Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"This violence is only moving us away from peace, not towards it"

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Thank you Mr President, and to the Secretary-General for his briefing today.

I want to begin by welcoming the Quartet's report on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I join others in thanking the Quartet Envoys and Principals for all their hard work in producing this important analysis of the situation facing ordinary Israelis and Palestinians.

The trends that this report highlights are sadly familiar; settlements, annexations, and demolitions. Violence, incitement and suffering, on both sides.

If we can't reverse these shocking trends, the report is clear what the future holds. It is, and I quote, a future of "a one-state reality of perpetual occupation and conflict". That's a future without security, a future without statehood. And that is no future at all.

I know there are disagreements about some aspects of the report – what it does and what it doesn't cover. But I hope that we can all acknowledge that whatever our disagreements, it is absolutely clear that progress must now be made to stop this possible reality coming to pass, and that we must advance, indeed save, the two-state solution.

There are three clear messages that I hope we can all agree today.

The first is that the violence must stop. Leaders on both sides must do more to clamp down on inflammatory rhetoric and incitement. It is simply not acceptable to stand by while this continues.

And sadly the violence that we have seen over recent months continues. Even as the report was being published, violence was claiming more innocent victims.

As we've heard last week, it was 13 year old Hallel Yaffa Ariel. Last month, 15 year old Mahmoud Rafat Badran. It is almost unspeakable that future generations of Israelis and Palestinians are now victims of a conflict and occupation that belongs firmly in the past. Children like Hallel and Mahmoud should be looking ahead to seven decades of peace and hope, not falling victim to seven decades of hate and fear. This violence is only moving us away from peace, not towards it.

Second, we need to send a clear message today that it isn't enough just to stop the violence. The shocking trends in the West Bank are unacceptable and must stop. Systematic settlement expansion, deep into the West Bank; legalisation of outposts; re-designation of land as Israeli "state land", and the obstruction or outright denial of Palestinian development in the West Bank - these policies are "steadily eroding the viability of the two-state solution", something which the report clearly spells out.

When a family in the Old City of Jerusalem is threatened with eviction from their home of over 60 years, you're not only eroding their past, you are eroding their future. You are eroding their faith that they will ever live in a land of their own, that they will ever peacefully co-exist with Israel. And in turn, you are feeding an anger that will only threaten the right of ordinary Israelis to live in safety and security.

The village of Khirbet Tana, a community near Nablus, has faced three waves of demolitions this year. Houses, barns, a school – the only school – were demolished. What hope is there for the two-state solution when communities are simply removed from the map?

My third message concerns the situation in Gaza. Two years after the last conflict, ordinary Gazans continued to live in the direst conditions. This must be addressed if we are to prevent a resumption of full-scale conflict. So we called on Hamas and other militant groups to commit to ending rocket fire and other attacks against Israel. Israel's citizens deserve to live in peace. In turn, we need to be clear that Israel must lift restrictions in order to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians, and allow the Gazan economy to grow. And finally, let us be clear that Palestinian leaders must work together to overcome their differences and reunify Gaza and the West Bank.

Now those messages have been given too many times before in this chamber. And I appreciate that some are disappointed that the Quartet report is not clear about the exact steps that need to be taken, steps that go well beyond words from this Council.

And sadly we are not in a position where there is an obvious path back to meaningful negotiations. But we can, and we must, use this report to underline the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for change.

It is now up to the parties to take action. We stand ready to support them. They need to show bold leadership if they are to make progress towards peace. It is long overdue.

Mr President,

Turning briefly to Syria. We are deeply alarmed by the credible reports that regime forces have begun an advance in to Darayya, a town which Jan Egeland and the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria confirmed had no significant presence of Daesh or Nusra. This is not

only a breach of the Cessation of Hostilities, it clearly undermines the regime's own declarations of a 'period of calm'.

As we all know, Darayya has been besieged by the regime for years, receiving much-needed aid convoys earlier this year – only then to be subjected to further bombardment by the regime. Such 'punishment attacks' following aid deliveries are utterly sickening.

At the same time, the regime has effectively cut the last supply route in to east Aleppo City. Encirclement of east Aleppo city threatens the lives of 300,000 people, potentially increasing the number of besieged people in Syria to over 800,000. We have already seen the intensity of violence in the Aleppo countryside causing many thousands to flee to the Jordanian border, increasing the pressure on stretched resources.

So we repeat our call, once again, for those states who have influence with the Syrian regime to ensure an immediate halt to those offensive and respect for the Cessation of Hostilities in place. These attacks are unconscionable and without justification.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/this-violence-is-only-moving-us-away-from-peace-not-towards-it