

Speech: Durable Peace in the Middle East

Thank you, Mr President. Can I also join others in welcoming the Indonesian Foreign Minister, who is a very good friend of the United Nations, and also join the American representative in expressing our deepest condolences to Chad for the loss of their peacekeepers and we send our condolences to the victims' families.

Mr President, as other speakers have noted, there a range of issues in the Middle East today that deserve the Council's concern but as Mr Mladenov was our briefer, I will confine my remarks today to the issues that he covered. And I want to start by echoing the German Representative that Israel's security shouldn't be put in doubt. We condemn unreservedly the rocket launches from Syria and Gaza into Israel.

I thank Mr Mladenov for his briefing. As he set out the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories remains deeply concerning. Mr Mladenov's statement about the erosion of prospects for establishing a Palestinian state – the erosion because the facts on the ground really should guide the Council's consideration. I think what he said about 25 years from Oslo is also a very salutary reminder that we do not have the luxury of time in which to find progress on the MEPP.

Turning to the situation on the ground, Mr President, and again as others have noted, the last three months of 2018 saw a dreadful increase in violence in the West Bank. Three Israelis – including a baby – were killed in Palestinian terror attacks, for which Hamas has claimed responsibility. And there is no justification for such acts of violence. During the same time in the West Bank and Gaza, 70 Palestinians were killed. On the 14th of January, a 14 year old Palestinian boy died as a result of injuries sustained from live fire following a protest at the Gaza fence. Mr President, we fully support Israel's right to defend herself but Israeli security forces should refrain from the use of excessive force against unarmed civilians. Lethal use of force should be exercised with maximum restraint and only as a last resort to protect life.

Turning to Gaza, the situation on security remains precarious. Sporadic rocket attacks by militants continue and a miscalculation could easily lead to renewed confrontation. We need to do everything we can to avoid another devastating war which would compound the already dire humanitarian and security conditions in Gaza and would threaten the security of Israeli border communities.

I wanted to draw the Council's attention to Gaza's health sector which remains under significant strain and to the problems with shortage of essential drugs and limited access to clean water. And Israel's movement restrictions, we believe, continue to affect the health of the population. In the longer term, renewed political resolve is required to improve the

situation. Several speakers today, Mr President, have drawn attention to the reconciliation process begun under Egyptian auspices between the Palestinian Authority and others. And we were very concerned by the Palestinian Authority's decision to withdraw their guards from the Rafah crossing point. And it is vital Mr President that the Council impress upon the Palestinian factions that they need to work together to break the deadlock. And we welcome continued Egyptian efforts in this regard.

On the West Bank, recent developments continue to undermine the achievements of the Oslo Accords and they jeopardize the prospects for a two-state solution. Following the violent attacks in the West Bank there have been a large number of incursions by Israeli security forces into Area A and Palestinian movement in the West Bank has been significantly restricted and disrupted. Full security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel remains crucial for the safety of both parties.

I wanted to express our disappointment, Mr President, that on 27 December – just days after the Council discussed the implementation of Resolution 2324 – Israel advanced plans for the construction of nearly 2,800 illegal settlement housing units. And it is doubly disappointing that over half of these units located east of the separation barrier in areas deep into the West Bank. Plans outlined by the Israeli government on 26 December to construct a new settlement, Givat Eitam, close to Bethlehem represent further threat to the territorial integrity of the future Palestinian state. If built, this new settlement would prevent the growth of Bethlehem and further fragment the West Bank.

We are closely following developments in East Jerusalem. The eviction notice served to the Sabah family in Sheikh Jarrah on 3 January places 45 people at risk of losing their home.

So Mr. President I want to encourage the Israeli government not to enforce this eviction, as we continue to urge them not to demolish the Bedouin community of Khan al-Ahmar.

Turning to Israel/Lebanon, we're concerned by the recent rise in tensions along the Blue Line. We condemn all violations of UNSCR 1701. The United Kingdom has been clear in this Council on many occasions that we condemn Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty whether by land or sea or air. Such actions undermine confidence and stability and we look for all relevant Security Council resolutions – but notably 1559 and 1701 – to be respected in full.

For too long, Mr President, we have witnessed Hezbollah blatantly disregard UN resolutions. Their continued possession of weapons outside of Lebanese state control and their reported attempts to acquire dangerous new missile capabilities remain deeply alarming, as do their statements which threaten Israel. Without an end to these illegal activities by Hezbollah in Lebanon and the region, we will continue to see regional stability threatened. We condemn Hezbollah's aggressive activities and we are clear that we should not allow them to go unchecked.

In conclusion, Mr President, the prospects for peace may seem bleak as Mr Mladenov outlined. We should not give up on the two-state solution. It remains the only viable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For this reason, the United Kingdom remains committed to the internationally agreed parameters for a durable peace in the Middle East. And it is critical negotiations are resumed towards an agreement 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 the shared capital of both states, and, Mr President, a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. Thank you.