

Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown M.P.  
The Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AA

26<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Dear Gordon Brown,

I am writing on behalf of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (UK WILPF) to welcome you to your new and very important responsibility as Prime Minister. As an organisation that has been working to eradicate the root causes of war for over ninety years, WILPF has a deep concern to see the foreign policy of the UK working for the welfare of the world's people and particularly for women and children who constitute the majority of casualties in conflict situations.

We appreciate that you have a formidable task to bring about substantial change, but we urge you to be bold and immediately to address the most crucial area of conflict: the Middle East. There are WILPF women in Palestine, Israel and Lebanon who work together for our objectives of a just, equitable and lasting peace in the region. As a result we know about the day to day condition of Palestinians, and were able to make an informed contribution to the House of Commons International Development Committee's Report: *Development Assistance and the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, published in January 2007. We are aware how far the actions of the international community, including the UK, have created the heartbreaking, bloody, factional conflicts that have been played out in Gaza in recent days.

In all UK foreign policies we urge you always to work through the United Nations, to uphold international law and avoid military interventions. In order to bring peace to the Middle East we ask you now to put pressure on Israel:

- to respect UN Security Council Resolutions, particularly SCR 242 and SCR 338 that call for an end to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip
- to release legitimately elected Palestinian officials currently held as prisoners
- to end the blockade on the Palestinian people

It is apparent that a new UK foreign policy in the Middle East would involve our Government in taking up a different stance from the current position of the United States. In doing this we could influence our friend and ally to bring US Government policies more in line with the current wishes being voiced by the American people.

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We ask you to implement a speedy withdrawal of UK forces from Iraq where it is now widely recognized that the presence of foreign troops and mercenaries is a cause of escalating military and civilian deaths in a situation that cannot be controlled by military means.

By abandoning the military route, the door is opened to our skilled UK diplomats to talk to all parties including Hamas in Gaza, and the Iranians over their nuclear developments, as

well as to the Israelis and other players in the very difficult and sensitive Middle East situation. This approach could be extended to Afghanistan where it is also apparent that military action is hardening attitudes, and has not helped women who are now being targeted for assassination when they try to take on public roles.

History tells us that all wars end and then settlements *must* be negotiated. By bringing forward this time (as our WILPF foremothers tried to do in 1915), imagine the lives that we can save! In 2000 the world community acting through the United Nations passed SCR 1325: *Women Peace and Security*, which emphasizes the essential role for women at all levels in peace processes and agreements. I am sure that you are aware of the importance of this groundbreaking resolution and of the action plan for its implementation already prepared by our Government.

We consider the Middle East issue to be of prime importance but have other concerns. This new foreign policy would provide resources to address some of these. To avoid making this letter unduly lengthy we summarise them and offer them as advice from a women's organisation which has monitored governments and international institutions for 92 years:

- 1. Work to strengthen the UN's position in upholding international law**
- 2. Note the widening gap between rich and poor in this country which mirrors that between rich and poor countries, and make equity rather than profitability your aim**
- 3. Recognise that unlimited "economic growth" is not sustainable and that this country, as a former leader in industrialisation, must now take a lead in cutting consumption and adopting a life-style that will be sustainable to humankind.**
- 4. Make use of the skills of women with independent minds in governing this country. WILPF would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Government's research/consultation on women's issues.**

In peace and hope,

Yours sincerely,

Sheila Triggs  
President, UK WILPF