

Speech: Latest rocket attacks in Israel, humanitarian situation in Gaza and the status of the Golan Heights

Thank you very much indeed, Mr President, and like our German colleague, I'll try to be brief because I think there has been a lot of common themes across the Council today. And while I share people's dismay that so many of these issues come back to us repeatedly, I think that if there is any unity in the Council it has been the condemnation of violence from both sides and the need for both sides to make progress.

I think, Special Co-ordinator, you asked us to be very clear about the condemnation of the recent rocket attacks. Dual British-Israeli citizens were [injured] in the latest rocket attacks so we have no hesitation in joining you and others in condemning unreservedly what has happened and in condemning such acts of terrorism and violence wherever they occur. And I'll note that there was another attack near the Ariel settlement on 17 March. We along with others support the Egyptian and UN efforts to broker a ceasefire and restore the situation to calm.

Violence not only creates fear and a cycle of violence among the Israeli and Palestinian populations, it also undermines the humanitarian situation in Gaza. And we have been concerned by the number of Palestinian deaths in the West Bank over the last few weeks.

A number of colleagues mentioned the heightened tensions at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. We urge all parties to work together to restore calm and to support the status quo under the custodianship of the King of Jordan.

The protests at the Gaza perimeter fence continue and we remain concerned about the volume of live fire that's been used. And this is resulting in horrific injuries and it is also resulting in fatalities. This is not to take away one iota from Israel's right to self-defense. And it's not to undermine or gainsay the fact that Hamas operatives cynically exploit these protests but it is worth repeating that this perpetual cycle of violence serves no one's interests. And as the German ambassador said: the emphasis ought to be on what can be done to implement 2334 and reduce the the violence that we see every day in the territories and in Israel.

And I just want to join others who referred to the March of Return – that anniversary will be with us shortly. We urge all parties to demonstrate restraint and avoid future violence. We continue to support the need for an independent and transparent investigation into last year's events in Gaza. And we welcome the recent decision by the Israeli Military Advocate General to order five criminal investigations relating to 11 separate instances of Palestinian fatalities during the Gaza protests.

It is customary, Mr President, to turn to the issue of settlements. Our views

on settlements remain well-known. Suffice it to say that we share the Secretary-General's views on the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem. We also remain gravely concerned by the threatened evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem and across the West Bank. And my Foreign Secretary wrote to the Israeli Government to condemn the planned demolition of the Palestinian village of Khan al-Ahmar and we continue to press Israel to abandon these plans entirely.

Mr President, a number of Council members have referred to the issue of the Golan Heights. For the United Kingdom, we view the Golan Heights as territory occupied by Israel. Annexation of territory by force is prohibited under international law and that includes the UN Charter. The United Kingdom does not recognise Israel's annexation in 1981 and we have no plans to change that position.

Before I conclude, Mr President, could I just correct something I said earlier? Dual British-Israeli citizens were injured in the rocket attack and not killed. I apologise for the error.

Thank you.