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Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP
Minister for Development and Africa
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development
Office
King Charles Street
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26th February 2024

Dear Andrew,

The current conflict and wider escalation in the Middle East are an issue of great concern for us both. While the Scottish Government continues to call, alongside a growing number in the international community, for an immediate and permanent ceasefire on both sides, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate with devastating effect as the Foreign Secretary noted in his letter to the First Minister of 12 February, with nine out of 10 Gazans living on less than one meal a day.

I am particularly alarmed by Israel's stated intention to launch a ground invasion into Rafah, the final refuge for some 1.5 million displaced Palestinians, as well as by reports from humanitarian agencies that the entry into and distribution of aid throughout Gaza is being routinely impeded, especially in light of the ruling by the ICJ on 26 January that Israel must take immediate steps to prevent genocide. I urge the UK Government to use its influence to ensure that Israel complies with this ruling in order to prevent a broader humanitarian catastrophe.

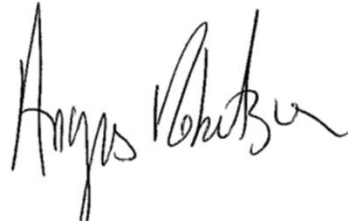
I share concerns about the serious allegations that United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff were involved in the abhorrent attacks of 7th October on Israel. That being said, UNRWA has warned that it may have to suspend its activities by the end of February due to the suspension of funding by a number of donors including the UK. This has the most serious ramifications for the 2 million people who are dependent on the agency for their survival, given there is no credible alternative to providing aid at that scale across Gaza. The UN Special Rapporteur on Food has warned that famine was now inevitable in Gaza.

I note in a statement released by FCDO on 27 January that you remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it. I would be very keen to understand what alternatives may be in place to ensure the 2 million people dependent on UNRWA are supported, and under what conditions and how soon the UK will be looking to

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return to their support for the agency. I think we can agree that if UNWRA were to cease operations, with no viable alternative, the humanitarian impact would be catastrophic. It is unconscionable that the international community stand by while thousands more innocent men, women and children die, knowing that more could have been done to save them.

During previous crises, such as that of Ukraine, the UK and Scottish Government have worked collaboratively both in humanitarian and recovery assistance. It would be very good to work towards a Four Nations approach in response to this crisis, and we would be keen to explore with your officials what support Scotland can provide in collaboration with UK efforts.



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