

The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear; we support a two state solution - a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

The Government will continue to support Palestinian institutions and promote economic growth, so that any future state will be prosperous and an effective partner for peace. We will ensure that the international community redoubles its efforts to support a comprehensive peace agreement that delivers an independent Palestine alongside a safe and secure Israel.

A key contention point is of course the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which are illegal under international law and present an obstacle to peace and take us further away from a two-state solution. We have strongly urged the Israeli Government to reverse recent announcements on proposed settlements, which damage Israel's standing in the international community.

It is vital that the civilian Palestinian population is protected but we are also clear that Israel has a right to defend itself from indiscriminate attacks. Hamas faces a fundamental decision about whether it is prepared to join efforts for peace, or whether it will continue to use violence and terror with all the terrible consequences for the people of Gaza.

The UK will continue to provide funding to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in order to maintain stability, provide vital services and build and strengthen the institutions needed for a viable two-state solution. However, certain key changes will be made to ensure this funding delivers the best value for money and maximum impact for Palestinians. The decision forms part of an ongoing examination of UK aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, carried out by DFID, in close collaboration with the FCO, to ensure that support is reaching those it is meant to help.

Our support will now focus solely on vital health and education services, in order to meet the immediate needs of the Palestinian people and maximise value for money. Funding will only go towards the salaries of health and education public servants on a vetted list. The UK will assess fiscal and public financial management reforms that the PA will need to show progress against in order to secure full future payments from the UK.

Our support to the PA will help to pay the salaries of up to 30,000 teachers, doctors, nurses, midwives and other essential health and education public servants on a vetted list. This will enable around 25,000 young Palestinians to get an education, provide up to 3,700 immunisations for children, and around 185,000 medical consultations annually.

The DFID alone will provide up to £25 million to the PA this financial year. Future payments will be subject to annual sign-off by UK Government ministers after reviewing the PA's commitment to the UK Partnership Principles and progress against key reform indicators.

The British Government is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution and we believe that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between Israelis and Palestinians, supported by the international community.

I hope this has been helpful.

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Gavin Barwell | Parliamentary Candidate