



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Israeli Settlements Debate**

Thank you for contacting me about the Backbench Business Committee debate on illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) on 9 February.

You are absolutely right that it is long standing UK Government policy that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are illegal under international law, an obstacle to peace and make a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, harder to achieve and that is why the UK supported resolution 2334 at the UN before Christmas. This is a view I support.

The UK and Israel have a strong and important trading relationship and the Government is firmly opposed to boycotts or sanctions. However, the UK does not recognise the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the settlements, as part of Israel and indeed the settlements are not covered by the current EU-Israel Association Agreement which governs our trade with Israel. Whilst it would be wrong to set out unilateral positions at this stage, I know that the UK will want to continue our strong trade and investment relationship with Israel.

I do not support a two way arms embargo on Israel. I know that the Government takes its arms export responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust arms export control regimes in the world. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. Imposing a blanket arms embargo on Israel would not promote the urgent progress towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which we want to see. However, I am encouraged that the Government continues to monitor the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and take into account the latest circumstances when assessing licence applications. Israel, like any state, has the right to ensure its own security, as its citizens also have the right to live without fear of attack and I believe we ought to support Israel's right to defend itself.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

**Edward Timpson MP**

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