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## Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTS)

**Latest Update: 31 December 2013**

The human rights situation in Israel and the OPTs has remained largely unchanged during the last three months.

### Israel

The UK welcomed Israel's participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on 29 October. The UK strongly supports the UPR as a vital international mechanism to review human rights performance. Further information, including the UK's contributions, can be found [here](#).

The Knesset (the legislative branch of the Israeli government) continued its discussion of the Praver-Begin bill relating to Bedouin communities in the Negev. The Bill was the subject of public protests in Israel and a number of countries on 30 November. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv has raised our concerns about the Bill and any forced relocation of Bedouin communities.

### East Jerusalem and the West Bank

The UK continues to have serious human rights concerns relating to the Israeli occupation of the OPTs.

We continued to discuss our concerns over treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military justice system with the Israeli authorities. The NGO *Defence for Children International* assess that 173 children were held in Israeli detention at the end of November.

UNICEF's six month progress report on child detainees highlighted an Israeli pilot scheme to use summons instead of night-time arrests in two areas of the West Bank; a welcome development. At Israel's UPR the UK recommended an end to the use of solitary confinement for child detainees and the use of audio-visual recording in all interviews of child detainees.

There continued to be a worrying increase in violence particularly in the West Bank over the reporting period, affecting both Palestinians and Israelis. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between October and December 12 Palestinians were killed and 493 injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank, including in raids of

Palestinian villages and in clashes during Palestinian demonstrations. This includes a 15-year-old Palestinian boy killed near Al Jalazun Refugee Camp on 7 December. The Israeli Military Advocate General's (MAG) Corps opened an investigation into the incident. Separately, MAG closed its investigation into the death of Palestinian activist Mustafa Tamimi, ruling that no regulations were breached when he was fatally shot with a tear gas canister from close range in 2011.

In the same period, three Israelis were killed as a result of violence in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank and 23 were injured, including a nine-year-old child. In December a 5kg bomb was discovered and detonated on a bus in Bat Yam, south of Tel Aviv, injuring an Israeli policeman. The Foreign Secretary [condemned](#) the attempted attack on 23 December.

According to OCHA, 72 Israeli settler related incidents in October and November led to Palestinian casualties or property damage, and eight incidents resulted in Israeli casualties or property damage. So-called "price tag" attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian property also continued, including on a number of holy sites in East Jerusalem.

Settlement announcements have continued. According to NGO Peace Now, plans were progressed for 2,821 units in the West Bank and 2,756 units in East Jerusalem. Settlements are illegal under international law and infringe upon the social and economic rights of Palestinians. Minister for the Middle East, Hugh Robertson reiterated the [UK's condemnation of settlements](#) and urged both sides to avoid steps which threatened peace negotiations.

We have serious concerns about Israeli demolition of Palestinian structures. 134 Palestinian structures were demolished in Area C and East Jerusalem between October and December, resulting in 242 Palestinians, including 123 children, being displaced. A [joint EU statement](#) expressed particular concern at the demolition of 30 Palestinian structures in the Jordan Valley on 10 December which displaced 41 people, including 24 children, on the eve of an impending winter storm.

## Gaza

The UK has been very concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza following Egypt's closure of the illegal smuggling tunnels. Frequent closure of the Rafah crossing compounded this by severely restricting the movement of Palestinians and others into and out of Gaza. Mr Robertson [called for](#) the Israeli, Egyptian and Palestinian authorities to work together to ease movement and access restrictions on Gaza and improve living conditions for its people.

Fuel shortages led to a serious energy crisis, with the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) shutting down on 1 November, resulting in power cuts for up to 16 hours a day. Basic services were disrupted, with water, sanitation, and hospitals particularly badly hit. The arrival of a winter storm on 11 December further exacerbated the poor humanitarian situation, causing heavy floods which displaced around 10,000. The GPP partially resumed operations on 15 December following a Qatari grant to the Palestinian Authority for the purchase of fuel, reducing power cuts to 12 hours per day in most areas.

Following the discovery of a Hamas-built tunnel into Israel, and Hamas claims that the tunnel was built with the purpose of attacking Israeli targets, Israel suspended transfer of construction materials into Gaza, including for humanitarian projects. This forced the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to suspend all 20 ongoing projects. On 10 December Israeli authorities re-allowed the export of construction materials to Gaza for international humanitarian projects but not yet for the private sector.

