

Oct. 30, 2012

Special Report
to members of British Parliament
PMW's response to letter by
Minister of State Alan Duncan to MP Robert Halfon,
that rejected PMW's report that exposed
Palestinian Authority's payment of salaries to terrorists
with UK money

London, Oct. 15, 2012 (updated Oct. 30, 2012)

by Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik

Introduction:

On May 20, 2011, Palestinian Media Watch published a report entitled:

**“PA to pay salaries to all terrorists in Israeli prisons:
Financial aid from many donor countries
goes directly to PA budget from which salaries are paid”**

The report exposed new Palestinian Authority legislation that went into effect in April 2011 retroactive to Jan. 1, 2011, which raised salaries for all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons for terror-related crimes. Recipients include all terrorists in prison, including those sentenced to dozens of life sentences for planning and directing suicide bombings. According to the explicit language of the PA law, according to PA economic reports on government salaries, and according to the PA tax authorities, the monthly payments to prisoners, which range from 1,400 shekels to 12,000 shekels, are salaries – in Arabic *Ratib* (راتب) - no different than salaries received by civil servants. They are paid from the PA's general budget and income taxes are paid as is the case with all other PA salaries. The PA's general budget is funded by numerous donor countries, including the UK.

Shortly after the release of PMW's report, British MP Robert Halfon questioned the UK's policy regarding funding of the PA in light of PMW's findings. Minister of State Alan Duncan responded with a letter saying PMW's report was *“inaccurate and misleading”*:

“I am writing to you further to your comments in the Jewish News regarding claims that British taxpayers are funding the families of Palestinian suicide bombers and prisoners in Israeli jails. If these claims were true, this would be a matter of very serious concern for me and the Department. However, I am pleased to reassure you that we have investigated the matter fully and can confirm that the allegations in Palestinian Media Watch's report are both inaccurate and misleading.”

It is not clear how the Minister's office “investigated the matter fully,” but unfortunately, the information the Minister presented in his letter is wrong. The Minister's main argument was that the payments were not salaries to terrorists, but *“social assistance programmes to provide welfare payments”* to the terrorists' families. He wrote: *“I hope you will also agree that*

dependent spouses or children should not be held responsible for the crimes of family members, or forced to live in poverty as a consequence."

The Minister's letter does not cite any sources to back up this information. Furthermore, those who conducted the research for the Minister did not bother to contact PMW - a serious omission, considering that it was PMW's report that was under discussion.

This present PMW report documents that the general statements made by the Minister of State in his letter, which lack any sources that contradict PMW's findings, are wrong.

This report verifies PMW's original findings:

- 1- The Palestinian Authority is currently paying **salaries** totaling approximately £2,798,825 each month to all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, including mass murderers. The prisoner is the only one who has the authority to designate an "agent" to handle his money while he is in prison. The prisoner is not obligated to give his salary to his wife, children, or parents.
- 2- As long as the UK continues funding the PA's general budget, it will be a participant in the payment of salaries to terrorist murderers.

This report quotes the arguments made by Minister Duncan in his letter to MP Halfon, followed by PMW's refutation of each point, with full quotes of the proof texts from Palestinian Authority sources. The Minister's full letter follows at the end.

Minister Duncan to MP Halfon (1):

"The PA operates two social assistance programmes to provide welfare payments to households who have lost their main breadwinner, either through imprisonment or where they have been killed or wounded as a result of the wider conflict... It is true that in some cases, payments will go to families of those who have committed the sort of crime that we utterly condemn. But I hope it is clear from the information I have set out above that the schemes are not intended in any way to reward or encourage such crimes. I hope you will also agree that dependent spouses or children should not be held responsible for the crimes of family members, or forced to live in poverty as a consequence."

