

[News story: UK response to violence in Gaza](#)

Alistair Burt said:

The violence today in Gaza and the West Bank has been shocking. The loss of life and the large number of injured Palestinians is tragic, and it is extremely worrying that the number of those killed continues to rise.

Such violence is destructive to peace efforts. We have been clear that the UK supports the Palestinians' right to protest, but these protests must be peaceful.

It is deplorable that extremist elements may have been seeking to exploit these protests for their own violent purposes. We will not waver from our support for Israel's right to defend its borders. But the large volume of live fire is extremely concerning. We continue to implore Israel to show greater restraint.

The UK remains committed to a two-state solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital. All sides now need to show real leadership and courage, promote calm, refrain from inflaming tensions further, and show with renewed urgency that the path to a two-state solution is through negotiation and peace.

[Speech: UK briefs Security Council on mission to Bangladesh and Burma](#)

Thank you very much indeed Madame President, and as it's the first time I personally take the floor, allow me to congratulate you on assuming your new role. I'd like to join my Peruvian colleague in particular in thanking the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, but also our Kuwaiti colleague for all the excellent arrangements. Without that, we would not have been able to cover so much in our trip. And like my Kuwaiti and Peruvian colleagues, we really did appreciate everything we saw from the UN teams on the ground and the help we had from the Secretariat. And I think, if I can speak for all the Council, I think all Council members found it a very productive and interesting, if difficult, visit.

Madame Chairman, I will speak about what we did on the third day with our

field visit to Northern Rakhine. We had a briefing on one made by the Chief Minister of Rakhine state and we took a helicopter trip over Northern Rakhine. We were accompanied by the Union Minister for International Cooperation U Kyaw Tin and the Chief Coordinator of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development, which is known as the UEHRD, and that was Dr Aung Htun Thet.

The members of the Security Council on that trip flew over an area that showed widespread devastation of land and villages and it was clear Madame President that these had been burned out. We saw physical arrangements for return being prepared by the Myanmar government. This included a reception center and a transit center at Talaat. This was intended to accommodate up to 30,000 people.

We met members of local communities in Northern Rakhine. We had a town hall meeting with Rakhine Muslim and Hindu groups. We met community members who had seen their families be victims of ARSA attacks, and we met a Rohingya community whose homes have been rebuilt by the authorities. We were also able to have a meeting with members of civil society at Sittwe airport, though our time was unfortunately brief.

In line with my colleagues, I'd like to offer the Council some reflections on what we saw. I think the first reflection I have is the sheer scale of the devastation. I have only ever seen one camp like it in my professional life before and I was very struck by the magnitude of what the refugees face and what the governments face and what the UN faces as they try to get the people home. We did see widespread devastation from the air and this is obviously one reason for the scale of the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

I think the second reflection would be the need for the Burmese authorities to increase the scale of their response and to allow the UN in with unconditional access to assist them. Only the UN has the technical expertise and know-how to deal with an event of this magnitude.

Myanmar has two reception centres. Together they can receive at best 300 people a day.

There are some 90,000 refugees, Madame President, so nowhere near the scale that would be required to bring so many refugees home. And as I said, the UN needs to be involved because it is the only institution in the world that has the ability to provide assistance at the scale required.

My third reflection would be that we didn't receive enough information about the prospect for long-term solutions. Council members heard that refugees would be housed only temporarily in the transit centre, but there was no convincing explanation about how they would actually get back to their villages and on what timeframe. And we did note, I think the Council was struck by the fact that the IDP camps in Sittwe have been there since 2012.

My fourth reflection: an emphasis on the physical arrangements and development as opposed to the underlying political issues. Council members heard about UEHRD development plans which are privately financed and about

the physical arrangements for repatriation. But two points, if I may, on that Madame President: there are risks to private financing, and anything delivered without Rohingya participation risk reinforcing displacement, not resolving it. I think we accept that the Myanmar authorities have a very deep concern about development issues in Rakhine state as a whole and I think the Council believes that that is one aspect that will need to be addressed. But it is not the foremost aspect in getting the Rohingya to start going back to their homes in safety and security, Madame President, and I think I was particularly struck again by the contrast between what is being offered on the ground in Myanmar and the scale of the problem.

