terrorism, there must be a lasting political solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict: a two-state solution which provides peace, justice and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. The UK will work urgently with our partners to ensure this vision finally becomes a reality. We are also urging all sides to de-escalate tension in the West Bank and tackle all forms of extremism. We will oppose any attempts by malign actors to cause further escalation in the region.

As the Prime Minister has said, we are investing more deeply in regional stability and in the two-state solution. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, have spoken, crucially, to counterparts across the region to underline the need to work together and avoid any further spread of conflict. This includes the King of Jordan, the President of Egypt, the Prime Minister of Israel, Palestinian Authority President Abbas, the President of Turkey, the Amir of Qatar, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and the UN Secretary General. The Foreign Secretary has spoken separately with the Israeli Foreign Minister, the Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister and the US Secretary of State; both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had further meetings with regional counterparts at COP 28 in Dubai at the end of November.

On 22 November, the Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad hosted a meeting of Foreign Ministers from five Arabic and Islamic countries in London. The Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 22-24 November, during which he reiterated the UK's support for Israel to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Humanitarian Law; the urgent need for further humanitarian aid to get into Gaza; and engaged on further acute issues such as the hostage situation in Gaza and rising tensions in the West Bank. During his visit he met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, as well as other Israeli ministers. The Foreign Secretary also visited Ramallah in the Occupied Palestinian Territories where he met Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, with whom he discussed the UK's continued support for the Palestinian Authority and a two-state solution.

Lord Ahmad spoke to the UN General Assembly in New York in October and delivered the UK intervention at a Security Council meeting on Gaza on 29 November, when he called for humanitarian pauses to get hostages out and aid in and set out our engagement to push for: a scaled up humanitarian response, progress on a two-state solution and meaningful action on settler violence. Lord Ahmad has met or spoken to representatives from the UN, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, the Palestinian Authority, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Morocco, Bahrain and Lebanon. Lord Ahmad visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 1-2 November; Qatar on 18-19 November; and had further meetings with Arab countries and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in New York on 29 November. He also travelled to Qatar on 10-11 December: to discussions on this crisis.

In all our engagements with Israeli counterparts we have underscored the UK's firm belief

in Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. Israel has a duty to protect civilians and we have called on Israel to take every possible precaution in this respect. Our position on international law is unwavering. We continue to make clear to all parties that all possible measures must be taken to ensure civilian casualties are minimised and to facilitate humanitarian aid to the civilians in Gaza. The Prime Minister has raised directly with his Israeli counterparts the need to act in line with International Humanitarian Law. Israeli President Herzog has also said Israel will abide by international law.

Peace, security and stability for Israelis and Palestinians alike can only be achieved through a collaborative and concerted effort towards a two-state solution; a secure Israel, living side by side with an independent, secure and viable Palestinian state.

Yours sincerely,

**Ministerial and Treat Official Correspondence Team  
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