

Peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue

Thank you Mr President. Before I start, I just want to pick up on what both the American and the German Ambassador said about the Holocaust commemoration, which takes place this year – a very important commemoration – and the fact that some of us will be joining the Secretary-General at the weekend in New York to commemorate this important anniversary.

Mr President, turning to the Open Debate;

The year 2020 opened with a new crisis in the Middle East, following the killing of Qasem Soleimani, in response to strikes by Iraqi militias against coalition bases, and the downing of Ukrainian Airlines flight 752. The United Kingdom continues to urge all parties to de-escalate following the events and for Iran to take the opportunity to come in from the cold and pursue its legitimate interests in the region peacefully, with full respect for international rules.

I'd like to echo what German representative said about recognition of Israel in this context.

Mr President, as demonstrated by the briefings we've heard today, it's right that this Council also remains engaged to resolve one of the longest standing conflicts on its agenda, the Israeli Palestinian conflict. We have made clear our concern that the situation on the ground, which, as the Secretary-General noted in his assessment last month, has deteriorated over the last three years. And the figures that the Under-Secretary-General quoted are troubling and compelling.

All sides have a responsibility to arrest this deterioration and to create an atmosphere more conducive to peace. For Israel, this means:

(i) An immediate halt to settlement expansion. We condemn the Israeli government's advancement this month of yet more plans, for over 1,900 housing units across the West Bank. It is the UK's longstanding position that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-state solution.

(ii) The avoidance of any suggestion that parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories should be annexed. Such a move would be contrary to international law, damaging to peace efforts and could not pass unchallenged.

(iii) An immediate end to the demolition of Palestinian-owned homes and structures, as well as the eviction of Palestinians from their homes. The targeting of donor-funded structures in Area C is of particular concern. We call on the Israeli authorities to provide a clear, transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C.

Turning to Palestinians' responsibilities:

(i) We unreservedly condemn the indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians by groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Such attacks are completely unacceptable, a violation of international law, and need to cease immediately.

(ii) There should be renewed efforts toward Palestinian reconciliation. We encourage those involved in the reconciliation process to allow the Palestinian Authority to fully resume its government functions in Gaza, and ensure compliance with the Quartet Principles.

(iii) We call on the Palestinian Authority to set a date for free and fair elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza as soon as possible. Genuine democratic national elections for all Palestinians are crucial to the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

Mr President, this Council has a role to play in identifying and containing future flashpoints in conflicts. The resumption of the Great March of Return protests in March is one such possible flashpoint. Hamas operatives have cynically exploited these protests in the past.

Mr President, the United Kingdom's commitment to Israel's security is unwavering. Any protests must adhere to the principle of non-violence. We reiterate our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the IDF police non-violent protests, including the use of live ammunition and excessive force, and call on Israel to adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality.

Turning to the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, as we have heard this remains dire. The United Kingdom will provide around \$21million in humanitarian assistance to Gaza in 2019/2020. And to help address the underlying causes we are more than tripling our spend on Economic Development programming providing \$75m between 2018 and 2023. Ultimately, only peace, stability and the easing of movement and access restrictions will allow necessary investments to be made in a sustainable way.

Mr President, we understand and share the deep frustration on all sides at the lack of progress on the Middle East Peace Process. A just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. We remain committed to achieving a two-State solution, and our long standing position is clear. We support a negotiated settlement recognised by all sides, leading to a safe and secure Israel, living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as a shared capital of both states and a just fair agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. We look forward to working with colleagues to advance our shared objectives of peace and prosperity in the year ahead.

Thank you, Mr President.