



Rt. Hon Joan Ryan MP

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Rt. Hon Jeremy Corbyn MP
Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition
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Our Ref: JR12550

Dear Jeremy,

I write to ask you to urgently clarify remarks that you made at the weekend while visiting Jordan.

In a Tweet from your account, you said: "We must work for a real two state settlement to the Israel-Palestine conflict, which ends the occupation and siege of Gaza and makes the Palestinian right to return a reality."

The "right to return" has also been endorsed publicly on a number of occasions by the Shadow Foreign Secretary in recent weeks.

The 1948 war caused great suffering among both Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. Palestinians lost their homes in what became the state of Israel and similar numbers of Jews were driven from their homes across the region.

However, as you are aware, the "right to return" is highly contentious and cannot be reconciled with a two-state solution, as this would simply create two majority-Palestinian states. The claim of an intergenerational Palestinian right of return - in contradiction of the UN's own 1951 Refugee Convention - to territory held by Israel between 1948-1967 would effectively turn Israel into a Palestinian state and destroy the Jewish people's right to self-determination.

Indeed, this is the aim of the leadership of the BDS movement which, in the words of Omar Barghouti, recognises that "the right of return cannot really be achieved except in a one-state solution" and it is also the demand of Hamas which, similarly, does not accept Israel's right to exist.

Only by limiting any "right of return" to a prospective Palestinian state - not to Israel proper - is it possible to achieve a two-state solution which meets the legitimate rights of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Indeed, loose talk of a "right to return" also undercuts those Palestinian leaders, such as President Abbas and the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, who are believed to have privately accepted in negotiations that only a limited, token number of Palestinian refugees should be able to "return" to Israel after any settlement, with the vast majority exercising their right in a Palestinian state

based in the West Bank and Gaza. Thus only the most rejectionist elements of Palestinian politics, such as Hamas and the BDS movement, call for a full "right of return" into the pre-1967 borders of the State of Israel.

I do not believe that it does anything to encourage the compromises and concessions a future negotiated settlement will involve for foreign politicians to appear to endorse the most extreme and illegitimate demands of either side. Nor do your remarks and those of the Shadow Foreign Secretary do anything to assuage the understandable concerns which are frequently raised both in Israel and among the Jewish community in Britain about a future Labour government's commitment to Israel's right to exist.

I believe it is important that those in a position of leadership and responsibility exercise both caution and precision when addressing difficult and complex foreign policy issues, especially those which are soaked in a long and tragic history of war, violence and terrorism.

I hope, therefore, that both you and the Shadow Foreign Secretary will immediately clarify what you understand by a "right to return" and, in the future, ensure any language you use concerning it helps to advance, not hinder, the cause of peace, reconciliation and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joan Ryan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rt. Hon Joan Ryan MP
Member of Parliament for Enfield North
Chair, Labour Friends of Israel