PMW's refutation:

The following are the PA sources showing that what PMW documented was in fact salaries to terrorists, and not welfare payments to support women and children:

1. The payments PMW documented are defined by the Palestinian Authority in the PA law "Government resolution # 23 of 2010" as "**salaries**" - *Ratib* (راتب) - for prisoners. Nowhere in the PA law do the words "social assistance" or "welfare payments" appear. On the other hand, the word "salary" appears repeatedly:

"Government resolution # 23 of 2010 concerning the amendment on payment of a **monthly salary** to the prisoner: Every prisoner will be granted a **monthly salary**... on condition that he does not receive a **salary** from a [different] governmental [body]... **The salary** will be paid to the prisoner from the date of his arrest... **The minimum salary** for a prisoner..." [*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, April 15, 2011]

2. The salary payments are not related to social welfare, but are determined according to the severity of the crime as expressed by length of time in prison. The longer the time in prison, the higher the salary:

“The minimum salary for a prisoner, to be paid to him from the beginning of his detention and for up to 3 years, is 1,400 shekels. Prisoners who have been imprisoned between 3 and 5 years will receive 2,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 5 and 10 years will receive 4,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 10 and 15 years will receive 6,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 15 and 20 years will receive 7,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 20 and 25 years will receive 8,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 25 and 30 years will receive 10,000 shekels. Those who have been imprisoned 30 years or more will receive 12,000 shekels.” [Government resolution # 23 of 2010, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, April 15, 2011]

The salary amount is far higher than social welfare payments, and is linked to the terrorist and the severity of his crime, not to his family status, his family’s needs, or their financial conditions. The basic salary payments become higher in accordance with years in prison and not the number of dependents in the family. The salary’s corresponding to the severity of the terror act demonstrates that the payment is not social welfare for the families, but is a reward for terror.

3. The Minister’s assertion that these payments are “*welfare payments to households who have lost their main breadwinner... dependent spouses or children should not be held responsible for the crimes of family members*” is wrong and appears nowhere in the law. Moreover, the standard payment system cited above is not related to the family status of the terrorist prisoner. Married prisoners with children receive a separate stipend for their wives and children, far smaller than the salaries that can be as high as 12,000 shekels (almost £2,000) a month:

“A supplement of **300 shekels** will be **added to the salary** of every married prisoner, as well as a supplement for children up to the age of 18 in the amount of **50 shekels**.”
[emphasis added, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, April 15, 2011]

This division makes it clear that there are two payments – a substantial basic as a reward for terror, and a second small supplement as social welfare according to the number of dependents. The core salary is not related to family status. The additional stipend for a married prisoner is 300 shekels (£48) to the spouse and a mere 50 shekels (£8) per child.

4. Another important regulation regarding the prisoner’s salary is that the prisoners have complete control over the money through the appointment of their personal representative to handle and control its use. PA regulation states that a “*wakil*” – an “authorized agent” or “power of attorney” will be appointed by the prisoner himself to determine the use of the money. The regulation explicitly gives the prisoner the right to designate people other than his wife or parents. Appointment of an “agent” can be authorized only by the prisoner’s signature on a special form. The following is the exact text of the regulation (emphasis added):

Paragraph 1

“Authorized agent: The person who is authorized to receive the salary in place of the prisoner.”

Paragraph 5

“1. If the prisoner is married, his wife will be his authorized agent, **unless the prisoner appoints someone else instead of her.**”

“2. If the prisoner is not married, one of his parents will be the authorized agent.

The prisoner determines which one of them **or any other person** [will be the authorized agent], if there is an argument about it.”

“3. Authorization of an agent is done by an authorization of agent [form] issued by the Red Cross, that is **signed by the prisoner**, or by a special authorization of agent [form] **signed by him and approved by a lawyer of the Ministry** [of Prisoners’ Affairs] and by the General Administration for Legal Matters of the Ministry. It will be valid for use by the Ministry only for the purpose of the salary.”

[PA regulation 18, 2010, PA Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs, <http://freedom.ps/attachments/25-5-2011/02.pdf> accessed Oct. 30, 2012]

An important legal indicator determining that this is a prisoner’s salary is that the money is controlled by the prisoner through his personal agent. The salary for any terrorist-prisoner can be put away in an account for the prisoner’s use after his release – if the prisoner so chooses. If the PA wanted this to be a welfare payment to the prisoners’ families, would it then not just give the money directly to the families and put them in control of it?

