

Mr Peter Ramsden
Secretary to the Committee
Committee on Standards in Public Life
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Dear Mr Ramsden,

How the Israel Lobby undermines the Principles of Standards in Public Life – a Matter for Investigation

Those signing this letter know the Occupied Territories and in particular Gaza, and are deeply concerned about the appalling conditions forced on the civilian population by the Israeli blockade and sanctions imposed by Britain and the EU.

Devastating blockade

This Christmas innocent Gazans are starving. Critically ill cancer and renal failure patients die an agonising death, unable to receive treatment because Israel blocks vital drugs and other medical supplies, including dialysis machine spares, and prevents the sick crossing the border for proper hospital care. New-born babies and those just months old are dying too, denied treatment. The United Nations Declaration of the Right of the Child lies buried under the sands of Gaza.

Israel has even imposed a fishing ban on the 3000 licensed fishermen, robbing them of their livelihood and the population of a proper diet. Boats ignoring the ban are fired on. Are those not Palestinian territorial waters? Have Palestinians no rights under the UN Law of the Sea Conventions?

The Gaza siege is the latest in a very long catalogue of Israeli violations of Palestinian rights. It has been allowed to develop into a full-blown humanitarian crisis and Britain, to its shame, has a hand in it. Furthermore it is a racist outrage that Christians and Muslims are together made to suffer so horribly at the hands of the Israeli state.

A letter was delivered through Henry Bellingham MP to the Foreign Office minister responsible for the Middle East, Kim Howells, suggesting (as many others have done before, including charities such as War on Want) that Britain consider suspending the EU-Israel Association Agreement. The rules provide for this if Israel's conduct towards its neighbours falls short of what is required under the UN Charter and other obligations.

On 11 October Mr Howells replied: "We consider that the Association Agreement is a key tool for the EU to both enhance co-operation with Israel but also to raise any concerns. We do not support suspension of that Agreement, which would limit how we could put our viewpoint across to the Israeli government."

When the EU demanded an end to the emergency in Gaza and also the military occupation of the West Bank, Israel responded with an even tighter lockdown and another letter was sent to Mr Howells. He responded on 30 November saying: "The Government does not support calls for the suspension of the EU/Israel Association Agreement. The UK...has strong relationships with Israel on a number of fronts... We do not consider it would be in the best interests of the UK, or the European Union, to end this relationship."

Mr Howells is a former chairman of Labour Friends of Israel. His shadow is a member of Conservative Friends of Israel.

The minister has subsequently been asked to explain what "viewpoint" Her Majesty's Government has put to the Israeli government regarding the medieval-style siege of Gaza and the collective

punishment of already impoverished civilians in flagrant breach of the UN Charter and every conceivable code of conduct.

What action have he and his Department taken to alleviate the suffering in this former British mandate? What is the status of the coastal waters off Gaza? How can Israel maintain a sea blockade lawfully and deny Gazan fishermen their livelihood?

How does continuing the Association Agreement in these cruel circumstances "enhance co-operation", and what "concerns" have been raised with the Israeli government?

No answers to these questions have yet been received.

British MPs eating out of the Israeli government's hand

In the meantime your Committee is aware how the lobby group, Friends of Israel, has embedded itself in the British political establishment and at the very heart of government. Its stated purpose is to promote Israel's interests in our Parliament and sway British policy.

MPs are surely not at liberty to act in the interest of a foreign military power at the expense of our own national interests, or to let foreign influence cloud their judgement. Such conduct is at odds with the second of the Seven Principles of Public Life, namely **Integrity** – *"Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties."*

The Friends of Israel organisation goes to great lengths to influence those in power. Indeed a good many, it seems, reach positions of power with FoI help. The political director of Conservative Friends of Israel claims that with over 2,000 members and registered supporters **alongside 80 percent of the Conservative MPs**, CFI has become the largest affiliated group in the party.

Its website states that the CFI *"strives to support the Conservative Party at all available opportunities. In the run up to the 2005 General Election... CFI supported candidates up and down the country. As candidates are now being continuously selected for target seats, CFI has developed a special programme of weekly briefings, events with speakers and a chance to participate in delegations to Israel. CFI encourages all members to help campaign for parliamentary candidates and also for local council, London and European elections."*

It also has a 'Fast Track' group for Conservative parliamentary candidates fighting target marginal seats at the next election. The political director himself is seeking election to Parliament. If successful where will his loyalty lie?

Senior Conservatives try to justify these activities by insisting that Israel is *"a force for good in the world"* and *"in the battle for the values that we stand for, for democracy against theocracy, for democratic liberal values against repression - Israel's enemies are our enemies and this is a battle in which we all stand together"*.

Such claims do not bear examination. Israel is no western-style democracy. It is an ethnocracy with racist policies and an apartheid agenda. It is a cruel oppressor, stands in breach of numerous UN resolutions, ignores International Court of Justice rulings and continues an illegal occupation, abusing its neighbours and stealing their lands and resources. It cares little for world opinion. How could anyone of fair mind and knowing the situation on the ground possibly support such a regime in the name of the British people, unless unduly under its influence?

Friends of Israel campaign loudly against Palestinian 'terrorism' without mentioning that since the start of the second Intifada in September 2000 Israelis have been slaughtering Palestinians at the rate of 4 to 1, and when it comes to children it is nearer 10 to 1 (Israeli B'Tselem figures). They never mention the 'Matrix of Control' and the perverse administrative procedures imposed by the Israelis in order to restrict travel, strangle the economy, bulldoze homes, confiscate lands and press ahead with their programme of ethnic displacement.