Although the November 2012 ceasefire has been broadly respected over the last year, small numbers of rockets have continued to be fired indiscriminately towards Israel by extremist groups although without causing casualties; Israel has periodically responded with airstrikes.

We continue to have concerns about the policing of Gaza border areas by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). One Gazan was fatally shot and 14 others were injured by Israeli fire during the reporting period. Palestinian sources claim these were farmers working their land near the border fence separating Gaza from Israel; the IDF claim some were throwing stones and others were trying to enter Israel illegally. In December an Israeli contractor repairing the fence was killed by a Palestinian sniper. Retaliatory Israeli airstrikes killed a three-year-old Palestinian and injured 16 others. Israeli authorities responded by closing the Kerem Shalom crossing for four days, and limiting the access of farmers working in the immediate vicinity of the fence.

In contravention of a Palestinian Authority moratorium on the death penalty, de facto Hamas authorities executed one Palestinian during the reporting period, and sentenced two to death. Then Minister for the Middle East Alastair Burt publically condemned the execution on 4 October as did the EU in a [joint statement](#).

## Update: 30 September 2013

The human rights situation in Israel and the OPTs remained broadly the same over July to September. The UK continues to have serious human rights concerns regarding the Israeli occupation of the OPTs, despite some positive steps in this period.

For example, we welcome the downward trend of Israeli use of administrative detention. According to Palestinian NGO Addameer, as of August 2013 there were 134 Palestinian prisoners being held in administrative detention, down from 250 in August 2012. We also welcome the release by Israel on 14 August 2013 of 26 Palestinian prisoners detained since

before 1993 as an important and difficult step to help re-launch direct peace negotiations.

We remain concerned about Israeli treatment of Palestinian children in military custody. The UK continues to discuss the issue with Israel and to encourage Israel to adopt recommendations from the independent 2012 report '[Children in Military Custody](#)'. As of end August 2013, 180 Palestinian children were held in Israeli prisons, including 31 under the age of 16, compared to 210 in August 2012 (34 under 16).

The UK has been particularly concerned by the recent spate of demolitions of Palestinian structures by the Israeli authorities, as well as the resulting displacement and need for humanitarian assistance. In the case of Mak Hul, every structure in the community was demolished and the entire community displaced. We are also concerned that the Israeli military authorities prevented the affected community from receiving humanitarian assistance. We have repeatedly made clear to the Israeli authorities, including to Prime Minister Netanyahu's office, our concerns over such demolitions, which we view as causing unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians, as harmful to the peace process, and as contrary to international humanitarian law. The Fourth Geneva Convention is clear that the destruction of any real or personal property is not justified unless it is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations, and that where humanitarian aid is needed, the occupying power is obliged to facilitate effectively the work of humanitarian relief schemes. The EU expressed concern at the incident in a [statement](#) on 21 September.

In a [statement](#) on 18 September, the then Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, warmly welcomed the announcement of positive Israeli steps to assist the Palestinian economy, including allowing construction materials for private projects into Gaza and agreeing to 5,000 additional work permits for Palestinians to work in Green Line Israel. However, the UK remains concerned about the damage that Israeli restrictions on the movement of goods and people have on the economy and living standards of ordinary people, and continues to urge Israel to ease these restrictions. The UN designates approximately one million Gazans as 'food insecure'. The economic situation in Gaza has worsened further over the past three months, with the tunnel closures by the Egyptian authorities impacting on the availability of fuel, construction materials and other goods. Closures of the Rafah crossing have further limited the ability of Palestinians and others to travel to and from Gaza.

The UK continues to have concerns about Israeli use of live fire. Eight Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces over the reporting period. On 10 August an unarmed Gazan was fatally shot by Israeli forces at the fence between Gaza and Israel, reportedly whilst trying to enter Israel, and a 19 year old was fatally shot during a violent demonstration in the West Bank town of Dura on 2 July. Six Palestinians were killed in Israeli operations in Jenin and Qalandya refugee camps in the West Bank in August and September. Violent protests at the Israeli incursions into the camps were ongoing at the time. British Embassy officials raised the UK's concerns about use of live fire with the Israeli Ministry of Defence and Prime Minister Netanyahu's office.

