

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Rt Hon Dr Kim Howells MP
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

September 5th 2007

Dear Minister,

As a member of the European Parliament's official delegation to Palestine, I am writing to object to the UK government's decision to refuse visas to members of the Palestinian youth football team, planning to tour the country as part of a groundbreaking project.

There are limited opportunities for people living in the occupied territories to engage in sporting activities and this visit to the UK was organised in order to give young footballers valuable experiences, including competing against other clubs and playing before a crowd of supporters. The summer's tour was also planned as a chance for team members and coaches to form links with community sports teams in the UK. These could then be pursued in coming years to help overcome some of the isolation felt by Palestinians growing up in an environment that is cut off from the rest of the world by roadblocks, travel bans and daily violence. Importantly, the project included strategies for taking low impact fitness training techniques back to Palestine, bringing some benefits to a wider group of people.

As I am sure you are aware, the Football Association and Truce International supported the tour, recognising the role it would play in improving the lives of disadvantaged Palestinians.

I understand that the Entry Officer's decision to not issue the necessary visas was based on concern that the players would not leave Britain after the tour, citing the closure of the borders with Gaza as a potential obstacle. Such an approach, whilst technically permissible under paragraph 41ii of the Immigration Rules, seems designed to punish innocent young people for the Israeli occupation of their territories and the resulting siege of Gaza. It contradicts the UK's public commitment to human rights and quality of life for Palestinians and, given the nature of this tour, I am surprised that the UK government did not do more to try and support and facilitate this visit. Did, for example, the FCO enter into discussion with the Israeli authorities about its concerns and seek to obtain assurances that the team members would be permitted to re-enter Gaza?

I am appalled at the UK's position on this matter and would urge you to do your utmost to ensure that it is reviewed immediately, enabling the youth team to visit Britain at a later date.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.