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London and South East Region

The Rt Hon William Hague, MP
The Foreign Secretary
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1

Dear Mr Hague

The Gaza Flotilla incident

I am writing on behalf of the UK United Nations Association London and South-East Regional Committee. We were pleased to hear your statement in the Commons of 31st May about the attack on the convoy delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza.

In the past there have been various investigations held by the Israeli authorities into such incidents, but these have been far from satisfactory. We therefore strongly support the call by HMG, and the Security Council, for a credible, independent and international investigation into the events of May 31st when the aid flotilla was intercepted. The enquiry would be to determine whether international maritime law had been breached, whether disproportionate force had been used, whether the rules of engagement issued to the troops were adequate and observed; and whether among the aid workers there were elements bent on violence, and whether the convoy contained arms or military supplies.

This incident is one of an extremely long list of violent incidents, many in breach of international law and the Geneva Conventions, in defiance of UN resolutions. We note in particular Israel's non-compliance with UNSC Resolutions 242, 446 and 194. The actions of successive Israeli governments in disproportionate military operations in the region, and the proliferation of illegal settlements, and other policies, seem calculated to provoke the very attacks on Israel they seek to prevent. As Lord Hannay of Chiswick observed in a debate in the Lords on 6th April, "the present Israeli Government ... by their words and deeds now represent the biggest obstacle to making progress" in the peace process. In the long term, the policies pursued by the Israeli government are in danger of seriously undermining the very foundations of international law.

We therefore urge HMG, and the EU, to bring the strongest possible pressure on Israel to radically review its policies; unless this occurs there is absolutely no prospect of peace in the region. To underline the importance of this we urge the EU to suspend preferential trading arrangements unless Israel meets its obligations under UNSC resolutions. We also urge HMG and the EU to bring strong pressure to bear on the authorities in Gaza to exercise restraint, which in itself would also add pressure on Israel to review its policies.

The UN reports that poverty levels in Gaza have tripled in the last 18 months, and as a first step, the government of Israel should (while retaining reasonable security measures) lift the blockade of Gaza: we urge HMG to do all in its power to persuade Israel to open the port to ships bringing humanitarian aid and supplies.

Meanwhile, can HMG give an assurance that no arms or military supplies from UK sources are being used either by the IDF or by Hamas in the ongoing conflict?

Yours sincerely

Neville Grant
Chair London and SE Region, UNA