The UK also [condemned](#) the murder of two Israeli soldiers, who were killed by Palestinians in the West Bank on the 20 and 22 of September. One soldier was kidnapped in Israel whilst off duty and then killed, the other was shot in Hebron whilst on duty.

There have been a significant number of settlement announcements over the last three months. Plans for 3,171 settlement units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank have been advanced since 30 July, though no plans have been advanced since the resumption of direct talks on 14 August. The construction of settlements, illegal under international law, has a severe impact on the social and economic rights of Palestinians, restricting their rights to free movement, their ability to earn a livelihood and the right to the protection of private property. Alistair Burt [condemned](#) these announcements and urged both parties to avoid steps which undermined negotiations.

Violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank has continued throughout the reporting period. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimate that between 1 July and 23 September there were 70 incidents resulting in Palestinian casualties or property damage, and six incidents resulting in Israeli casualties or property damage.

The UK continues to urge the Palestinian Authority (PA) to uphold internationally recognised human rights standards, and remains concerned about a number of issues. For example, Palestinian security forces killed a man in a Nablus-area refugee camp during an arrest raid on 27 August. Amjad Odeh, 37, died immediately after he was shot by Palestinian security forces in the head, according to locals. PA security forces said the victim was killed in an exchange of fire. The UK has raised the conduct of PA security forces with both the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of the Interior.

The UK continues to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Hamas-controlled Gaza. Whilst the ceasefire agreed in November 2012 continues to be largely respected, extremist groups in Gaza continued to fire occasional rockets indiscriminately into Israel, with 13 launched between July and September. The UK condemns these attacks.

The de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza also sentenced five Palestinians to death between July and September in contravention of President Abbas's moratorium on the death penalty. Mr Burt condemned planned public executions in a [statement](#) on 13 August. The executions were subsequently delayed. EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah issued statements on [13 August](#) and [5 September](#) condemning the use of the death penalty.

On 1 September, Israeli security forces announced a series of arrests in relation to an alleged West Bank-based Hamas sleeper cell, which they report was in the advanced stages of planning an attack on a shopping centre in West Jerusalem, during the Jewish High Holy Days. The Israel Defence Forces reported the discovery of rockets and chemicals for explosives during the arrests.

### **Update: 30 June 2013**

There were no major changes in the trends seen in previous updates

Within Israel, the human rights situation remained broadly positive. We are following Israeli government plans regarding Bedouin land claims and unrecognised villages in the Negev. Draft legislation passed the Ministerial Committee of Legislation on 6 May as well as the first of three Knesset readings on 24 June. It has aroused particular concerns over the possible relocation of large numbers of Bedouin.

The UK continues to have serious human rights concerns regarding the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes built without Israeli permits (which are almost impossible to obtain for Palestinians) continued over the last three months. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported the demolition of 89 structures from April-May, displacing 211 people. The monthly average of people displaced in April increased by 30% in comparison to 2012. By contrast, Israeli settlement construction continued, fundamentally impacting the social, economic and political rights of Palestinians. Plans were advanced for over 1,300 new housing units and the retrospective legalisation of four Israeli outposts progressed.

The Israeli-built Separation Barrier in the West Bank prevents many Palestinian communities from accessing their land and continues to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. On 24 April an Israeli court ruled against a petition to re-route one planned section of the barrier, which if built would bisect the Palestinian community of Al-Walajah, leaving the 3000 acres of villagers' land on the other side of the wall only accessible via agricultural gates under a permit regime.

We remain concerned about Israel's excessive use of administrative detention and the treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention. As of May, 155 prisoners were administratively detained in Israel. According to NGO Defence for Children International, as of April 238 Palestinian children were detained in the Israeli system, including 135 held inside Israel in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention. We continue to urge the Israeli authorities to implement recommendations made in an independent FCO-funded report by leading British lawyers in July 2012, Children in Military Custody, as well as UNICEF's March 2013 report on the same issue. Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt most recently raised this with the Israeli Minister of Justice on 10 June and the Israeli Attorney General on 20 June.