There is little progress on tackling the political issues, as my two colleagues noted in the meetings they described. Many of these political issues were raised in the Annan Commission recommendations. They centre around community reconciliation, around regularising citizenship status of Rohingya, around human rights such as freedom of movement and access to education and livelihoods, and holding the perpetrators of violence to account. Again Madame President, we heard from some of the other villagers and officials about attacks on them from the ARSA. So it is clear to me speaking nationally that there does need to be an accountability mechanism for all the alleged violations of human rights committed, violations and abuses of human rights committed in Northern Rakhine. But again I start from the point that it is the Rohingya that the Council went to examine and it is the Rohingya that is overwhelmingly the largest part of the problem.

And lastly, Madame President, we have in recent days been very concerned by reports that Myanmar security forces have threatened Rohingya villages not to talk openly with the Security Council delegation and that the people who did so are being looked for by security forces now. It's obviously unacceptable that anyone should feel intimidated from talking to the Security Council who after all undertakes these missions on behalf of the international community. And I would be most grateful if the Myanmar authorities could clarify that as a matter of urgency.

Thank you very much indeed, Madame President.

I would like to just make one last point if I may. I was struck by the unity of the Council throughout the trip, and I think my colleagues were as well. And I think we all would like to find a way to preserve that unity as under your direction, Madame President, we go forward.

[Press release: PM bilateral meeting with President Varela: 14 May 2018](#)

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with the President of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela, at Downing Street earlier today.

They discussed the importance of the international community continuing to come together to uphold the global prohibition on the use of chemical weapons, particularly in the wake of the attack in Douma, Syria, and the attempted murder of the Skripals in Salisbury.

They discussed regional security cooperation, agreeing on the importance of our joint work to address cross-border threats including the trafficking of narcotics, people, contraband and counterfeit goods, and illicit finance.

They discussed joint anti-corruption efforts, and the Prime Minister noted the importance of seeing further progress in introducing anti-corruption legislation and criminalising tax evasion in Panama.

They also discussed education, noting the strong teacher training links between our two countries and the centrality of education to development.

Finally, they discussed trade, agreeing trade links between the UK and Panama would continue to go from strength to strength as the UK leaves the EU. In particular, they welcomed the approach agreed at the March European Council to provide continuity during the implementation period for international agreements, which could be swiftly transitioned into new bilateral agreements once the implementation period ends.

[Speech: Call to refocus the UN Mission in Kosovo](#)

Updated: professional title for Stephen Hickey should read “coordinator” and not “counsellor”

Thank you Madame President. And thank you SRSg Tanin for your briefing.

Madame President, in February, the UK celebrated ten years of diplomatic relations with Kosovo. In the same month, the European Commission adopted a strategy for ‘A credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans’. Kosovo’s opportunity here was not overlooked – through implementation of the Stabilisation and Association agreement, Kosovo has the opportunity to

progress on its European path.

We welcome the significant milestones that Kosovo has reached since our last meeting, including the ratification of the Border Demarcation Agreement with Montenegro. Good neighbourly relations are a key feature of any European democracy, and are crucial for stability in the wider Balkans region.

We encourage both Serbia and Kosovo to continue to make progress towards a sustainable solution through the EU-Facilitated Dialogue. Progress is vital for stability, security and prosperity in the region, as well as in the two countries themselves. Provocative acts and rhetoric from both sides are deeply unhelpful and antagonistic.

Our priority in Kosovo remains strengthening the Rule of Law, and the challenges still remain. We welcome President Thaci's public commitment to uphold Kosovo's obligations through the Specialist Chambers. We also welcome the speedy appointment of Jack Smith as Kosovo's Specialist Prosecutor, and the continuity this provides in the Specialist Chambers' pursuit of justice for victims.

We note that Prime Minister Haradinaj has requested a review into the arrest and deportation of Turkish nationals. As a supporter of democratic values, Kosovo must continue to prioritise the Rule of Law and respect for international human rights in all its institutions.