5. Nearly two thirds of the prisoners are unmarried and have no children. Nevertheless, they still receive a full monthly salary:

“The Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs in Ramallah said... that there are 2,805 married [prisoners], representing 37.4% percent of the total number. There are 4,695 unmarried prisoners, representing 62.6%.” [Al-Quds, Jan. 3, 2010]

Thus, nearly two thirds of the money that the British minister was informed is a “welfare payment” for wives and children is actually going to thousands of single terrorists without families.

6. Another confirmation that the PA views payments to prisoners as government salaries is that the prisoners pay **withheld income taxes**, as do all salaried workers:

Headline: “Prisoners and their families praise [PA] government decision to raise salaries, [Minister of Prisoners’ Affairs] Karake: Withholding tax applies to every citizen who receives income from the PA”

“A meeting was held between the Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs and the Ministry of Finance... several issues on this subject [of finances] were clarified: The [withholding] tax applies to every citizen who receives income from PA coffers; it is within the framework of the Income Tax Act; and begins with salaries over 2,400 shekels per month. The beginning rate is 5% for salaries over that amount (2,400 shekels). The tax rate is graduated, reaching at most only 10% of prisoners’ salaries. The Minister of Prisoners’ Affairs said that the prisoners in the [Israeli] prisons and their families are subject to the [withholding tax] law, and [added that] the salary raise this year had been welcomed with great satisfaction among the prisoners and their families.” [Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, June 19, 2011]

7. The following official PA economic document provides further proof that the PA pays salaries to prisoners. The document discusses in detail what portion of the PA budget went to paying salaries in May 2011:

“An official document, a copy of which reached *Life and the Market* (supplement to the official PA daily), reveals that the cost of salaries [in the PA budget] is much higher than people think... The sum of monthly salaries for May 2011 totaled 727,287,824 shekels (i.e., £123,393,581), paid from the treasury of the [Palestinian] National Authority... The document shows that the largest portion of the salaries’ expense - more than 40% - was paid to civil servants... **As for the prisoners, they receive approximately 2.5% of the**

cost of salaries [for May], in the form of salaries and [additional] payments, totaling 17,678,247 shekels (i.e., £3,000,000)."

[*Life and the Market*, supplement to *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, June 19, 2011]

Significantly, this PA government report did not deal at all with social welfare: it compared and discussed only government salaries, and it included salaries to prisoners.

Minister Duncan to MP Halfon (2):

"Contrary to media reporting, the payments [to prisoners and to families of people killed] are not more generous than standard PA civil service or military salaries."

PMW's refutation:

When PMW reported that the salaries of prisoners were higher than the salaries of PA civil servants and military salaries, PMW cited an official PA document which explicitly states that:

"The average salary for a civil servant in the Palestinian Authority is 2882 shekels...

The average salary for members of the PA military personnel is 2704 shekels...

The average prisoner salary is 3129 shekels."

Salary recipients	Average monthly salary
Civil servant	2,882 shekels
Military personnel	2,704 shekels
Prisoner	3,129 shekels

[*Life and the Market*, supplement to *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, June 19, 2011]

Note also that Minister Duncan in his letter did not use the word "salary" to refer to prisoners' payments, even though the PA only uses the word "salary."

Minister Duncan to MP Halfon (3):

"In the case of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, they receive a minimal allowance to cover the cost of food and clothes. This scheme operates at the request of the Israeli authorities and is designed to reimburse them for the costs of providing prisoners with food and clothing. It is not in any sense a 'salary' to prisoners, nor a 'reward' for having committed crimes against Israel."

