

Speech: UK concerned about planned demolition of the village of Khan al-Ahma

Thank you Madam President, and thank you to Special Coordinator Mladenov for your briefing and for the work you are doing to improve the situation and bring the situation closer to peace and for all the hard work of your teams on the ground.

The United Kingdom is committed and remains committed to achieving a two-state solution, leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

We continue to believe that the best way to achieve this is through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and for all parties to focus on steps that are conducive to peace.

As the French Ambassador said, some 25 years ago, we had the Oslo Accords. It is doubly concerning, therefore, to see the recent developments on the ground, on key aspects of Resolution 2334. The level of rhetoric of hatred and dehumanisation on all sides is repellent but it is also dangerous.

The UK remains deeply concerned about the Israeli authorities' planned demolition of the village of Khan al-Ahmar. Khan al-Ahmar is located in an area of strategic importance for the contiguity of a Palestinian state. Its demolition threatens a major blow to the prospects for a two-state solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital, by paving the way for settlement building in Area E1.

The UN has said that demolition could amount to forcible transfer in violation of international humanitarian law. The recent decision of the Israeli Supreme Court does not mandate demolition; demolition remains at the discretion of the Israeli Government.

We therefore call on the Israeli government once again not to go ahead with its plan to demolish the village, including the school, and displace the residents.

I share concerns about the situation of the UN Relief and Works Agency, which is facing severe financial pressure at a time of increased demand.

We support a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for Palestinian refugees, and until that point, we remain firmly committed to supporting UNWRA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.

We are concerned about the impact of the recent US decision on funding. We believe UNRWA is a lifeline for millions of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. We have so far provided ourselves some \$67 million to UNRWA; \$59 million to its core services and \$7.8 million in humanitarian aid in Syria.

We hope this will help meet immediate needs and that programmes and services remain uninterrupted. We call on the international community and other donors to follow this and step up support to UNRWA to ensure its vital services are not interrupted.

At the same time, I would like to stress that for UNRWA to have a sustainable future, it needs to continue to promote realistic and technical cost-saving reforms. The United Kingdom will continue to work closely with UNRWA and donors on how best to ensure continuity of essential services to Palestinian refugees at this time.

Lastly, and as the French Ambassador said, there is an urgent need to address the awful and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. The United Kingdom has recently announced a new \$49 million programme to support economic development in Gaza and the West Bank. We have released \$2.6 million to UNICEF, to help provide up to 1 million Gazans with access to clean water and sanitation, and have given \$2 million to the ICRC appeal to support emergency medical needs.

We are supportive of efforts to reduce the conflict in Gaza. It is in everyone's interest for peace and stability to prevail in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

And Special Coordinator, we fully support your efforts to improve the situation in Gaza and we urge the relevant parties to engage fully with your proposals.

We also would like to see progress on humanitarian and economic proposals at the meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee next week, and we call upon both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to deliver on their outstanding commitments.

We reiterate the need for Israel to reduce its movement and access restrictions on the people of Gaza, and for Hamas to commit to non-violence and fully end its attacks on Israel.

In order to see a long-term improvement in Gaza, momentum around Fatah-Hamas reconciliation needs to be maintained. The United Kingdom is supportive of Egyptian efforts to enable the Palestinian Authority to resume control of Gaza, and we encourage all parties to engage constructively.

The recent deaths on both sides of the conflict, including the deaths of three Palestinians in Gaza over the past week and the stabbing of an Israeli in a settlement on 16 September, reflect the need for progress to end the cycle of violence.

We strongly urge all relevant parties to respect international law, de-escalate tensions, exercise restraint and prevent incidents that could jeopardize the lives of Palestinians and Israelis.

Thank you, Madam President.