

ISRAEL/GAZA

I have already issued the statement below which sets out my position fairly clearly. Since then, however, the situation — both in Gaza and domestically politically — has moved on and I believe that both the Opposition amendment and the Government's amendment are an improvement on the SNP motion on the order paper and in part at least reflect the sentiments that I had already expressed myself. There is no realistic prospect of a unilateral ceasefire being achieved and to suggest otherwise is disingenuous.

That does not mean that we cannot or should not be allowed to mean that we may not strive for a pause in the hostilities to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and hostages held by Hamas — those that may still be alive or their bodies — to be released.

While serving as a Deputy Speaker I am not permitted to vote and shall not do so but I believe that my constituents have a right to know both where I stand and that I have made my own views known to the Government at an appropriate high level - which is the quid pro quo for, as a Deputy Speaker, not voting.

Notwithstanding the appalling scenes in the House of Commons recently I am hopeful that the matter will be revisited on the floor of the House and a substantive and significant message sent in respect of the situation in Gaza in the immediate future.

STATEMENT:

“On Wednesday 21st February parliament will vote on whether or not to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza” say some of the emails that I have received. I know of no decent person that would not wish to see a full and final cessation of the hostilities in the Middle East but that is not what the motion and its supporters are calling for. They are seeking a unilateral ceasefire by the Israeli Defence Force. They know that that is not achievable. Whether intentionally or otherwise they are engaging in futile gesture politics of a kind of which I would not wish to be a part.

A true ceasefire will require that both Hamas and the IDF lay down their arms and recant their proclaimed determination to destroy each other. It will also need to be conducted under clear but quite complex United Nations rules. I believe that the statements, which I wholeheartedly endorse, made by the King of Jordan and by our own Foreign Secretary, David Cameron, point towards the right and probably the only way forward.

I spent some time, last week, in personal discussion with the President of Cyprus and colleagues, exploring the possibility of sending humanitarian aid – food, shelter and medical support – directly into Gaza from the port of Larnaca. Cyprus is about two hundred miles by sea from Gaza and with goodwill it ought to be possible to send the desperately required assistance without having to route it via Egypt with the inevitable complications and bureaucracy. That is an achievable objective. It will indeed require, as a prerequisite, a ceasefire – but that ceasefire will have to be bi-lateral and an end to not just some but all of the slaughter. That is what we should be working for and that is what, when it votes, I

would hope that the House of Commons will support rather than the one-sided and meaningless motion that it is likely be asked to consider tomorrow.