

Thank you for writing to me about the human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

The Liberal Democrats 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.

I, and my Liberal Democrat colleagues, 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.

I would like to take the opportunity to reply to each of the questions you have raised in turn.

1) Given that Israel has continued to expand settlements on occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in defiance of international law and international opinion, do you think the UK should ban the import of settlement goods into the UK? No.

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.

2) Do you agree that Israel's blockade of Gaza imposed since 2007 should be lifted immediately? Yes

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.

3) Do you agree that the government should enforce its own arms export licensing criteria and stop supplying arms to Israel until it ceases its violations of international law? Not all arms exports, no.

Liberal Democrats 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.

4) Numerous reports have highlighted the mistreatment of Palestinian child prisoners in Israeli military detention. Do you agree that any child prisoner should be treated in accordance with international law and not Israeli military law? Yes

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.

5) Do you agree that future UK trade deals should include a strong human rights clause, and that any trade agreement with Israel should be conditional upon the respect of international law and human rights? Yes

We are facing a situation around the world where international humanitarian law is being increasingly undermined. This is dangerous and unacceptable. We 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.