



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

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*From The Minister of State*

Dear Mr Machover

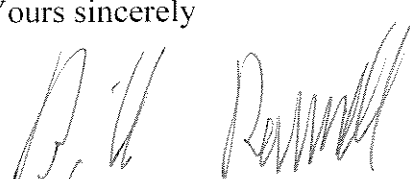
Thank you for your letter of 20 November to the Foreign Secretary about an incident off the coast of Gaza. I am replying as Minister responsible for the Middle East.

I share your concern about actions by the Israeli navy off the coast of Gaza. Even before the recent hostilities we had serious concerns about the Israeli restrictions on Gaza in general, including the restrictions on the passage of relief aid, fuel and people. Such actions have had a serious impact on the lives of Gazans.

As you point out, although there is no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control that Israel has over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retains obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as an occupying power. We have consistently pressed the Israeli government to comply with their obligations under international law, including when I visited Israel in December last year.

On the issue of the arrests, we were able to provide consular assistance to Andrew Muncie, as a British national, but not to the other non-British nationals. Following his arrest on 18 November Mr Muncie was deported on 25 November. Our consular staff in Tel Aviv responded quickly to the news of Mr Muncie's arrest and were able to speak to him within 12 hours of being notified. We then followed this up by making several visits to the prison to ensure Andrew had no concerns about his treatment or health that he wanted to take up with the local authorities. Consular staff in Tel Aviv and London were in regular contact with Mr Muncie's family in Scotland throughout his detention to keep them updated of events. It is worth mentioning that Mr Muncie was strongly advised not to travel to Gaza before setting sail aboard the 'Free Gaza Movement' boat and was reminded of FCO travel advice and the limits of the consular assistance we would be able to provide should he get into difficulty there.

Yours sincerely



BILL RAMMELL