PMW's comment:

In this excerpt, Minister Duncan cited correct information, but it is not at all related to the salaries allotted to terrorists documented by PMW. The PA gives two payments to the prisoners. First, the main payment is a salary granted to prisoners, as documented above. Second, the PA pays prisoners monthly canteen money, as recently explained by the Minister of Prisoners' Affairs:

"[Minister of Prisoners' Affairs] Karake said that the [Palestinian] government pays **salaries** to the prisoners in prison, in an amount averaging 17,500,000 shekels (i.e., approximately: £2,798,825) per month, as well as millions of shekels in **canteen** money each month, for prisoners in prison." [*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, July 8, 2012]

The fact that the prisoners receive canteen money directly in prison is not at all related to the salary payments that the PMW documented, which currently stands at approximately £2,798,825 per month.

Minister Duncan to MP Halfon (4):

"It is true that in some cases, payments will go to families of those who have committed the sort of crime that we utterly condemn. But I hope it is clear from the information I have set out above that the schemes are not intended in any way to reward or encourage such crimes."

PMW's response:

The following PA TV interview by phone with a released prisoner, who called the TV studio to complain about the PA, is a striking indicator that the terrorists themselves understand that they are receiving a PA **salary** specifically as a *reward for*, their terror attacks. Iyad Abu Khaizaran, a member of the Islamic Jihad terror organization, was given a life sentence in 1991 for stabbing a 76-year-old Israeli man, Shlomo Yahya, to death in a suburb of Tel Aviv. He was released from prison in 2011, when Israel agreed to release 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who had been held hostage by Hamas for more than 5 years. The released terrorist called the PA TV talk show to complain that while he and other prisoners all received **full salaries** in prison, since his release he had only received half a salary. The terrorist explained the reason he and other released prisoners should receive a full salary: "We killed Jews. I personally killed Jews. I killed settlers and I injured soldiers... The PA that presents itself as responsible for the nation must be faithful to everyone." The PA's payment of salaries is not seen by the terrorists themselves as a welfare issue at all, but as a way for the government to be "faithful" to him and his friends for their killing of Jews.

The following is the transcript:

PA TV host: "With us is Iyad Abu Khaizaran. Good evening."

Iyad (on phone): "Hello. Since the day we were released from prison, we were given [only] half a salary... We killed Jews. I personally killed Jews. I killed settlers and I injured soldiers. My house was destroyed. I have 11 bullets in my body. I served 22 years in Israeli prisons. The PA that presents itself as responsible for the nation must be faithful to everyone."

Host: "You, like the other [prisoners], did you receive salaries in the prisons?"

Iyad: "Yes. After about the year 2000, [the salaries] were organized."

Host: "In other words, from 2000, I mean, all the organizations, without exception, whether it was Fatah, or Hamas, supporters of Abbas or not supporters of Abbas, they [all] received salaries or not?..."

Iyad: "Yes, yes they did." [PA TV, March 29, 2012]

This interview is very significant. It shows not only that the letter of PA law defines the payments as salaries, but that the terrorists themselves understand it both as a salary and as a reward because he "personally killed Jews."

Conclusions:

1. The PA under law pays salaries to all Palestinian terrorist prisoners in Israeli prisons.
2. Prisoners' salaries are not social welfare payments to support wives and children, but salaries granted to prisoners because they committed crimes against Israel, including terror and murder.
3. The Arabic language of the written PA law uses the word that means "salary." The words "social assistance" and "welfare" do not appear at all in the entire text of the law.

4. The monthly salary amount is based on the number of years the terrorist has been in prison, for single and married prisoners alike. It is not based on family status.
5. The salary for prisoners goes as high as 12,000 shekels a month for those who have served the longest time in prison. Stipends are a mere 300 shekels a month for wives and 50 shekels per child. 62% of the terrorists in Israeli prisons are single and receive full PA salaries.
6. A prisoner serving more than 30 years receives a monthly salary of 12,000 shekels, approximately three times the salary of a civil servant, even if the prisoner has no wife and children.
7. The prisoner, not his family, controls the money and determines who should be in charge of it through an “authorization of agent” form.
8. Withholding taxes are paid from the higher salaries, as with all PA government salaries.
9. The average salary of prisoners is higher than the salaries for PA civil servants and military personnel.
10. The salaries of the PA terrorists in Israeli prisons are paid from the PA’s general budget.
11. The yearly UK monetary aid given to the PA general budget helps pay the salaries of terrorist murderers in prison.

