

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

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

October 15th 2007

Dear Kim,

Many thanks for your letter of September 20th about the UK's refusal of entry clearance to the Palestinian National Youth Football Team over the summer. I was interested to learn that this decision was taken after discussion with various officials. It was also helpful to receive confirmation that the main obstacle in this instance was concern about whether team members intended to leave the UK or, indeed would be able to, at the end of their visit. You cite the border closures at Gaza as a factor in this decision.

However, your response gives no indication of the FCO playing any kind of facilitating role in this process - placing pressure, for example, on the Israeli authorities to ensure that the illegal closure of the borders with Gaza would not prevent this positive trip from going ahead, both in terms of allowing players out of Gaza in the first place and permitting them to return. Given the multiple benefits of this trip and the unreasonable travel restrictions imposed on Palestinian citizens on a daily basis, surely the British government should have been pressing for all parties involved, particularly the Israeli authorities, to work towards a positive solution. I am certain this would have been possible without breaching UK Immigration Rules had the political will existed and would welcome your thoughts.

Furthermore, as I understand it, 3 members of the team were actually from West Bank. I am unclear why there were concerns that they, particularly, might be unable to return to Palestine, as your correspondence only makes specific reference to the difficulties associated with Gaza.

Once again, thank you for giving this your attention and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.