"Price-tag" vandalism attacks and Israeli settler violence continued to rise in Israel, East Jerusalem and the West Bank against Palestinian, Muslim and Christian targets including graffiti and vandalism in Arab-Israeli Abu Ghosh; over 1200 olive trees destroyed near Nablus; damage of Palestinian-owned cars and a church in Jerusalem, and cars and houses in Ramallah. Alistair Burt [publicly condemned](#) settler violence on 20 June. We continue to encourage the Israeli authorities to bring those responsible to justice, most recently during the visit of the Israeli Attorney General in June. The Israeli Police say they have increased patrols, as well as cooperation between the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), Police and Border Guard. At least 13 Israelis were arrested in April and charged with throwing rocks at Palestinian vehicles and other offences.

The Israeli authorities reported an increase in violence by Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem against Israeli forces and civilians. On 30 April a Palestinian stabbed and killed an Israeli in the West Bank. A succession of violent incidents by Israeli extremists followed, including attacks on buses and a mosque. Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt [publically condemned](#) the events.

On 3 April, Israeli forces fatally shot two Palestinian youths who were reportedly attacking a manned Israeli watchtower with Molotov cocktails. Clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli forces around "Nakba Day" on 15 May resulted in injuries to nearly 200 Palestinians and four Israeli soldiers

Since March, two Palestinians have been injured by live fire from Israeli forces at the Gaza border. During Alistair Burt's June visit to the region, he underlined his concern about IDF use of live fire in enforcing the Gaza buffer zone and fishing restrictions and dealing with peaceful protests, and visited the family of Palestinian protestors killed by the IDF

Mr Burt called again for Israel to ease restrictions on movement of goods and people to and from Gaza. Between April and June, in response to rocket fire from Gaza, Israel closed the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings between Israel and Gaza for a number of days (Erez remained open for humanitarian emergencies). This exacerbated shortages and led to the delay or cancellation of Gazan exports to Europe. In May, after a period of relative calm, Israel re-extended the fishing limit from three to six nautical miles. This still falls significantly short of the 20 nautical mile limit stipulated under the Oslo Accords.

After a three week halt in April, Israeli authorities have allowed the resumption of family visits for Gazan Palestinian prisoners, facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, expanding these to include parents, spouses and children up to the age of 8.

Regarding the Palestinian Authority (PA), we continue to have concerns about allegations of mistreatment by the Palestinian Security Forces. The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) published its 18th Annual Report in May: 306 allegations of torture and mistreatment in the West Bank and Gaza were received in 2012 with a further 105 received in March-April 2013. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas responded by issuing an order confirming the PA's commitment to the prohibition of torture. The Foreign Secretary raised this issue with President Abbas on 23 May, stressing the importance of accountability in the Palestinian Security Forces.

We continue to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Hamas-controlled Gaza, including allegations of repression of dissent; curtailment of free speech and freedom of association including violent dispersal of peaceful protests; use of the death penalty; suppression of women's rights; and harassment and detention of individuals suspected of "morality" offences. For example Hamas police stopped a number of young men for "indecent" haircuts and women were prevented from participating in the Gaza marathon. The Gazan Military Court has issued three new death sentences and two Palestinian men were executed on 22 June for alleged collusion with Israel, in contravention of a PA moratorium on executions.

We remain concerned at the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Gazan militant groups towards Israel in contravention of international humanitarian law. Between April and June, 27 rockets were fired towards Israel from Gaza and two from Sinai. Five mortar shells were fired into Israel. Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt [publically condemned](#) the rocket fire.

### **Update: 31 March 2013**

The human rights situation within Israel has remained broadly positive. Israeli Parliamentary elections took place, and were conducted in line with international standards. However Israel's handling of the occupation and related human rights implications continued to cause concern. Notable events included the death of a Palestinian prisoner in Israeli detention, continued hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention and the issuing of the second report by the Turkel Commission calling for significant changes to the way allegations of violations of international law are investigated (see further detail on these below).

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem concerns remain about restrictions on Palestinian construction in Israeli-controlled Area C in the West Bank, and in East Jerusalem, and the impact these have on the viability of a future Palestinian State.