Minister Duncan wrote:

“I hope this information will reassure you that the Palestinian Authority is not operating any programme which financially rewards those who commit acts of terrorism and no UK aid is being used for this purpose.”

This PMW report shows the opposite: The PA spends 17 million shekels (i.e., £2,798,825) monthly in 2012 to pay salaries to terrorist prisoners from all the terror organizations. These payments are in recognition of their acts of terror. UK aid to the general budget of the PA is also being used for this purpose.

Minister Duncan:

*“... regarding claims that British taxpayers are funding the families of Palestinian suicide bombers and prisoners in Israeli jails. **If these claims were true, this would be a matter of very serious concern for me and the Department.** However, I am pleased to reassure you that we have investigated the matter fully and can confirm that **the allegations in Palestinian Media Watch's report are both inaccurate and misleading.**”*

This report documents that PMW's original report is both accurate and true. The fact that the PA uses its general budget to reward terrorists with salaries should be a matter of very serious concern for all donor countries to the PA.

Appendix: Full Palestinian Authority Sources

PA law granting salaries to terrorists

The following is the article in the official PA daily quoting the new Palestinian Authority law:

"[Ali Abu Diak,] Secretary of the Central Bureau of the Prisoners' Movement, presented a concise review of the laws [concerning prisoners] published in vol. 90 of the official PA [Government] Registry, **published on April 13**, as follows:

1. **Government resolution #19 of 2010...:**

A released prisoner will be exempt from tuition fees at government schools and universities if he served a period of five years or more in prison. A released female prisoner who served at least three years in prison will be exempt from tuition fees at government schools and universities. These prisoners are entitled to transfer the exemption to one of their children, or to their spouse...

The Palestinian Authority is committed to providing the opportunity for academic study for prisoners in Israeli prisons, by covering all study expenses for all stages of university study available to prisoners.

A prisoner's children will be exempt from 80% of academic tuition fees if the prisoner was sentenced to at least 20 years and has been in prison for at least 5 years. Children of a female prisoner will be exempt from 80% of university tuition fees if the prisoner was sentenced to at least 10 years, and has served as least 3 years.

Every released prisoner will be exempt from governmental health insurance if he served at least 5 years in prison, and for female prisoners - at least 3 years. ...

2. **Government resolution #21 of 2010**, concerning the amendment to provide for the needs of prisoners within Israeli prisons:

a. **Every prisoner will be paid a uniform sum linked to the cost of living index, as a monthly expenditure...**

b. Every prisoner will be paid a uniform sum of 400 [Israeli] shekels for clothing. The sum will be paid twice a year, and will be added to the prisoner's salary...

3. Government resolution # 22 of 2010, concerning the amendment to provide for the prisoners' legal needs...

4. Government resolution # 23 of 2010 concerning the amendment on payment of a monthly salary to the prisoner:

Every prisoner will be granted a monthly salary, to be paid to him or to his family, on condition that he does not receive a salary from a [different] governmental or semi-governmental body or official institution... **The salary will be paid to the prisoner from the date of his arrest**, and a special supplement will be paid to prisoners from Jerusalem and from the Interior [i.e., Israeli Arabs]; a spousal supplement will be paid, and a special supplement for children up to the age of 18...

The minimum salary for a prisoner, to be paid to him from the beginning of his detention and for up to 3 years, is 1,400 shekels. Prisoners who have been imprisoned between 3 and 5 years will receive 2,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 5 and 10 years will receive 4,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 10 and 15 years will receive 6,000

shekels. Those imprisoned between 15 and 20 years will receive 7,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 20 and 25 years will receive 8,000 shekels. Those imprisoned between 25 and 30 years will receive 10,000 shekels. Those who have been imprisoned 30 years or more will receive 12,000 shekels.

A supplement of 300 shekels will be added to the salary of every married prisoner, as well as a supplement for children up to the age of 18 in the amount of 50 shekels for every boy or girl, in addition to a supplement for prisoners from Jerusalem in the amount of 300 shekels, and a supplement for prisoners from the Interior [i.e., Israeli Arabs] in the amount of 500 shekels...

