

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your continued engagement with about the horrors we are seeing in Palestine. I thought it might be helpful to provide another update, as so much has happened in the past two weeks. The challenge is to try and make the current Government to change course and indeed, work out how we use our voice on the international stage. Nevertheless, there are a few actions I believe the Government can take at home regarding protest rights and visas, which I detail below. Apologies in advance for a long email.

Netanyahu's plans to occupy the whole of Gaza are utterly abhorrent - and it is increasingly clear that his goal is ethnic cleansing. This plan will only serve to wreak more devastation on the lives of millions of Gazans, whose homes and communities have already been destroyed, while endangering the lives of those hostages still held by Hamas. Keir Starmer needs to stop the export of all UK arms to Israel **today** and sanction Netanyahu and his cabinet. Only a ceasefire - not expanded military action - can bring the suffering in Gaza to an end. That must include the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages by Hamas - a terror group which has no role in the future of Gaza - and a full reopening of aid routes into the strip to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe there.

Protest rights

It cannot be right that groups like Palestine Action are placed in the same legal category as ISIS, the Russian Imperial Movement, or the Maniacs Murder Cult. The right to peaceful protest is a cornerstone of a liberal democracy. It is deeply troubling that hundreds of people were arrested under anti-terror laws simply for expressing support for Palestine Action. This sets a dangerous precedent and risks a chilling impact on free speech and legitimate protest. Serious criminal offences such as vandalism of military equipment and RAF aircraft, aggravated burglary and violent disorder all demand accountability under the law; but these are criminal acts not comparable to the horrors of terrorism. The Government must urgently review the terrorism legislation.

Palestinian student visas

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are deeply concerned about the worsening situation facing Palestinians in Gaza who have earned the right to study in the UK or reunite with their families here, but are being blocked by impossible visa requirements. Since the closure of the UK authorised biometric registration centre in October 2023, Palestinians with valid UK visas, offers of study, or family reunion rights have been left with no safe or viable way to complete their applications. The closure of border crossings has made travel to alternative biometric centres in neighbouring countries almost impossible. As a result, students risk losing the university places they have worked so hard to secure and families remain heartbreakingly separated.

We believe that if a UK university has offered a Palestinian student a place, they should not be prevented from taking it up simply because of bureaucratic requirements they cannot meet under current conditions in Gaza. The Government must urgently create safe, legal, and accessible humanitarian routes to allow eligible Palestinians to travel to the UK before the academic year begins.

Our Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesperson, Lisa Smart MP, has written to Home Office

ministers demanding urgent action to:

- Ensure Palestinian students with UK offers can take up their places this autumn.
- Guarantee safe, legal, and accessible humanitarian routes for all those entitled to valid UK visas.
- Uphold the rights of those applying under family reunion and protection routes.

I have asked for Lisa to share the Government response with me when she receives it.

I know we can all feel very powerless when we watch what is unfolding on the news. Please keep engaging with me and I will continue to do what I can in Westminster to ensure that the Government recognises Palestine and does all it can to stop this abhorrent devastation.

Kind regards,
Sarah

Sarah Gibson MP

Member of Parliament for Chippenham