The Israeli authorities have continued to demolish Palestinian property, with activity spiking in January. We also remain concerned about the Israeli Defence Force's (IDF) use of live fire, which has resulted in the deaths of 12 Palestinians since January. Instances of Israeli settler violence against Palestinians and their property, and of violence directed at IDF forces and settlers by Palestinians, continued over the reporting period.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is still precarious, in large part as a result of ongoing Israeli restrictions. While both sides have largely respected the ceasefire agreed on 21 November 2012, rockets were fired by Palestinian militants on two occasions and two Palestinians were shot near to the border fence. The de facto Hamas rulers in Gaza continue to abuse human rights. The Independent Commission for Human Rights in received 21 reports of torture and mistreatment in January and February. A detainee in Gaza was also sentenced to death in March in contravention of a moratorium imposed by President Abbas.

The second report of the official Turkel Commission, issued on 6 February, contains 18 recommendations on how Israel could improve the investigation of complaints stemming from armed conflict. If enacted, these would constitute a major overhaul of the current process. Aspects of the report were welcomed by Prime Minister Netanyahu and the recommendations broadly welcomed by NGOs as a means of improving IDF accountability. The UK has encouraged the Israeli authorities to implement the recommendations as a matter of urgency.

January saw the completion of the border fence with Egypt and a resulting drop in numbers of asylum seekers and economic migrants. While the fence itself is a sovereign right of Israel, Israel is still obligated to provide asylum to those meeting the requirements defined in international law.

On 27 January the Israeli Cabinet approved recommendations by Minister Begin to resolve Bedouin land claims within Israel, including for 62% of land claimed by Bedouin to remain under their control and for the majority of unrecognised villages to be recognised. Some practical aspects of implementation remain to be clarified, however. For example it is not clear how many of the unrecognised villages, inhabited by 90,000 Bedouin, will remain unrecognised and how many Bedouin will have to move. Over the reporting period the British Embassy in Tel Aviv engaged with Bedouin communities and the Israeli government on this issue and will continue to do so. We will monitor developments closely.

Palestinian prisoner Arafat Jaradat died in Israeli custody on 23 February. There were allegations, denied by the Israeli authorities, that he died as a result of torture. There are currently three parallel investigations in hand. The UK has made clear to the Israeli authorities the importance we attach to a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death, including the allegations of mistreatment. We continue to follow the case closely.

Hunger strikes by Palestinians held in detention by Israel continued. One hunger striker was released and deported to Gaza in March. Two prisoners ended their hunger strike. Samer Issawi continued his hunger strike and remains in a critical condition. Two further prisoners took up hunger strikes. Officials in the British Consulate General in Jerusalem continue to monitor the condition of Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike and are in regular contact with the Prisoners

Affairs Ministry in the Palestinian Authority and relevant NGOs. The UK has lobbied the Israeli authorities for the rights of those on hunger strike to receive medical care of their choice and family visits, and has encouraged all sides to reach a solution that prevents loss of life.

On 20 March the IDF arrested 27 children in Hebron, following reports of stone-throwing. 20 of the children were under 12 years old and below the age of criminal responsibility. Their parents were not informed of their arrest, in contravention of Israeli Military Law. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv raised UK concerns at the arrests with the Ministry of Justice and National Security Council.

In March 2013 UNICEF published a disturbing report on children in Israeli military detention. This echoed many of the findings and recommendations made in an independent report written by leading British lawyers and funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office last year. Although the UK welcomes some positive recent steps made by the Israeli authorities, including reducing the length of time a Palestinian minor can be held in pre-trial detention or before being brought before a judge, we share many of the concerns raised in both reports and continue to press the Israeli authorities for further improvements, including the introduction of audio-visual recording of all interrogations.

Allegations of torture and mistreatment of detainees in Palestinian custody continued. The Palestinian National Human Rights Institution Independent Commission for Human Rights received 27 complaints of torture or mistreatment against detainees in the West Bank and 21 against detainees in Gaza between January and February 2013. Coverage of human rights abuses in Gaza is limited and the actual figures on torture and mistreatment there are likely to be higher. The UK regularly raises concerns regarding the treatment of detainees in Palestinian custody with the Palestinian Authorities, including with Prime Minister Fayyad on 3 March. UK officials in the OPTs are following closely the investigation into the death of a Palestinian in police custody on 1 March and will continue to include human rights training in our support to the Palestinian Security Forces as part of a US-led training programme.