Madame President, the investigation into the death of Oliver Ivanovic is clearly ongoing. We have been clear in our expectation that Kosovo's rule of law institutions will lead a thorough and full investigation to bring those responsible to justice at the earliest opportunity. But equally, we expect Serbia to refrain from any provocations that could heighten tensions and support investigative efforts in an open and constructive manner.

Madame President, the hard work and dedication of thousands of UNMIK personnel has helped bring peace to Kosovo. The current situation is in part a result of their work. We also recognise Kosovo's commitment to peace, stability, reconciliation and prosperity and the UK will continue to be a proud supporter of Kosovo as it strives to achieve its full potential.

Madame President, given the scale of the threats to international peace and security around the world right now, and the relative stability and progress on the ground in Kosovo, it is clearly inappropriate and inefficient for this Council to spend so much of its time discussing the situation in Kosovo and devoting so much resources to it. The United Kingdom joins other European members of this Council in firmly believing that the situation in Kosovo allows for a substantial reduction in the current cycle in reports and meetings. We further believe that the Security Council must refocus UNMIK's efforts so that the means deployed by the United Nations are tailored fully to the situation on the ground. To this end, we look forward to a strategic review of the mission in due course.

Thank you Madame President.

[News story: MOD launches biggest ever mental health awareness week with new confidential support for personnel on operations](#)

This comes as the MOD announces a series of new joint projects with leading mental health charity Samaritans.

The initiatives, backed by £3.5 million in LIBOR funding, will build on the charity's digital technology to offer military personnel at home and on operations abroad access to confidential support. Online and face to face training in listening skills will also be offered to serving personnel and families, in order to give them confidence and expertise in encouraging others to not suffer in silence.

As part of the partnership with Samaritans, a confidential webchat service is being developed allowing military personnel, who often live in shared living quarters, particularly when serving on operations abroad, the ability to talk in confidence with a trained staff. Pocket guides are also being produced which will provide information and emotional support for when people are in isolated locations, particularly on operations.

Samaritan volunteers with military experience will also be trained in how to address mental health issues in a military environment, based on cutting-edge research from King's College London.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are absolutely committed to making sure that no one in our military suffers in silence.

I've stepped up our support for mental health in the Armed Forces, with an extra £2 million of funding a year and a new 24-hour mental health hotline.

I'm delighted to announce that personnel serving abroad will be able to access a new confidential system to help them in their time of need.

A range of events and activities will take place across the military and the MOD to mark Mental Health Awareness Week.

Civilian and military teams are being encouraged to use the week to hold

conversations on mental health issues. Managers, using the recently launched Mental Health Guide for Managers, will also outline the support which is available across the MOD, including the recently launched Combat Stress 24-hour mental health hotline. Discussions on stress and resilience will be held on the MOD's internal Defence Blog, the Land Warfare Centre will hold a wellbeing symposium and Joint Forces Command will also promote an online self-help programme available to personnel.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

We have long recognised the importance of treating the physical effects of battle but any invisible scars experienced by our brave service personnel were given less attention.

We are determined to change this and encourage a more open culture in talking about mental health. With our comprehensive mental health and wellbeing strategy, 20 specialist military mental health sites around the country, a 24/7 helpline and a partnership with the Royal Foundation, we are now far better placed to provide the comprehensive support our armed forces deserve.

As we mark Mental Health Awareness Week, I want everyone in the military to adopt the mindset that mental wellbeing matters just as much as physical health.

The Defence Secretary in February increased funding for Armed Forces mental health services to £220 million over the next decade and launched the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline, in conjunction with Combat Stress. The new number – 0800 323 4444 – has already received over 350 calls.

The MOD currently has a network of 20 'hub and spoke' mental health centres, comprising of 11 hubs and a further nine teams. Regular visiting clinics are also held at other military centres across the country.

Last year the MOD launched its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusing on preventative measures to protect our personnel. MOD also partnered with the Royal Foundation, a charity set up by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to improve training and education alongside the strategy to promote mental fitness.

There are a range of services provided by partners working with MOD and through the Armed Forces Covenant, including the NHS, other Government departments and charities, which serving personnel, veterans, and their families can access.