Dear Minister

Please do thank your officials Alastair King-Smith and Nicola Friel on my behalf for an excellent follow-up meeting following my adjournment debate on “Humanitarian Issues in Jerusalem”.

You may remember that one of the key points of my speech was that we in the UK and across Europe should not be subsidising illegal Israeli settlements given that this runs counter to UK foreign policy. I was encouraged to find that officials were looking at these issues.

I presented evidence that several of the companies benefiting from European funding through the FP7 research programme are suspected of serious breaches of international law through their work in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The FP7 research programme provides for the exclusion of projects because of violations of international law and human rights:

“*Cooperation with third countries in the domain of research with possible dual use should be avoided with any country that does not respect human rights, UN resolutions and international law*”.

I hope that officials in your department will investigate these companies and work with their European counterparts to ensure that, where this is happening, companies are excluded from future research funding and are asked to repay amounts received.

The successor programme, Horizon 2020, is now under discussion and this would be an excellent moment to tighten up procedures so that they do not merely provide for but require the exclusion of companies that are operating in breach of international law. There is now an opportunity to strengthen the proposals as they are scrutinised by the Parliament and Council.

I would welcome a Europe-wide labelling system that would give consumers the information they need to decide whether or not they wish to buy products which have been grown or made in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. We need this to go further than the current UK system of voluntary guidance covering only agricultural produce, but to be compulsory and to incorporate other goods too.

I would also like the Minister to enable local decision making, by allowing local councils to exclude companies from public contract tendering processes where there is compelling evidence that they have been involved in breaches of international law overseas. It maybe that no legislation is needed on this issue, but some guidance – focused on international law and how it applies to public contracts – would be extremely helpful to local decision makers.

I am pleased that the Minister’s Department are looking at some of these issues with a view to ending our inadvertent financial support for settlements. But I must at this time remind him that our final policy objective is a two-state solution with a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel, and that objective is slipping through our fingers with every demolition in Jerusalem and the West Bank and every new home built for Israeli settlers on Palestinian land.

The Minister must act quickly and decisively. We will also need to evaluate whether or not these limited actions will bring about the change of behaviour by the Israelis that is necessary to achieve our goal of two viable states. If not, more effective actions will be needed, such as suspending the EU-Israel Association Agreement until its human rights clause is met by Israel.

I look forward to discussing these issues with you, in the House and at other opportunities.

Yours sincerely

Alex Cunningham