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*From The Minister of State*

Our reference: 56025

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Thank you for your letter of 29 January to the Foreign Secretary about the special session of the Human Rights Council on 24 January. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

The UK decided to abstain from the vote primarily because the resolution did not reflect events in a balanced manner. The text made no mention of the attacks against Israeli civilians. It is important that the UN voice is heard and supports progress on the peace process. It can only do this by maintaining a balanced perspective in its statements. As reported at the session by Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Palestinian militants fired around 230 mortar shells and 110 rockets into Israel since the beginning of the year until 22 January 2008.

I have attached the statement the Foreign Secretary and Development Secretary made two days after the special session in which this government made it clear that we did not support the Israeli decision to close the Gaza crossings. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is extremely grave, we wholly support opening Gaza's borders as a first step to alleviating Palestinian suffering. On 28 January, the Foreign Secretary along with his European colleagues in the General Affairs and External Relations Council called for the continuous provision of essential goods and services, including fuel and power supplies from Israel into Gaza. In addition, we announced support for the proposal by the Palestinian Authority to take control of the crossings and we support the Arab League's efforts on this issue. The EU stands ready to resume its border mission at Rafah (Gaza - Egypt crossing) as soon as conditions allow.

Further information about our policies towards the Middle East can be found on the Middle East Peace Process pages of our website at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk).

KIM HOWELLS

**DAVID MILIBAND AND DOUGLAS ALEXANDER COMMENT ON THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA (21/01/08)**

The Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, and the Secretary of State for International Development, Douglas Alexander, have issued a joint statement on the situation in Gaza.

'The recent escalation of violence between Gazans and Israelis is extremely grave. We deplore the fact that innocent civilians on both sides are suffering and the increasing number of casualties. Both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in peace and security. We urge all parties to exercise restraint.

'The rising number of rocket and sniper attacks from Gaza into Israel is unacceptable, as is the number of Palestinian civilian casualties. We do not support Israel's decision to close all crossings into Gaza, preventing the delivery of vital humanitarian supplies as well as fuel to the Gaza power station. Reports that electricity has been cut due to fuel shortages are particularly alarming and require urgent attention. Continued fuel shortages will have immediate humanitarian consequences, including on the supply of clean water. We appeal to all parties to work for the reopening of the crossings. The UK will pursue this with Israel, the PA, the UN, the EU and other partners.

'Israeli security and justice for Palestinians will not be achieved by cutting off fuel or by firing rockets. Both sides have a responsibility to support the Peace Process launched at Annapolis. The situation on the ground is an important part of this. Palestinian security efforts and Israel's reopening of the Gaza crossings need to support each other and the drive for a long-term peace.'

**DAVID MILIBAND AND DOUGLAS ALEXANDER CONCERNED OVER IMPACT ON GAZA OF FUEL CUTS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL (11/01/08)**

'We continue to be deeply concerned by the growing humanitarian impact of restrictions by the Government of Israel on industrial diesel supplies to Gaza, particularly on the most vulnerable sections of the population. We welcome Israel's recent decision to increase the supply of industrial diesel and continue to urge them to lift all restrictions on fuel with immediate effect.

'We utterly condemn the rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. We support all efforts to stop these attacks consistent with obligations under international law. The humanitarian needs of people who are in no way associated with the rocket attacks should not however be compromised. Reports indicate that the Gaza Power Station had cut electricity production by 30% because the reductions in industrial diesel supplies since October have reportedly left reserves near exhaustion.

'The resulting power cuts had left vital infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, water and sewage systems, as well as households, reliant on backup generators. This further aggravated the already difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza.

'We also welcome Israel's recent lifting of the restrictions on non-industrial diesel, important for back-up generators and ambulances, and hope that this will not be reversed.