

# Crucial that all parties avoid exacerbating tensions in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Thank you Mr President, and my thanks to the Special Coordinator for his briefing today.

Mr President, let me start by welcoming Israeli Prime Minister Bennett's recent visit to Bahrain. We are pleased to see the continuing positive relationship between two long-standing friends of the UK. The UK actively supports the pursuit of regional stability through normalised relations. We are committed to ensuring that normalisation is an enduring success, and we will continue to support efforts that bring us closer to this goal.

The UK is however concerned by the negative trends on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including an increasing level of violence and incitement to violence.

The UK condemns the firing of missiles by Palestinian militants in Gaza at the start of February. We are resolute in our commitment to Israeli security. We continue to call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their inflammatory action against Israel.

As we've heard again today, violence in the West Bank, including settler attacks against Palestinian people and property, is rising. It is the Government of Israel's responsibility to provide protection to Palestinian civilians, to ensure all such incidents are thoroughly investigated, and to bring those responsible to justice. We are concerned about clashes between Israeli Security Forces and Palestinians. Since the last time the Council met to discuss this issue, two Palestinian children have been killed in the West Bank. We urge restraint on all sides.

We have witnessed tensions in Sheikh Jarrah, where scheduled evictions have led to violent clashes in the neighbourhood. We call once again for the halting of forced evictions and demolitions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Such practices fuel tensions on the ground. And we urge a permanent end to settlement activity, which threatens the two-state solution. The UK opposes the authorisation to legalise the outpost Evyatar in the West Bank. We recall that Evyatar has been a source of instability since May, and that such outposts are illegal under Israeli and International Humanitarian Law.

Mr President, the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis is worsening. Rapid action is needed to improve the situation, and we continue to call on the PA to implement necessary reforms. The UK wants to see continued cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, including on economic initiatives, to help boost the Palestinian economy and improve the lives of all in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Doing so is beneficial to the safety and prosperity

of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Finally, Mr President, as we approach a convergence of Muslim, Jewish and Christian religious holidays in April, it is crucial that all parties commit to respect the historic Status Quo and take steps to avoid exacerbating tensions, in order to prevent escalation.

I thank you, Mr President.