

A peaceful and secure two-state solution

Thank you, Mr President. Let me reiterate others' welcomes to this Council today. And thank you also, of course, to Nikolai for his briefing and through him to his team for all they're doing.

I want to start by stating clearly that the brutal murder of an Israeli soldier on 8 August and the IED terror attack which killed a 17 year old Israeli on 23 August are both an outrage. This perpetual cycle of violence does not serve anyone's interests and must end.

The United Kingdom is also concerned by the increase in tension in Gaza, including the four attempts this month by Gazan militants to infiltrate Israel, which contribute to an environment of terror. We utterly condemn the abhorrent rocket attacks by militants in Gaza. Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and all militant groups must cease all actions which are violent or provocative or which put civilian lives at risk.

We encourage the Palestinian Authority, Israel, regional and international actors to put forward sustainable, long-term proposals for resolving the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas and for returning the Palestinian Authority to government functions in Gaza.

It is also important that we continue to address the underlying causes of the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, in particular by improving movement and access for people and goods.

And let me say on the point about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the UK is, of course, firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. UNRWA is a vital humanitarian and stabilising force in the region. The UK has increased its funding to £65.5 million this year to match our support from 2018. But we do, of course, remain concerned about the funding crisis.

Now, Mr President, turning to settlements, the United Kingdom is seriously concerned about the plans announced earlier this month by Israel to advance over 2,300 housing units in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. We urge Israel to halt its settlement expansion, which is contrary to international law and which promotes the effective annexation of the West Bank. As we have put on record before in this Council, the United Kingdom would be strongly opposed to any move to annex all or part of the West Bank. Such a move would be deeply damaging to prospects for a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians and could not pass unchallenged.

Mr President, during last month's open debate, many member states expressed alarm regarding the demolition of Palestinian properties in Wadi al Hummus, in Sur Bahir. And I reiterate that the United Kingdom remains seriously concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property and evictions

of Palestinians by Israeli authorities. This practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and it is harmful to the peace process.

I also wanted to touch on the clashes that took place on the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif on 11 August during the religious holidays of Eid al-Adha and Tisha B'Av. The United Kingdom urges all parties to maintain calm, avoid provocation and uphold the status quo to ensure the safety and security of the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount and all who worship there, particularly during religious observances.

I would note that Nikolai Mladenov had to say about the recent escalation between Israel and Hezbollah. That causes the United Kingdom concern. We, of course, support Israel's right to security, but we also condemn violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. And we urge both sides to show restraint and to de-escalate. A conflict would be in no one's interests.

Mr President, turning to the more positive developments, the United Kingdom welcomes the agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to transfer outstanding fuel tax but we remain worried about the impact of Israel's wider decision to withhold tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority. We encourage the Israeli government to reverse its decision, which undermines the Oslo Accords, and we encourage the Palestinian Authority to accept the remainder of the revenues on a provisional basis, as refusing all revenues only harms Palestinians.

Mr President, every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. The ongoing violence underlines that a just and lasting resolution which ends the occupation and delivers peace of both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue.

So the United Kingdom continues to encourage the United States administration to bring forward detailed proposals for a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, which addresses the legitimate concerns of both parties. And as we have said before, the best way to achieve this is through substantive peace talks between the parties, leading to a two state solution based on 1967 lines with Jerusalem as a shared capital and a just fair, agreed, and realistic settlement for refugees.

Thank you, Mr President.