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Dear Cllr Pattison,

Thank you for your correspondence of 21 November to the Prime Minister, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Parliamentary Correspondence Team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been asked to reply.

The death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable. Since the election, the UK Government has led international calls for an immediate ceasefire. The fighting must stop, Hamas must release the hostages and Israel must ensure much more aid can enter Gaza. We continue to urge all parties to engage in negotiations in good faith and show the flexibility needed to reach an agreement.

During the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel he pressed Israeli leaders to deliver on their promise to "flood" Gaza with aid, calling on them to end restrictions and open all border crossings, including Rafah. He also pressed for safe distribution of aid in Gaza. More aid workers have been killed in Gaza than in every other conflict globally combined this year. Israel must provide a guaranteed deconfliction mechanism to keep humanitarian operations safe from military operations. 1.9 million people have been forced to flee their homes—almost 90% of the population. The IPC's (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification's) recent famine risk assessment found that there was a high risk of famine across the whole of Gaza.

The Government continues to call for the immediate release of the hostages so cruelly taken by Hamas on 7 October. The deal on the table is the best way to get the remaining hostages out and end the suffering they and their families have endured.

On 2 September, the Foreign Secretary announced the suspension exports licences to Israel for use in the conflict in Gaza, as required under the Export Control Act 2002. The suspended licences were for equipment where we assess there is a clear risk that the items could be used in breach of International Humanitarian Law in the current conflict in Gaza. This is not a blanket ban; but targets around 30 relevant licences that might be

used in operations in Gaza. The majority of UK export licences for Israel are for civilian use, covering a range of products such as food-testing chemicals, telecoms, and data equipment. They are not for weapons. Alongside our allies, we have repeatedly communicated to the Israeli Government our concerns regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza, but found that those concerns have not been addressed. The UK remains fully committed to Israel's security and its right to self-defence, in accordance with international law. The IHL assessments will continue. We hope to see sustained evidence of Israel's commitment to IHL that would allow us to lift this suspension.

We received the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 19 July and are considering it carefully before responding. The issues raised are by their nature complex and require proper consideration. The UK respects the independence of the ICJ, and the Government is absolutely clear on the fundamental importance of the international rule of law. It has taken the Court five months to produce its Opinion, and we will comment further when we have considered it carefully.

It is the UK Government's long-standing policy that any determination as to whether a genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent national or international court, and not for governments or non-judicial bodies. This approach ensures that any determination is above politics, lobbying and individual or national interest. In this regard, the UK awaits the ICJ's decision. We cannot comment on ongoing legal proceedings and do not believe it helpful to speculate on the outcome.

As we look for a pathway out of the wider crisis, we are conscious of this conflict's complexities and are determined to listen to all sides. Our overarching goal is clear: a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, alongside a safe and secure Israel. There is no way out of this crisis without a route to both Palestinians and Israelis enjoying security, justice and opportunity in lands that they can call their own. We want a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution and are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a peace process, at a time that is most conducive to that process.

The Foreign Secretary has twice visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since taking office, meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as families of hostages, victims of violence and members of the humanitarian community. The Prime Minister last spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 19 October and met with President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority on 25 September.

The situation in the Middle East continues to evolve rapidly. But please rest assured that the Foreign Secretary and his entire Ministerial team will continue to do all they can to secure lasting peace in the region.

Yours sincerely,

Parliamentary Correspondence Team
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office