

**Government Response to
the Petition of Mohamed Soliman
on
Closing the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand**

Presented to the House of Representatives

In accordance with Standing Order 380

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Introduction

- 1 The government has carefully considered the Petition Committee's referral of the petition entitled *Mohamed Soliman: Close the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand*. The petition requests that the New Zealand Government close the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand.
- 2 The government welcomes the Committee's referral of this petition and thanks the petitioner for bringing this matter to the government's attention.
- 3 The government responds to the report in accordance with Standing Order 380.
- 4 The government has considered the petition as it pertains to New Zealand's foreign policy settings and obligations and responsibilities under international law. The government is unable to respond positively on the recommendation because the continued presence of the Israeli Embassy enables New Zealand to directly engage on matters of interest and concern with Israel.

Recommendations and government response

- 5 Petition Recommendation: limit the diplomatic relationship between New Zealand and Israel by closing the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand.
- 6 Response: The Israeli Embassy's continued presence in New Zealand provides the government with the ability to engage directly with Israel on matters of interest and concern. It allows the government to act in New Zealand's interests on bilateral and multilateral issues where Israel is also engaged, including to make representations on the 7 October 2023 Hamas terrorist attacks; to request Israel's support for New Zealand's consular efforts in Israel and the evacuation of New Zealand citizens and permanent residents from Gaza; and to register New Zealand's deep concerns regarding the conflict in Gaza and the broader situation in the region. We have also used the opportunities available through our diplomatic relationship to highlight the important and urgent need for sufficient humanitarian assistance to enter Gaza. The government's view is that diplomatic channels enable such bilateral discussions to take place and are especially vital where New Zealand is geographically distant from the country in question or does not have its own diplomatic presence located in Israel.
- 7 Further, if the government were to expel Israeli diplomatic staff, in effect seeking to 'close' the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand, we would anticipate that Israel would respond in kind by restricting the ability for New Zealand diplomats accredited to Israel to operate, and to limit engagement with Israeli officials. This is not in New Zealand's interests.

- 8 The government continues to express its grave concerns over the situation in Gaza directly to Israel and in public statements, including in multilateral settings such as the United Nations. Officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade engage with Israeli officials on a regular basis at all levels, including in-person and by phone. New Zealand officials have met with the Israeli Embassy multiple times since the 7 October terror attacks committed by Hamas, and ensuing Israeli military offensive in Gaza.

Conclusion

- 9 It is important that diplomatic channels remain an effective means of communication between states. This allows the government to pursue New Zealand's interests.
- 10 When the government has concerns, including relating to Israel's military offensive in Gaza and continued occupation of the Palestinian territories, we continue to prioritise direct engagement including with the Israeli Embassy in New Zealand. The government also regularly makes its position on the Israel/Hamas conflict clear in public statements, including in multilateral settings such as the United Nations. Therefore, the government is unable to respond positively to the petition.