Tensions remain across the West Bank, heightened by the death of Palestinian detainee Arafat Jaradat in February, with an increasing numbers of protests and violent incidents since January. During this period a total of 12 Palestinians were killed (including two children) and 1,315 injured by the IDF. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), two of these deaths occurred in Gaza, next to the border. Other people were shot during protests and some were killed trying to enter Israel illegally. The UK raised concerns with the Israelis regarding use of live fire by the IDF against civilians, and EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah issued a statement in January registering concern at the six deaths which occurred in that month.

A number of Palestinian "protest villages", set up in opposition to planned settlement expansion in the strategically important "E1" area near Jerusalem, were removed by Israeli authorities. The UK is supportive of the right of Palestinians to protest peacefully against the occupation.

The UN recorded 53 attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians resulting in injury or damage to property in January and February. Of particular concern was an incident on 10 January near the West Bank city of Nablus in which a group of armed settlers from nearby settlements raided agricultural areas next to Urif and Qusra villages, clashing with local residents and opening fire with live ammunition, injuring one Palestinian. A total of 285 olive trees were damaged or destroyed in the village.

The Israeli authorities continued to report violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem by Palestinians against Israeli forces and civilians, with the Israel Security Agency reporting 221 such attacks in January and February, an increase compared to 2012, although no fatalities were reported. On 14 March six Israeli settlers were injured when stones were thrown at their car, causing an accident in which a two year old child was severely injured.

According to UN OCHA figures, between 1 January and 18 March, 157 Palestinian structures were demolished by Israeli authorities and 309 people displaced. The UN reported that the number of demolitions in January 2013 was three times the monthly average for 2012. In addition, on 19 January the Israeli authorities removed 14 Red Cross tents and confiscated emergency aid provided to displaced families in Palestinian Bedouin community of Hamamat Al Maleh. The area was declared a closed military zone. The confiscation occurred two days after the demolition of 46 structures in the two communities. The UK raised strong concerns over demolitions with the Israeli authorities. Ongoing settlement construction continues to erode the chances of a two-state solution.

There are continued concerns about freedom of speech within the OPTs. At the end of the reporting period Mamdouh Hamamreh, a journalist, was convicted for defaming President Abbas by a local Bethlehem Court. He was freed on orders of the President's Office the day after being sentenced.

The UK deplores incitement to hatred or violence on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including anything that could stir up hatred and prejudice in a region that needs a culture of peace and mutual respect, and raises such incidents with the relevant authorities. In the last quarter the British Consulate in Jerusalem investigated allegations of material praising suicide bombers being broadcast on Palestinian TV and the Embassy in Tel Aviv raised concerns over a leaked video of a Jewish Home party candidate advocating the destruction of the Dome of the Rock and replacing it with a Jewish temple. The UK is supporting training for Palestinian journalists and the creation of a media Code of Conduct that covers both Gaza and the West Bank.

A report published in February by the Council for Religious Institutions in the Holy Land found that incitement and extreme negative characterisations are very rare in both Israeli and Palestinian textbooks. However it identified a need for textbooks on each side to do more to promote a more positive portrayal of the other. We will discuss this further with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

The UK has continued to urge Israel to ease restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza which severely hamper the local economy. Egyptian-led ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas continue, and there has been some easing of Israeli restrictions, including increasing Palestinian sea access off the coast of Gaza to six nautical miles, easing restrictions on access to agricultural land near border areas and easing restrictions to allow Qatari construction materials into Gaza for reconstruction efforts.

A rocket was fired from Gaza towards Israel on 26 February, for the first time since a ceasefire agreement was reached on 21 November 2012. The Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt MP, issued a statement saying that “we have consistently condemned the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel in violation of international humanitarian law” and calling on both parties to respect in full the November ceasefire. Further rockets were fired from Gaza during President Obama’s visit to the region. In response, the Israeli Authorities reduced Palestinian access to the sea off the coast of Gaza to three nautical miles.

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