

Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs  
and Culture

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson a' Bhun-reachd, Cùisean an  
Taobh A-Muigh agus Cultar  
Angus Robertson MSP/BPA



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Councillor Susan Aitken  
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**Item 7(a)**

**31st October 2024**

Our Reference: 202400431753  
Your Reference: SA/PS0911/FIRS

7 October 2024

Dear Councillor Susan Aitken,

Thank you for your correspondence of 11 September 2024, to John Swinney, First Minister, setting out Glasgow City Council's position in regard to Solidarity with Palestine. As Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs I am responding to you.

You will be aware that the former First Minister, myself and other Scottish Government ministers have written on several occasions to UK Government ministers on different issues related to the conflict.

The Scottish Government has taken a consistent approach to the conflict and the impact that this has had on communities in Scotland. We have repeatedly called for the UK to play a full role in international negotiations and to press as hard as possible for a permanent ceasefire, the provision of desperately needed humanitarian aid, and Israel of course has the right to protect itself and its citizens from terror.

The Scottish Government has condemned Hamas's brutal attacks and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. There can be no future for Hamas in Gaza.

In exercising this right however, Israel must abide by international humanitarian law. Israel's military action has gone far beyond any legitimate response. For those who cannot leave, supplies – including food, fuel, water and medical supplies – must be allowed into Gaza. A ceasefire from all sides is needed to create a humanitarian corridor that would ensure the protection of innocent civilians and delivery of essential supplies.

The significant rulings by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) set out that Israel must prevent any acts that could be considered genocidal and take measures to ensure humanitarian access to Gaza. It Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

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also, rightly, called for the immediate release of all hostages taken by Hamas. The Scottish Government has been clear throughout that an immediate and sustained ceasefire by all sides is required to prevent further loss of innocent life and avert a humanitarian catastrophe. In light of the worsening humanitarian situation and International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, the former First Minister and other ministers wrote to their UK Government counterparts to call for Israeli military and civilian leaders to be held accountable.

The Scottish Government does not believe that there is a case to send more weapons to Israel. As such, the Scottish Government has called for an immediate ban on the license of arms exports from the UK to Israel. The UK Government's decision to suspend some arms licences is welcome but should go further: the sending of all UK arms to Israel must stop. Banning the export of arms to Israel will be a clear signal to the Israeli Government that it must not cross that red line. It will reduce the risk that British-manufactured weapons or equipment are used in an offensive that is certain to see countless more innocent women, men and children killed and suffer if the Israeli Government carries out its dire threat.

The Scottish Government has called upon the UK Government to work together to explore a possible Resettlement Route to help anyone who is forced to flee the region. Gaza belongs to the people of Gaza, and they must not be forced to leave. However, for those who need refuge and sanctuary then Scotland stands ready to welcome them. Given the gravity of the situation, it is right that the current focus is on calls for a ceasefire and an increase in humanitarian aid. Should a displacement of refugees occur, we have called on the UK government to use its existing UK Resettlement Scheme, and ensure it is aligned with UNHCR to provide those who want to leave with the support they require.

We have also called for the UK Government to officially recognise the State of Palestine to break the political impasse that has condemned Israelis and the Palestinians to successive cycles of violence. Specifically, the former First Minister called upon the UK to review its position following the welcome decision by Ireland, Norway, Spain and Slovenia to recognise the State of Palestine. It is only with full recognition of Palestine, as a State in its own right, that we can truly move forward towards a two-state solution. Recognition would offer hope to Palestinians that a just and durable political solution is possible, and would allow Israel and Gaza to move towards long term peace and stability which is in the interests of all parties. I myself, as Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, made this position clear during a Member's Business Debate in the Scottish Parliament on 26 June.

Our long-standing position is that while it may seem a distant prospect, the Scottish Government continues to support the UK and EU positions of a two-state solution that respects the human rights of everyone in the region to ensure that a secure Israel can live peacefully alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. Only through such an outcome can the cycle of violence that is killing and injuring so many innocent civilians be ended.

Yours sincerely

**ANGUS ROBERSTON**

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