These regulations will be implemented from Jan. 1, 2011, on the basis of available sources of funding."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, April 15, 2011]

PA regulation 18, 2010 from the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs on the appointment of agent authorized to control a prisoners' salary (emphasis added):

"Paragraph 1:

Authorized agent: The person who is authorized to receive the salary in place of the prisoner."

"Paragraph 5:

1. If the prisoner is married, his wife will be his authorized agent, **unless the prisoner appoints someone else instead of her.**"

"2. If the prisoner is not married, one of his parents will be the authorized agent. The prisoner determines which one of them **or any other person** [will be the authorized agent], if there is an argument about it."

"3. Authorization of an agent is done by an authorization of agent [form] issued by the Red Cross, that is **signed by the prisoner**, or by a special authorization of agent [form] **signed by him and approved by a lawyer of the Ministry** [of Prisoners' Affairs] and by the General Administration for Legal Matters of the Ministry. It will be valid for use by the Ministry only for the purpose of the salary."

[PA regulation 18, 2010, , PA Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs, <http://freedom.ps/attachments/25-5-2011/02.pdf> accessed Oct. 30, 2012]

PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs, Issa Karake on current level of salaries

Headline: "[PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs, Issa Karake] Emphasized that the PA is one of the major employers of released prisoners –

"Karake said that the [Palestinian] government pays salaries to the prisoners in prison, in an amount averaging 17,500,000 shekels (approximately £2,798,825) per month, as well as millions of shekels in canteen money each month, for prisoners in prison. Karake stated that the government offers release grants to released prisoners in an amount exceeding 5 million shekels (approximately £800,000) annually."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, July 8, 2012]

PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs, Issa Karake explains difference between salaries and canteen payments

Headline: "Karake: 400 shekels paid to prisoners, and canteen allowance to be increased" Minister of Prisoners' Affairs, Issa Karake, said that **the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs had paid every prisoner 400 shekels, in addition to his salary (Arabic: *ratib*), as clothing expenses.** He added yesterday, in a press release, that [his ministry] is working to increase [the prisoners'] canteen allowance (Arabic: *mukhassas*) for the month of Ramadan, and noted that the financial grant for released prisoners who had served long sentences will be regulated by law and in accordance with available financial resources. He thanked the President [Abbas] and the Prime Minister [Fayyad] for their constant interest in providing a dignified and worthy life for every male and female prisoner released from the occupation's prisons. Karake noted that the Palestinian Authority is in unfortunate financial straits, and therefore this grant will be regulated according to a table to be approved by the government and fair criteria to be set by the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs. [Karake added that] this would become a regular service, along with the other services provided by the Ministry for Prisoners' Affairs."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, July 11, 2012]

PA Salaries are from the PA's general budget

"An official document, a copy of which reached *Life and the Market* (supplement to the official PA daily), reveals that the cost of salaries [in the PA budget] is much higher than people think. According to the document, the sum of monthly salaries for May 2011 totaled 727,287,824 shekels (£123,393,581), paid from the treasury of the [Palestinian] National Authority... The document shows that the largest portion of the salaries' expense - more than 40% - was paid to civil servants. A total of 293,435,045 shekels was paid to 101,802 civil servants, about three quarters of them in the West Bank. **The average salary for a civil servant in the Palestinian Authority is 2882 shekels...**

The military personnel of the Palestinian Authority occupy second place – 24% - in the cost of salaries, with a total of 172,873,226 shekels. **Surprisingly, the Gaza Strip represents more than 55% of the total cost of salaries of military personnel. The average salary for members of the PA military personnel is 2704 shekels...**

The PA transfers about 7% of the cost of salaries overseas, in the form of salaries to personnel at consulates and the Palestine National Fund, foreign fronts, **and PLO forces and institutions, in the amount of 51,872,446 shekels.**

As for the prisoners (i.e., in Israeli prisons), they receive approximately 2.5% of the cost of salaries [for May], in the form of salaries and [additional] payments, totaling 17,678,247 shekels (£3,000,000).

