



## Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

[www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk](http://www.craigwhittakermp.co.uk)

### **Violence at the Gaza/Israel border**

Thank you for contacting me about violence in Gaza.

Like you I am deeply distressed by the deaths and injuries in Gaza, the violence is shocking and tragic. There are a number of important facts which need to be established urgently, including why live fire was used. Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself, however, the number of those killed and injured indicates that we should ask if more restraint is possible. The Government is supportive of an independent and transparent investigation into the violence and is working at the UN to find the correct formula for this investigation.

I believe the Palestinian right to protest is important, however, these protests must remain peaceful. I am extremely concerned that extremist elements may have used the protests to further their own violent and deplorable aims against the State of Israel. This is another reason why I believe there is an urgent need to establish the facts. Above all, it is important that this violence is not repeated and that all those involved commit to peaceful protest, restraint and observing international law.

There is a pressing need for all parties to reach a wider agreement that addresses the underlying causes of conflict in Gaza and to take the necessary steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. Any agreement should ensure that Hamas and other militant groups permanently end rocket and other attacks against Israel, that the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective governance, and that Israel lifts its restrictions to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians. As a response to the immediate situation, the UK is providing humanitarian support through a number of programmes including those of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Of this support, £1.9 million is helping to support up to a million people in Gaza by providing access to clean water and sanitation facilities in order to prevent the spread of disease.

I firmly believe that the international community must redouble its efforts to support a comprehensive peace agreement that delivers a safe and secure Israel alongside an independent Palestine. A two-state solution brought about through agreement is the most effective way for Palestinian aspirations of statehood to be met.

I do not believe that imposing a blanket arms embargo on Israel would promote the Middle East Peace Process. Defence and security exports support a country's legitimate right to self-defence. Israel has this right as much as any other nation. I know that the Government takes its arms export responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust licensing systems in the world. A licence would not be issued for any country if there was a clear risk that any exports might be used in the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP

