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Foreign &
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Office

Room K1.150
Main Building
Foreign and Commonwealth
Office
King Charles Street

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Dear Colleague

Update on the Crisis in Gaza

I am sure that you and your constituents continue to be concerned about the situation in Gaza. I thought it would be helpful to give you an update on what the Government is doing to ensure a lasting ceasefire and establish sufficient delivery of humanitarian aid and reconstruction supplies. We are also acutely aware of the impact that the Gaza crisis has had on British communities. I and other Government Ministers have had a range of meetings between leaders of various faith communities and Ministers to discuss concerns that the events in Gaza have raised, and both the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government have written to community leaders to keep them abreast of latest developments.

Making the ceasefire last remains an urgent priority. We are doing everything we can to support the Egyptians in their efforts to ensure both sides remain committed to a cessation of hostilities. Whilst recent events have demonstrated the fragility of the ceasefire, they have also demonstrated that neither Hamas nor Israel wants a return to the events of early January.

A ceasefire will only be sustainable if action is taken to stop arms trafficking into Gaza and open the crossings into Gaza. The UK has offered to provide naval assistance to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza by sea. We are cooperating with EU and regional partners to see if the EU Border Assistance Mission to Rafah can be re-activated, and possibly extended to other crossings. We are publicly and privately emphasising to the Israelis that they must open the borders for humanitarian aid and longer-term reconstruction supplies. We are pushing very strongly for this.

We are also working to alleviate the suffering of the people in Gaza. A fact-finding team from the Consulate General in Jerusalem and the Department for International Development (DFID) visited Gaza on 2 February and had meetings with leading humanitarian agencies, including the Red Cross and the UN. Officials from DFID are also working with aid workers on the ground in Gaza to get a clear picture of the immediate needs of the population, the challenges going forward, and how best the UK can contribute. We have pledged almost £27m of emergency funds to the Gaza crisis in addition our commitment of £243m to the

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Occupied Palestinian Territories over three years. We have given £200 000 to the Mines Advisory Group to clear unexploded ordinance in Gaza, and made three armoured vehicles available to the UN in Gaza.

The reconstruction effort is only half of a twin track approach; the other track is a redoubled effort to find a long term, sustainable solution to the problems of the Middle East. The Government strongly believes that only a comprehensive peace - involving not only the Israelis and all Palestinians, but also all Arab states - can be lasting. We will work closely with the President Obama's Administration to achieve this. Secretary of State Clinton has already pledged to join efforts to achieve a comprehensive solution, and President Obama has made it very clear that his Administration is committed to turning a Peace Process into a Peace Plan. The appointment of Senator Mitchell as Special Envoy to the Middle East is an early demonstration of this new commitment.

We believe the crisis in Gaza has underlined the urgent need to make political progress; we also believe that 2009 offers a unique opportunity to make progress. We are determined to do everything we can to seize that chance.

Bill Rammell

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