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Rt Hon Philip Hammond
Foreign Secretary
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London, SW1A 2AH

Dear Mr Hammond,

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israel's attacks on Gaza over the past month have resulted in the deaths of more than 2,042 Palestinians 1,444 of them civilians, of whom 478 are children and 246 are women while Israel itself has sustained 66 deaths, of them only 2 civilians. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has risen to 460,000, more than a quarter of the entire Palestinian population of Gaza. Over 3000 Palestinian children have been injured and 16,800 Palestinian homes destroyed. Israel has bombed hospitals, ambulances and, notoriously, a UN school which was being used as a shelter for thousands of Palestinian civilians. Israel's actions constitute clear abuses of human rights and are in violation of the requirements of international humanitarian law not to use lethal force indiscriminately, to do so proportionately and to protect civilians and civilian buildings.

This current action follows on from previous IDF actions including Operation Cast Lead in which large numbers of civilians and children were killed; and it follows years of occupation, blockade, the construction of the illegal wall and illegal Israeli settlements, all of which constitute oppression and involve thousands of human rights abuses of Palestinian people on a daily basis.

The Arms Trade Treaty to which the UK is a signatory requires that no transfers of weapons be made to countries which are likely to use them in the commission of human rights abuses. Given the above facts it is difficult to understand the licensing of twelve companies to transfer military equipment to Israel since 2012. Israeli equipment used in Gaza in the 2008-9 conflict "almost certainly" contained UK-supplied components the UK has approved. Yet the Foreign Office has licensed over £47 million in weapons sales to Israel since then - and spends millions on buying its "battle-tested" weapons exports. The UK government is supplying and supporting Israel not only in Gaza now but in its taking of Palestinian land and property in the West Bank, building of the separation wall and illegal settlements for Israelis. Verbal protests are not enough to stop a regime which is prepared to use lethal weapons to enforce its will rather than observe international law and all standards of human rights. The UK cannot deny its share of responsibility for the acts it is carrying out.

We urge you to ensure that the Foreign Office apply the spirit of the Arms Trade Treaty and refuse applications for licenses for export of arms or arms components to Israel. Beyond that however we ask that the Foreign Office place an embargo on the sale of all UK equipment to, and purchases from Israel as well as the breaking off of all military contacts. This would send a strong message to the Israeli government that its actions in Gaza are totally unacceptable.

Yours sincerely,

R. Brian Larkin
Coordinator, on behalf of the Management Committee
Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre