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to see



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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PRIME MINISTER

From The Minister of State  
Douglas Hurd CBE MP

18 April 1981

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to see

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Dear Mr Gorst,

MS

attached

Thank you for your letter of 7 April to Lord Carrington. He has asked me to reply.

I fully understand your concern, and that of your constituents. This is indeed a difficult area, and it is important that there should be no misunderstanding about the Government's policy.

Our aim is to make a positive contribution towards a comprehensive and negotiated settlement providing guaranteed and recognised boundaries for Israel and self-determination for the Palestinians. For that aim to become a reality, it will be necessary for the Palestinians to accept Israel's right to a secure and independent future, and for Israel to recognise that the Palestinians must have a say in their own future. Unless these two fundamental principles are reconciled, there can be no peace in the Middle East. These are the principles of the Venice Declaration. The purpose of current European peace efforts is to narrow the differences between the two sides. We can only make progress in this direction if we talk to the parties concerned.

In the case of the Palestinians, including those in the West Bank and Gaza, the only body which can at present claim to have wide support is the Palestine Liberation Organisation. This is why we believe that if there is to be a negotiated settlement, the PLO will have to be associated with it. But if there is to be progress the PLO will have to change. They must abandon violence and they must, as you say, declare openly their willingness to live in peace with Israel.

Our contacts with the PLO which, as you will know from statements in the House, have been going on through officials for some time, are designed to bring about that change. There are at present no plans for Ministers to meet PLO representatives but, as the Prime Minister has made clear in the House, this may be necessary in the context of our Presidency of the European Ten in the second half of this year. You will know that Mr Thorn and Mr Van der Klaauw have both met Arafat in the course of taking forward the Ten's peace efforts. Any contacts we may have with the PLO will not of

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John Gorst Esq MP,  
House of Commons.





course affect the position on official recognition, which is in our view appropriate only to States and not therefore to the PLO.

I should add that we see no contradiction between our approach to Middle East peace and our fundamental commitment to a secure and independent future for Israel. Indeed, Israel's right to such a future is the first principle of the Venice Declaration. I know the strong feelings which this matter arouses, and the amount of misunderstanding which exists, or has been created. If you would like to bring a group of your constituents to see me to discuss this further, I should be very glad to see them.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister and the Chief Whip.

Yours sincerely  
John Gifford

PP

(Approved by Mr Hurd and signed for him in his absence abroad by his Assistant Private Secretary)