Taking care of families of *Shahids* (Martyrs), inside and outside [the PA], totals about 3.5% of the total cost of salaries [for May], in the amount of 26,458,137 shekels.

The West Bank received the majority of the payments and salaries to prisoners, while the Gaza Strip receives a greater portion of the budget for assistance to *Shahids*' families.

The average prisoner salary is 3129 shekels... Salaries for members of the inactive Parliament (Legislative Council) [which has not been meeting since the Fatah–Hamis conflict] totaled approximately 0.5% of the cost of salaries – 3,272,316 shekels."

[*Life and the Market*, supplement to *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, June 19, 2011]

Full text of Minister of State for International Development Alan Duncan's letter to MP Robert Halfon:

Robert Halfon MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Alan Duncan MP
Minister of State

30 August 2011

"I am writing to you further to your comments in the Jewish News regarding claims that British taxpayers are funding the families of Palestinian suicide bombers and prisoners in Israeli jails. If these claims were true, this would be a matter of very serious concern for me and the Department. However, I am pleased to reassure you that we have investigated the matter fully and can confirm that the allegations in Palestinian Media Watch's report are both inaccurate and misleading.

The PA operates two social assistance programmes to provide welfare payments to households who have lost their main breadwinner, either through imprisonment or where they have been killed or wounded as a result of the wider conflict. The schemes operate on the basis of need, regardless of the cause of the breadwinner's death or imprisonment. For example, the family of a Palestinian prisoner imprisoned for spying on behalf of Israel is entitled to the same assistance as the family of a Palestinian held in an Israeli prison. Similarly, the family of someone killed in fighting between Palestinian factions would have the same opportunity to receive support as the family of someone killed by the Israeli authorities. The level of payment is based on a needs assessment and goes to the family (not the prisoner) to help them meet basic living costs. Contrary to media reporting, the payments are not more generous than standard PA civil service or military salaries.

It is true that in some cases, payments will go to families of those who have committed the sort of crime that we utterly condemn. But I hope it is clear from the information I have set out above that the schemes are not intended in any way to reward or encourage such crimes. I hope you will also agree that dependent spouses or children should not be held responsible for the crimes of family members, or forced to live in poverty as a consequence.

In the case of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, they receive a minimal allowance to cover the cost of food and clothes. This scheme operates at the request of the Israeli authorities and is designed to reimburse them for the costs of providing prisoners with food and clothing. It is not in any sense a 'salary' to prisoners, nor a 'reward' for having committed crimes against Israel. In some cases, the Palestinian Authority will also cover education fees for prisoners, for example for the 200 children under 16 being held by the Israeli authorities. This forms part of the PA's work to counter extremism, by providing prisoners with education and the means to pursue a peaceful livelihood.

I hope this information will reassure you that the Palestinian Authority is not operating any programme which financially rewards those who commit acts of terrorism and no UK aid is being used for this purpose. The UK, along with the US, EU and other European countries, funds the PA to deliver essential services such as health and education to help the poorest and most vulnerable people in the OPTs. Our funding will support 5,700 children a year through primary school, immunise 2,000 children a year against measles and provide skilled personnel to help deliver 2,370 live births, among other results. Our development assistance is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding which reaffirms the PA's commitment to non-violence and a negotiated solution to the conflict. UK aid to the Palestinian Authority is subject to rigorous scrutiny and monitored against specific benchmarks in reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Our financial assistance is provided through a World Bank trust fund which carries out close monitoring of PA expenditures.

Our development assistance supports the peace process by building the institutions of a future Palestinian state which can live alongside Israel in peace and security. As the Foreign Secretary set out in his speech on 31 March 2011, we believe that long term peace can only be achieved through a negotiated two state solution which reconciles the legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people for a state of their own with Israel's natural and justifiable yearning for long term security. I am sure that this is a goal upon which we agree."

ALAN DUNCAN