

14<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for taking the time to contact me about the debate on 13<sup>th</sup> October in the House of Commons on the recognition of the state of Palestine.

I had hoped to attend and speak in this debate. However, I had a longstanding commitment that evening to attend and speak at an Open Day event in Southcote for prospective parents and students of The Wren School and was therefore, unfortunately, unable to take part.

However, I can confirm that I am supportive of the amended motion which was passed and stated:

*“That this House believes that the Government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, as a contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution.”*

I want to see a peace settlement that allows both the Israeli and Palestinian people the opportunity to live in peace and to feel safe in their own homes. Whilst other countries in the international community, including the United Kingdom, should offer support to achieve this, ultimately it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who are the key to reaching a lasting peace deal. Recent provocations by both sides have clearly not been helpful in achieving this.

In particular, I deplore the Israeli government’s expropriation of 988 acres of land around the settlement of Etzion near Bethlehem. These settlements are illegal under international law and this was a particularly ill-judged decision that comes at a time when the priority must be to build on the ceasefire in Gaza.

The restrictions placed on Gaza by Israel are also harmful to the goal of a two-state solution. I therefore welcome the ceasefire agreement including agreement from Israel to open more of its border crossings with Gaza to allow the easier flow of goods, including humanitarian aid and reconstruction equipment, into the coastal enclave. This should form the basis for further easing.

However, I do support the right of Israel to defend itself, in a proportionate manner, against attack and believe that the continued presence of Hamas is a serious barrier to peace in the region.

Last year I had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli government, some younger people from the region as well as business folk. Although it may not seem this way currently, based on my discussions I was encouraged by the desire of many on the ground to secure peace. These meetings left me optimistic that a lasting peace deal is possible, but it will clearly involve compromise by both sides.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,



**Alok Sharma MP**