Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"The Syrian people deserve peace and justice"

2014-04-29

Thank you Madam President,

I would like to thank Mr Serry for his statement and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their contributions to this debate. I will focus my intervention on the Middle East Peace Process and Syria.

Madam President,

The future of the peace process hangs in the balance. Both the Israeli and the Palestinian leaderships need to seize the diminishing opportunity before them and focus on the ultimate goal: a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict – which is so desperately needed for their people.

During his recent speech to the Knesset, Prime Minister David Cameron emphasised the transformative benefits of peace. These include:

a prosperous Palestinian State living side-by-side with a safe and secure Israel;

normalised relations between states in the region;

and a Special Privileged Partnership between the parties and the European Union.

By contrast, the consequences of letting this opportunity pass would be very grave, both for the parties, and for the region.

With respect to recent announcements on Palestinian reconciliation, let me reiterate that the United Kingdom believes that for a lasting peace, it is necessary to end the separation between Gaza and the West Bank, and to reunite them under a Palestinian Authority that is fully committed to peace with Israel. The United Kingdom has consistently made it clear that we will engage any Palestinian government that demonstrates through actions that they are committed to the principles set out by President Abbas in Cairo in May 2011.

Madam President,

The United Kingdom remains very concerned about the increase in tensions and violence leading to the many deaths of both Palestinians and Israelis. We condemn the further expansion of Israeli settlements and continued demolition of Palestinian homes as well as the

continued rocket fire by extremist groups in Gaza into Israel. Both are contrary to international humanitarian law.

Increasing tensions around the Holy Sites of Jerusalem are also disconcerting. The status quo must be maintained and respected. We urge the responsible authorities to maintain calm and avoid letting those with extremist agendas dictate the atmosphere around the Holy Sites.

Finally let me welcome President Abbas's remarks on the Holocaust. The entire international community must stand united against those who deny the terrible truth of the Holocaust.

Madam President,

The situation in Syria worsens every day. The regime continues to act with a complete disregard for civilian life, humanitarian needs, and Security Council resolution 2139. The Secretary-General has been very clear: the Security Council must act in the event of further non-compliance.

Recent credible reports that chemical weapons have again been used by the regime in Syria call into question the regime's commitment to comply with its obligations and to dismantle its programme in full. We raised our concerns with other states in the OPCW Executive Council on 11 April and welcome today's OPCW announcement to launch an investigation into these reports.

We commend the work of the UN-OPCW Joint Mission. But the situation on the ground is concerning: missed Syrian deadlines; ambiguities in the declaration; alleged recent use of chemical Weapons, and limited progress on the destruction of Chemical Weapons Production Facilities. As we approach the completion of the extraction phase, the Joint Mission will continue to have a vital role in ensuring that this Council is fully appraised on compliance with resolution 2118.

The Syrian people deserve peace and justice. The international community must ensure all those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity are held to account. The United Kingdom continues to call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court and will continue to support the moderate opposition in their efforts to protect Syrians from the regime and from extremist groups.

The Assad regime's announcement of elections on 3 June 2014 is a cynical attempt to sustain his murderous dictatorship. Elections will be conducted amidst regime attacks on civilians and hundreds of thousands living under regime siege in horrendous conditions. These elections can have no value or credibility when held in a climate of fear where non-violent opponents to Assad have been detained or disappeared and millions of Syrians who live as refugees are prevented from voting.

A clear route to credible elections exists through the establishment of a transitional governing body, as set out in the Geneva Communique. We call on the Assad regime to return to Geneva and to negotiate on the basis of the Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi's proposed format and agenda. All Council members bear responsibility to work for a negotiated political solution and in particular to put pressure on Assad to engage with the process in good faith.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-syrian-people-deserve-peace-and-justice