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Economy and Gaelic  
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airson Eaconamaidh agus Gàidhlig  
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23 February 2025

Dear Neil,

Thank you for your letter of 11 November 2024, regarding Amnesty International's concerns around support provided to companies operating in the defence sector.

Please accept my sincere apologies for the delayed response.

Firstly, the Scottish Government hugely values the important work that Amnesty undertakes to promote and protect human rights around the world. Your commitment to advocating for justice, equality, and the dignity of all individuals is vital and raising awareness and holding governments to account play a crucial element in advancing the cause of global human rights.

The Scottish Government has been unequivocal in calling for an immediate and sustained ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages. We have supported humanitarian assistance, and consistently called for recognition of a Palestinian State and a two-state solution, which is the only solution for lasting peace in the region.

It is our long-standing position of not using public funds to support the manufacture of munitions and, while we do not currently control the levers for exports of defence products, we have consistently pressed the UK Government to take a more responsible line on the granting of export licences and policing any potential deviation.

Any support for defence sector companies is instead focused on helping firms to diversify their activities and technologies, and ensuring Scotland continues to benefit from significant economic returns and thousands of jobs in the defence, aerospace and shipbuilding sectors.

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With specific regard to the Gaza-Israel Conflict, the UK Government's decision to suspend some arms licences was a welcome and overdue development, but we believe this should go further and we will continue to call for an end to all licences for arms exports from the United Kingdom to Israel.

We have always been clear that Scotland, whether as an independent country or under the current constitutional arrangements, requires defence forces. That in turn dictates the requirement for those forces to be appropriately equipped – using products manufactured by the same companies under discussion here - to allow them to defend both the citizens of Scotland and carry out the international obligations required through NATO membership.

The Scottish Government, therefore, regards defence as a legitimate activity.

I would like also to reiterate that the Scottish Government condemns human rights abuses and corruption wherever they occur, and we are committed to the UN Guiding principles on Business and Human Rights. Grants which contribute to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza should not be paid and existing Scottish Government policies are designed to address this.

Our 2018 'Guidance on due diligence: human rights' sets out how we and Scottish public bodies must undertake due diligence on an individual or company's human rights record before entering into an investment relationship, including the awarding of grants. Public bodies have been regularly made aware of this guidance and ministers advised them again of their responsibilities in 2024.

Turning to your questions concerning monitoring, impact, evaluation and compliance linked to grant funding, I would suggest a meeting between Amnesty representatives and Scottish Enterprise would be productive. This would allow you to discuss directly with the agency these operational questions in greater detail. If this is agreeable, then my officials would be happy to organise this.

We are both united on the issue of the Gaza-Israeli Conflict and I think you will agree with me that we must all do everything possible to advocate for the adherence to the recently agreed ceasefire and support, as best we can, the ongoing efforts to achieve a lasting peace and a sustainable political resolution in the Middle East.

I hope this is helpful.



**KATE FORBES**

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