

Speech: Commence renewed and meaningful peace negotiations

Thank you Mr President and thank you to Special Coordinator Mladenov for your briefing and for your recent work with Egypt to secure a renewed ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. It is essential that the ceasefire is respected and maintained by all sides. The people of Israel and Gaza deserve peace and security.

The escalation seen at the Gaza perimeter last Friday, including the killing of an Israel Defense Force soldier, is deeply concerning. Hamas must cease all acts of violence and terror and decide whether it is prepared to demonstrate its commitment to achieving peace and ending this conflict.

The most recent escalation and exchange of rockets into southern Israel, and the economic and kinetic response by the Israelis, are also both concerning.

We urge the parties to take immediate steps to reverse the current negative trends on the ground, and to commence renewed and meaningful peace negotiations.

Mr President, now more than ever, we urgently need a political process that delivers a two-state solution. As Council Members, we must seize the opportunity presented by the prospect of a US plan. The UK stands ready to support and contribute to all credible efforts to restart the peace process; we urge others to do the same.

The UK position on the peace process is unchanged; we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Mr President, every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. No one wants to see a return to conflict, which will inevitably have devastating consequences. We call on the parties to take the following urgent action to avoid escalating the conflict:

First, Hamas must bring an immediate and permanent end to rocket fire and the sending of incendiary devices into Israel.

Second, Israel must reverse its punitive measures and work with the international community to ease conditions in Gaza, including opening movement and access and reducing economic restrictions.

Third, the Palestinian Authority must resume salary payments and work to restore its presence in Gaza.

The international community also has responsibilities, including the need to rally around Special Coordinator Mladenov's plans to improve the situation in Gaza and in supporting Egyptian efforts on political reconciliation and longer-term arrangements for calm in Gaza.

The risk of tensions boiling over into a full-blown conflict are very real and very dangerous. Every effort must be made to avoid civilian casualties.

Nobody around this table wants to see another Gaza conflict. At such a highly sensitive time, we urge calm and restraint.

We appreciate Egyptian efforts in calming tensions and we urge Egypt to do more by improving movement and access through Rafah crossing.

Mr President, we are also deeply concerned by continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities. Due to severe planning restrictions, many Palestinians have no option but to build without permission. This needs to change. Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and, in all but the most exceptional of cases, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

The village of Khan al-Ahmar is a case in point, and this is an example that has also been raised this morning by the French and Dutch Ambassadors. We continue to urge Israel to abandon demolition plans entirely, and instead provide a transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C. Not only could demolition constitute forcible transfer, it would also pave the way for settlement building in E1. In accordance with our longstanding policy, we would have to condemn such a move. Such action would strike a major blow to the prospects for a two-state solution and make it difficult to believe that Israel wants progress towards peace.

Finally, Mr President, I want to reiterate that the UK remains firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. The UK welcomes the important contributions that Member States are providing to UNRWA.

However, UNRWA's deficit remains at \$217 million, meaning it will shortly have to make a decision about whether to open schools in September. The increased demand for UNRWA's services and growing instability across the region make UNRWA's support even more important. It is clear that UNRWA needs a broader pool of financial support from donors to achieve sufficient, assured and predictable financing. It is also clear that UNRWA needs to continue to promote realistic and technical cost-saving reforms.

The UK continues to support UNRWA and remains one of the top five donors. We have delivered our pledge of \$37.5 million and have brought forward \$13.5 million to help meet the urgent needs of Palestinian refugees. We encourage members of this Council to consider what more they can do to support Palestinian refugees and alleviate the current financial pressure facing UNRWA.

Thank you.