

Speech: After generations of hostility, blood & tears & in the wake of years of pain & wars, we are determined to bring an end to the bloodshed & sorrow

Thank you Mr President and let me join others in thanking you Nikolay for your briefing and for your tireless efforts on this issue.

As you have set out so clearly this morning, the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories continues to be of utmost concern for the Security Council. After generations of hostility, blood and tears and in the wake of years of pain and wars, we are determined to bring an end to the bloodshed and sorrow.

But such determination is not new, Mr President. In fact, those words I just uttered come from the Washington Declaration, signed on this very day twenty three years ago.

That historic document started a process that created a historic peace between Israel and Jordan; a peace that would have been unthinkable decades before. The symbolism of this particular anniversary should not be lost on anyone in this Council today. It should remind us all that the peace we seek is not impossible; no matter how far off it may appear; no matter the challenges ahead.

It is a reminder of hope that the region desperately needs. One need only look to the recent abhorrent surge in violence to see that peace remains far from the minds of far too many.

I condemn the horrific terrorist attack that claimed the lives of three Israelis during a Shabbat dinner last Friday. I deplore the tragic murder of two Israeli policemen at the Temple Mount/Haram Sharif the Friday before.

A spiral of tension and violence has swept across the West Bank and Jerusalem in recent days. I am deeply concerned about the loss of life, including the deaths of at least four Palestinians, and deplore the violence that has left hundreds injured in clashes over the weekend. The relevant authorities must swiftly investigate all these incidents.

We call on all parties to show restraint and restore calm. We call on all parties to avoid provocation and, through engagement, to reach a solution that ensures the safety and security of the Temple Mount/Haram Sharif; one that upholds the status quo. We welcome the engagement between all parties to find a solution, and we welcome positive steps taken overnight. This is the path to de-escalation. This is the path all parties must take.

In parallel, Mr President, we must not lose sight of other challenges to peace, such as the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the recent cut in electricity supplies is exacerbating already perilous conditions; over 33,000 people displaced, insufficient clean water to meet the population's needs, with most only getting water for a few hours every 3 to 5 days.

Over 70% of Gazans are now reliant on UNRWA and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the UN for their efforts to alleviate the suffering of those in Gaza.

Ultimately, it is Hamas' decision to choose violence and reject the Quartet Principles that lies at the heart of the tragedy in Gaza. There is a way out; Hamas must renounce violence, recognise Israel and accept previously signed agreements. This means an end to the rockets, an end to the violence. Those countries in the region with influence over Hamas must encourage them to take these steps.

We also need to see steps towards the restoration of the Palestinian Authority control of Gaza and with it, the restoration of effective and accountable governance. If we are to achieve a solution, Israel must lift restrictions on Gaza to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians. The UK stands ready to do all we can to support these efforts.

Beyond Gaza, we're also concerned to see settlement activity in East Jerusalem increasing, especially at a time of heightened tension. All settlements are illegal under international law and I strongly condemn plans to build new settlement housing units. Many of these units are within Palestinian neighbourhoods and some involve the demolition of Palestinian homes. This is unacceptable. I'm also gravely concerned by proposals for the construction of a further 1,100 units between the West Bank settlements of Adam and Neve Ya'akov. Settlements undermine the territorial contiguity of the West Bank and make a two-state solution harder to achieve.

So there is a great deal for us to do, Mr President, if we are to make peace a reality. But before I give up the floor, let me return to the Washington Declaration. While the process begun on this day in 1994 would lead to peace between Israel and Jordan, we should never forget the leadership shown by the United States that was so instrumental in making that peace possible.

And it is that same leadership that President Trump and his administration are now demonstrating in reinvigorating the Middle East Peace Process. This is to be applauded and supported. We call on the region, on Israelis, and on Palestinians to seize the opportunity that such leadership offers, just as it was seized 23 years ago.

Thank you.