Friends of Israel repeatedly campaign for the release of a handful of Israeli soldiers like Gilad Shalit, corporal tank gunner, but ignore the 9,000+ Palestinian civilians abducted from their homes and incarcerated, often without trial, including some 300 women and 150 children. Many have been tortured, like Luwaili Ashqar whose lower lumbar spine was probably broken during 4 days of vicious, non-stop torment – see [http:// www.haaretz.com:80/hasen/spages/871239.htm](http://www.haaretz.com:80/hasen/spages/871239.htm) and prepare to be sickened.

What is the basis for Britain's decision to outlaw elected leaders (Hamas) who rightly refuse the illegal demands of an armed occupier (Israel)? And why has there been no outcry in Britain against the unlawful and inhuman siege of Gaza?

Courted, cosseted and lied to by the Israeli state, Friends of Israel present a distorted picture to their Parliamentary colleagues and the British public. Such people cannot be relied on to make balanced policy decisions concerning the Middle East. When speaking on such matters they should at least be required to declare their interest.

It is especially disconcerting to discover that at least two members of your Committee, which is pledged to uphold the Principles of Public Life, are Friends of Israel - namely Baroness Shephard, president of Conservative Friends of Israel and Alun Michael MP, a member of Labour Friends of Israel. Your website suggests that Baroness Shephard relinquished her pro-Israel position in 2005 but the CFI website contradicts this.

'Friendship' misplaced

The danger of inappropriate 'friendships' with foreign regimes became even more evident last week when Tzipi Livni, Israel's foreign minister, was reported to have twice asked David Miliband, our Foreign Secretary, to scrap the law that authorises magistrates to issue arrest warrants for suspected war criminals who set foot in the UK. Avi Dichter, a former director of the Shin Bet spy service and involved in the Shehadeh assassination in 2002, in which 14 Palestinian civilians (including children) were killed by an Israeli air strike, had to cancel a trip to London for fear of being arrested.

Doron Almog, an Israeli ex-general also involved in the Shehadeh affair, narrowly avoided arrest when he landed at Heathrow in 2005. Now Israel wishes the UK to change its laws to protect alleged war criminals. How can we be sure this will not happen in the name of "enhanced co-operation", as Mr Howells puts it.

Given that Israel's deep penetration of our political system apparently prevents Britain from taking a principled stand on Middle East matters, including the violations of Palestinian human rights, we invite your Committee – minus those with an interest – to uphold the Principles of Public Life and consider the activities of the Friends of Israel as a matter for urgent investigation.

For truth and justice,

(Signatories)

Mona Baker, Professor of Translation Studies, BA, MA, DSc

Sally FitzHarris, MA (Oxon)

Karl Sabbagh, writer

Sara T A Wood, MA (Oxon)

Derek Summerfield, Hon Senior Lecturer, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College and Teaching

David Halpin, MB, BSc, FRCS,

Stuart Littlewood, BA, MInstM

Martin Birnstingl, MS FRCS, previously senior surgeon at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London

Felicity Arbuthnot

Rich Wiles, Artist

Dr C.J.Burns-Cox, MD, FRCP

Dr Nur Masalha

Reader in Religion and Politics and Editor of Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal

David Seddon, MA PhD

Professorial Fellow, University of East Anglia

Robert Shearer, MB BS FRCS, Consultant Urological Surgeon (retd)
Medical Director, Royal Marsden Hospital, London 1994-2000.

James Goddard, MBE and **Tricia Goddard**

Sue Fanous, BSc, MA

Colin Imber, formerly Reader in Turkish Studies, University of Manchester

Mary Bedford

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Essential information for the Committee....

PCHR Weekly Report: Israeli Human Rights Violations

http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/W_report/English/2007/13-12-2007.htm

Walt & Mearsheimer: The Israel Lobby

http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/mear01_.html

John Pilger

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article18904.htm>

USA's Israel Lobby

<http://www.redress.cc:80/global/pjballes20070917>

Jeff Halper: Israel's Strategy for Permanent Occupation

<http://www.counterpunch.org/halper11272007.html>

Privatising Zionism <http://www.zmag.org:80/content/showarticle.cfm?>

SectionID=107&ItemID=14510

Uri Avnery: Talk with Hamas Now

<http://www.redress.cc/palestine/uavnery20060129>

Facts about the Founding Fathers of Israel

<http://www.redress.cc/palestine/skabbani20040424>

Forty Years of House Demolitions

<http://www.icahd.org/eng/news.asp?menu=5&submenu=1&item=488>

Gaza: A Call for Urgent Action

<http://www.icahd.org/eng/news.asp?menu=5&submenu=1&item=483>

Not Only Territory but Viability

<http://www.icahd.org/eng/news.asp?menu=5&submenu=1&item=480>

Matrix of Control

http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/216_halper.html

Torment and Torture

<http://www.redress.cc/palestine/dhalpin20071211>

Finally, a quiz to test the knowledge of any Friend of Israel on the Refugee issue

<http://www.personal.leeds.ac.uk:80/~eenajma/PalQuiz/quiz1/quizmaker.html>

Lest we forget...

The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Committee has set out 'Seven Principles of Public Life' which it believes should apply to all in the public service. These are:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

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