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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

26 September 1985

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 23 September about the decision to invite a joint Jordanian/Palestinian delegation to visit London. I am glad that you told me about the Conservative Friends of Israel's concern over the invitation. I hope my letter will show that there is no need for this.

Last February King Hussein issued a brave challenge to the Palestinians to join him in seeking a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute and outlined a step-by-step approach to achieve this. We thought that the initiative deserved our support because it represented a genuine and courageous attempt by moderate Arab governments to move towards peace, which is of course Israel's goal also.

Peace itself will only come through direct negotiations within whatever framework is agreed between the parties. It is not for others to choose who will speak for the Palestinians in those negotiations. Indeed Mr. Peres himself has recently called for involvement in the negotiations of authentic representatives of the Palestinians. What we can do is to help and encourage those whom the Palestinians see as their representatives to take the essential steps of renouncing terrorism and of recognising Israel's right to exist. We shall never get to the negotiating table until there is a moderate Palestinian leadership which has the confidence of the majority of Palestinians and is prepared to take these steps.

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The purpose of inviting a joint Jordanian/Palestinian delegation to London is precisely to help and encourage that essential transformation to take place. We want to give confidence to those among the Palestinians who support a peaceful settlement and renounce violence, and encourage them to take the practical steps necessary if peace negotiations are to start. It is not an invitation to the PLO: and it does not signify any change in our attitude to that organisation. There is no question of that. On the contrary, it is a signal of the changes which we want to see in them.

It is for that reason that the members of the joint delegation have been chosen very carefully. Two of them are leading and distinguished members of Jordan's own government. The two Palestinian members, Bishop Khoury and former Mayor Milhem, have been chosen because they personally support a peaceful settlement and are opposed to terrorism and violence and are prepared to say so publicly when they come to London. They will be coming in their own right as individuals. I recall mentioning their names at my last meeting with the Conservative Friends of Israel, without any contradiction, as examples of moderate Palestinians with whom contact should be encouraged. Both are well known to Western governments: Mr. Milhem for instance has met Secretary of State Shultz as well as Richard Luce. The very fact that both of them have been threatened with death since being invited to London only underlines the importance of sustaining those among the Palestinians who are genuinely prepared to use peaceful means and say so publicly. So too do the vicious and despicable attacks which have just been made on an Israel-registered yacht and the British Airways office in Rome.

Of course I cannot guarantee that such a meeting will advance the peace process. But I do very strongly believe that we shall not get progress unless all concerned are ready to take risks for peace. We are taking the risk of this meeting in the hope that those who speak for the Palestinians will in turn be persuaded to take the risk of jettisoning the

tactics and the methods which have for too long been an
obstacle to peace.

You may like to bring my letter to the attention of your
members.

Michael Alison will contact you separately about my
programme for Blackpool.

Yours sincerely
Raymond

Michael Fidler, Esq., J.P.