

It is only through dialogue that we can improve stability across the Middle East

Thank you Mr President. Thank you also to the Special Coordinator for his briefing, and for the Secretary-General's detailed report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334.

The report highlights worrying trends across the region, including an increasing level of violence and incitement to violence across a number of fronts. We call on all parties to condemn incitement wherever and whenever it occurs.

Just last week, we were horrified to see attacks on three Israeli citizens near Nablus, in which a young man lost his life. Our hearts go out to the family of Yehuda Dimentman. We fully support Israel's right to ensure its security and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The report also highlights the acute risks to stability facing the region, and the need to ease tensions. These include the immediate financial crises facing both the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA; the rising tension in East Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah following a number of violent attacks; and an increase in settler violence against Palestinians. We call on all parties to urge calm and prevent this cycle of violence.

Mr President, the UK continues to urge the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion and settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The plans to advance construction in E1, and the demolitions and evictions affecting the Palestinian populations in East Jerusalem and Area C, directly threaten the viability of a future Palestinian state.

We welcome the decision by the Jerusalem district planning committee to postpone the decision to construct housing units in Atarot beyond the 1967 lines. We urge the Israeli authorities not to move forward with these plans.

Mr President, we must not forget the toll this prolonged conflict has taken on the people of Gaza. As our Minister for the Middle East set out on 17 December, the UK is proud to have provided \$2.6m to UNICEF to launch their Child Sensitive Cash Assistance Programme in Gaza – to help vulnerable households, especially children, access basic services.

We do welcome the positive progress made this year to improve relations between the parties and encourage dialogue at a senior and ministerial level. We encourage further progress in this regard. We hope economic cooperation will continue to develop, building on the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in November and, we hope, through a meeting of the Joint Economic Committee early next year.

Mr President, as we look towards a new calendar year, we urge a continuation of increased dialogue between the parties and a reversal of the negative trends we have heard about today. It is only through dialogue that we can improve stability across the region and build the foundations for peace. The UK remains firmly committed to a two-state solution, based on 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Mr President, before I conclude, may I join others' thanks to you as Presidency during this busy month and to our colleagues and their teams from Estonia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam for their time on the Council.

Dag Hammarskjöld reminded us; "We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put in it is ours." Your time on the Council has been remarkable.

Thank you Mr President.