

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are committed to seeing a negotiated peace settlement with a two-state solution. This will involve difficult, but necessary compromises on both sides of the conflict in order to respect the rights of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

We have continued to condemn disproportionate force used by all sides and have always stood firmly in support of the indivisibility of human rights and the rule of law.

In response to the questions you have asked, can I say that first of all, I do not support trade sanctions on Israeli settlement goods, as I fear they make achieving a peaceful solution harder.

I am supportive of the voluntary guidelines which enable customers to identify whether goods come from the OPTs and decide for themselves if they want to buy them.

Secondly, I believe that Israel's blockade of Gaza imposed since 2007 should be lifted immediately.

In fact, since 2007, the Liberal Democrats have been taking every opportunity to call for the blockade of Gaza to be lifted and for trade routes to be reopened. It will be vital for the UK to work with the EU and the UN to put pressure on Israel for this to happen, while recognising their legitimate security concerns.

Thirdly, as a Liberal Democrat, I believe that there should be a presumption of denial when considering whether to grant arms export licenses for equipment bound for countries that are listed in the Government's Human Rights and Democracy Report as countries of concern, which currently includes Israel and the Occupied Palestinian territories.

Under our proposals, it would be up to the Secretary of State to lift the ban on a license if they were certain that those weapons would not be used in contravention of international law.

In response to your fourth question - I'd like to say that reports of child prisoners in any circumstance are extremely worrying to hear. The Liberal Democrats have always put human rights and international law at the centre of our foreign policy. These are some of our core values and we would always ensure that international law was at heart of our relationship with Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and every other country around the world.

Finally, in answer to your last point, we are facing a situation around the world where international humanitarian law is being increasingly undermined. This is dangerous and unacceptable. I strongly believe that human rights should be at the centre of all future UK trade deals, not just with Israel or the OPTs, and conditional upon the respect of international law and human rights.

My priority now is to see a return to talks that bring a lasting end to the violence, improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians and address Israel's legitimate need for security. It is vital that the international community boosts its efforts at bringing both Israeli and Palestinian delegations back to the negotiating table.

It would be deeply worrying if the region entered into another period of sustained conflict as has been endured previously and therefore both sides must work for sustainable peace.