

# The importance of Israel and Palestine living in peace

Mr Mladenov, thank you very much once again for your briefing and for the work of your team on the ground in, from what we have heard, obviously very difficult circumstances. I took careful note of your characterisation of the current situation, and given the number of crises and difficulties we've seen over Gaza in recent months, I know you don't make that characterisation lightly. And I'll come back to that in a minute.

But I wanted to start, as others have done, I wanted to stress the UK position on settlements hasn't changed. They are illegal under international law. They present an obstacle to peace. They threaten the physical ability of a two-state solution. The British position was reflected in our support for UNSCR 2334, but also in previous resolutions, which confirmed the lack of legal validity, such as SCR 465 of 1980. We've also condemned the advancement of plans for over 2000 housing units across the West Bank on 10 October and call on such counterproductive action to end.

Turning specifically to Gaza, I wanted to thank Ms Hary for her briefing and her insights on access. We take this very seriously. The most important thing, I think, is the escalation of hostilities in Gaza that began on 12 November. We're very concerned about that. We welcome the ceasefire reached between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and we're grateful, as are others, to Egypt and the UN for their mediation efforts. And I want to stress the complete unacceptability of the indiscriminate attacks against civilians by Palestinian Islamic Jihad. We regret the loss of life and we urge all parties to adhere to the ceasefire arrangement. Longer term, we encourage actors to put forward sustainable proposals to resolve the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas, by Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants in Gaza. Hamas' misrule is leading to dreadful consequences for the people of Gaza and also of Israel.

I wanted to pick up on Ms Hary's briefing on movement and access restrictions and show how this has constrained exports and impacted on the Palestinian economy in forms of low growth and rising levels of unemployment. And we look to Israel to apply the same conditions on Palestinian traders as they do on Israeli ones.

I wanted to join what other speakers have said about our concern about demolitions, about incidents of violence in both directions. I wanted to take the opportunity also to join others in saying absolutely that Israel's security is a top priority for us and to condemn the missiles that are fired at Israel. But as long as we have this destabilising situation, and the violence is very difficult to find a way through.

We remain concerned by increase in settler violence. We welcome work towards genuine and democratic national elections for all Palestinians – and I agree with those speakers who said that this was crucial in view of the

establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. And to this end, we call on all Palestinian factions to seek common ground and to work together to pursue a positive path towards democracy for the full benefit of the Palestinian people.

I also just wanted to put down a marker about a call for greater media freedoms in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including revising relevant legislation. We're concerned by the 17 October decision by the Ramallah Magistrate Court ordering the blocking of 50 Palestinian Arabic websites. We think that's an important part of what is happening on the ground.

But finally, to join others in noting the importance of the two-State solution, but also the importance of Palestine and Israel living in peace, living in mutual respect side by side as equal and sovereign states. And of course, security is an absolutely crucial component of that.