



Rt. Hon. James Cleverly
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs

PWG NOTE – UK EMBASSY RELOCATION TO JERUSALEM

Dear Secretary Cleverly,

According to media reports from New York, UK Prime Minister Liz Truss told Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in their talks on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly that she is “positively considering” relocating the British Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Citing a knowledgeable source, *The Telegraph* reported that this major shift in foreign policy is a result of Truss’s desire to “challenge Whitehall orthodoxy and take a fresh look at things.” Truss first raised the idea during her campaign when she sent a letter to the Conservative Friends of Israel in which she promised to consider moving the embassy “to ensure we are operating on the strongest footing within Israel.”

It is worthwhile recalling that in 1980, after the Israeli Knesset passed the Basic Law: Jerusalem declaring the “complete and united” city the capital of Israel, the UK voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 478 which determined that the law “constitutes a violation of international law” and called on all states that have diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw them. Furthermore, as a permanent member of the UNSC, the UK played an important role in drafting Resolution 2334, which “reaffirms that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.” Finally, when former President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocated the US Embassy there, then Prime Minister Theresa May said that the UK adhered to its position that the status of Jerusalem should be determined in negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The UK then joined 127 other countries in passing a UN General Assembly resolution condemning the US move, demanding that it be rescinded, and calling on all states to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem. The impact of a UK Government decision to abandon this longstanding policy could be disastrous.

In the last decade, Israel has accelerated its settlement activities in East Jerusalem, aiming to consolidate more territorial control and change the demography in favor of the Jewish majority in order to foil any prospects of a negotiated political agreement based on the 1967 borders. It is doing so by applying illegal practices of relocation of its own citizens to new, exclusively Jewish neighborhoods constructed in occupied East Jerusalem, while conducting forced evictions, house demolitions, and measures that amount to ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population. Rather than taking a step that would lend these Israeli policies legitimacy, the UK should be looking for ways to bring them to a halt.

The relocation of the embassy to Jerusalem, whether East or West, before any diplomatic breakthrough would be seen in Israel as acceptance of its position on sovereignty over the “united” city and would signal to the Palestinians another breach of the disintegrating two-state paradigm that envisions East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state. With the status of the Palestinian Authority under attack and tensions in the West Bank at a dangerously high level, we urge the UK to recognize that an embassy move could spark a wave of violence that will be difficult to contain.

We support the comments by Husam Zomlot, head of the Palestinian mission to Britain, who pointed out that the UK “bears a unique historical responsibility” for the situation and expressed incredulity over its willingness to openly flout international law. We wish to underscore that at this time in particular, with the rules-based international order under threat from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is more important than ever to uphold the principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We appeal to the UK prime minister and government to abandon thoughts of instituting this radical policy change and to look to strengthen the UK’s “footing within Israel” by promoting moves that will help the two sides advance along the path to peace.



Amb. (ret.) Ian Baruch
PWG Chairperson



Ms. Susie Becher
PWG Communications Director

CHAIRPERSON

Amb. (ret.) Ian Baruch

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Ms. Susie Becher

ADVOCACY TEAM

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“We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.” (Nelson Mandela, 1997)