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The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper, MP
Foreign Secretary
Parliamentary Office
House of Commons
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Dear Foreign Secretary,

We write as senior leaders in our respective UK education trade unions to protest in the strongest possible terms about our treatment by Israeli border and military personnel as we sought to enter Israel/Palestine via the Jordanian border on Friday 22 January 2026.

We were part of a 15-strong high-level mission of global education trade unionists coordinated by Education International (EI), the global education unions' federation. The mission was due to visit the West Bank to join the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT) for celebration events to mark UNESCO International Day of Education on 24 January. We were also due to take part in a graduation ceremony of women members of the GUPT from a professional development education training course, in part funded by EI and some of its member unions, including the NEU, EIS and UCU.

The entire mission was stopped at the border and held for five hours. Our passports were confiscated, our phones searched and we were questioned at length by the Israeli military. The questions went far beyond the itinerary and purpose of our intended visit to the West Bank but included our personal political views and affiliations, and our relationships to contacts both personal and professional on our phones. We were not allowed to cross the border into Israel/Palestine and were finally returned to Jordan, only after the border crossing had closed, where our passports were eventually given back to us.

Throughout our five-hour ordeal, the leader of the GUPT, the Deputy Education Minister for the Palestinian Authority, and the governor of Jericho were waiting on the other side of the border to meet our delegation.

Our treatment by Israeli border officials and military personnel on 22 January was utterly unacceptable, and we ask that you protest in the strongest possible terms to your Israeli counterpart. We are entitled, at the very least, to an apology and the assurance that there will be no further impediments to our travel or that of other international educators seeking entry to Palestine for wholly legitimate purposes.

You will be acutely aware of the situation facing educators and the education system in Palestine and the reason why we felt it so important, as sister education unions, to demonstrate our solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues on the International Day of Education.

In Gaza, 95% of schools have been damaged or destroyed and all universities demolished. Over 20,000 children and young people, and hundreds of educators, were killed in the recent war with thousands more left with life-changing injuries. Children and young people have lost two years of schooling and study, and there are no schools or universities for them to return to.

In the West Bank, schools are currently operating for just three days a week and educators have endured months of lost pay due to the withholding of tax revenue from the Palestinian Authority by the Israeli government. Even on days when schools are open, roadblocks and violence by armed Israeli settlers and the IDF make the journey to school or university a perilous and uncertain one for both learners and educators. UNRWA schools face closure following Israel's decision to ban the organisation from the territory. In addition, some 84 schools in the West Bank face pending demolition orders.

Our trade union organisations will continue to raise the plight of Palestinian children, students, educators and trade unionists. We hope we can rely on the UK Government to do the same. We trust that you will speak to your counterpart in Israel and secure an apology and an agreement that any future entry for international educators will not be prevented.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Harlow

Ed Harlow
NATIONAL PRESIDENT
NEU

J Grady

Dr Jo Grady
GENERAL SECRETARY
UCU

Adam Sutcliffe

Adam Sutcliffe
NATIONAL PRESIDENT
EIS