Gordon Brown Reassures Israel over Tzipi Livni Arrest Warrant

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<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/16/tzipi-livni-israel-arrest-warrant>

Gordon Brown today told Tzipi Livni, Israel's former foreign minister, that he was "completely opposed" to the [warrant issued by a British court for her arrest](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/15/israel-tzipi-livni-arrest-warrant) for war crimes and pledged to work to change the law that allowed it.

Brown's comments, quoted in a statement issued by Livni's office, followed a diplomatic row over the warrant issued in relation to her role in the war in [Gaza](http://www.theguardian.com/world/gaza) earlier this year.

The prime minister's remarks, made in a telephone conversation with Livni and reported on Israeli news websites, followed a statement by David Miliband, the foreign secretary, that the government was "looking urgently" at ways to change the UK legal system. Miliband reportedly rang his Israeli counterpart, Avigdor Lieberman, to apologise for the episode.

Shimon Peres, Israel's president, called it a "serious mistake" by Britain.

The dispute erupted after Westminster magistrates court in London issued an[unprecedented arrest warrant for Livni](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/14/tzipi-livni-israel-gaza-arrest), now Israel's opposition leader, on Sunday – a move described by Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, as an "absurdity." Miliband said Israeli leaders "must be able to visit and have a proper dialogue with the British government".

The warrant was withdrawn amid embarrassment in the Foreign Office when it was discovered that she was not in the UK. But the fact that it was issued in error – at the request of lawyers acting for Palestinian victims of the Gaza war – did nothing to quell Israeli anger.

Livni had been due to attend a conference in London but cancelled two weeks ago. Palestinian sources claimed to have seen her at the event and alerted the lawyers.

Palestinians and an Israeli human rights organisation say about 1,400 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the [Gaza offensive](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/23/israel-gaza-war-crimes-guardian). Israel counted 1,166 Palestinians dead and said most were combatants. Israel says it acted in self-defence against Hamas rockets from Gaza. Thirteen Israelis died.

Miliband said in his statement: "The procedure by which arrest warrants can be sought and issued without any prior knowledge or advice by a prosecutor is an unusual feature of the system in England and Wales. The government is looking urgently at ways in which the UK system might be changed in order to avoid this sort of situation arising again."

In September, pro-Palestinian lawyers tried to invoke "universal jurisdiction" to arrest Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister. His status as a cabinet minister gave him diplomatic immunity, which Livni, a former minister, did not have.

In 2005, a retired general, Doron Almog, returned to [Israel](http://www.theguardian.com/world/israel) without leaving his plane at Heathrow after a tip-off that police planned to arrest him in connection with the demolition of homes in Gaza