Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"These children hold no responsibility for the events that have led to their life in a warzone."

2016-10-19

Thank you Mr. President and I join others in thanking our briefers Nikolay Mladenov and Stephen O'Brien.

And I also thought it was particularly interesting to hear the considered views of colleagues coming towards the end of their two years as non-permanent members of the Security Council.

When we last met here in July, we discussed the Quartet Report. It set out worrying trends for the Israel-Palestine issue. Trends that, as the report itself made clear are eroding the viability of the two-state solution. Since our last discussion, there has been an acceleration of some of those trends in the wrong direction, and so we are further still from the ever-elusive two-state solution.

I see three areas of particular concern.

First, settlements. As we saw in the Arria formula meeting last week, Israel has pushed forward plans for over 1,500 settlement units and continues to demolish Palestinian structures. This runs in direct opposition to Quartet recommendations to cease the policy of systematic settlement expansion and to remove blocks on Palestinian development.

This year, as Stephen said, we have seen 958 structures levelled. But they're not just structures. They are homes. They are shops. They are schools. This is all part of an Israeli policy that has left 1,000 people displaced, including 690 children. That's 690 members of a generation that currently seem destined to inherit a situation no closer to peace than their parents.

With demolition orders issued against the Palestinian village of Susiya and the Khan Al Ahmar School, East of Jerusalem, I fear we have not seen the end of this disturbing trend. Livelihoods are on the line, just when Israel needs to be building confidence between communities, not demolishing the bedrock on which they are built.

The United Kingdom, once again, urges Israel to cease its systematic policy of settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian structures, and limits on Palestinian development.

Second, we are extremely worried, as is Nikolay, about the dire situation in Gaza. It is here where the ramifications of 50 years of strain are most visible. There is a water crisis. Far from drinking quality, 90 percent of the water is not even fit for agricultural use. There is a jobs crisis. Unemployment rates are among the highest in the world. And we are on the brink of an even more disturbing crisis: a possible return to war. Anyone sleepwalking into that needs to wake up. The continued rocket attacks launched by Hamas and subsequent Israeli responses demonstrate just how real this risk is.

But my third point is that this is not inevitable. Health facilities and schools have been rebuilt in Gaza. Efforts have been made by both sides to improve energy supplies for the Palestinian people. Leaders on both sides must seize whatever momentum these small positive developments provide to make strides and progress in other areas. We need to see elections in Gaza and the West Bank. We need to see an end to the hateful rhetoric. And finally, we must see a return to the negotiating table to end this conflict once and for all.

Mr. President,

I'd like to turn our attention to the worst single issue facing the Middle East region, indeed possibly the whole world, Syria. The suffering of the people of Aleppo has become a weekly focus for this Council. Veto after veto prevent us from taking action, but we must press forward. There are 100,000 reasons for us to do so. 100,000 children under siege. 100,000 children struggling without food or medical provisions. 100,000 children living in the wreckage of eastern Aleppo.

These children hold no responsibility for the events that have led to their life in a warzone. And yet the Syrian regime and Russia have consistently chosen to put them at risk. They have chosen to continue to send their jets over the homes of these children, bringing with them havoc and destruction. Russia has chosen to back a regime that employs the medieval tactics of siege and starvation in the pursuit of military victory.

And the rationale for being on the wrong side of history? The excuse, and that's exactly what it is, an excuse, is that the terrorists must be defeated.

Of course the terrorists must be defeated. We all agree with that. But that does not justify bombing Aleppo until there is nothing left to bomb.

After its veto, Russia's proposed solution to regain some goodwill is an eight hour pause, uncoordinated with anyone else. That's wholly inadequate.

The United Nations has repeatedly called for at least 48 hours to provide the most basic aid – and even that will not be enough time to address meaningfully the suffering in Aleppo. Sustained access, on the basis of a full cessation of hostilities, is required. It is within Russia's gift to make that happen. It is not too late.

This Security Council must united to end the war. Unite around a policy to stop the aerial bombardment and shelling of eastern Aleppo immediately, and for a lot longer than eight hours. Indefinitely.

After 5 years of bloody conflict, after the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, we can do better. Those 100,000 children in Aleppo deserve better.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/these-children-hold-no-responsibility-for-the-events-that-have-led-to-their-life-in-a-warzone