Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Middle East: We urge all parties to make difficult choices required for meaningful progress

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Thank you Madam President. I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and the representatives of Israel and Palestine for their statements.

One of the consistent themes of the speeches heard at last month's High Level Debate in the General Assembly was grave concern about the situation in the Middle East. Violence and conflict in the region continue to present the international community with many challenges - challenges which this Council has a responsibility to address.

The conflict in Gaza this summer was a grim reminder of the devastating toll of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the lives of ordinary civilians. The international community must act with urgency to help the people of Gaza get back on their feet and begin the hard work of reconstruction. We welcome the $5.4 billion pledged towards the reconstruction of Gaza, and commend the efforts of Egypt and Norway to rally international support for reconstruction efforts.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza must be the immediate priority. The parties must move quickly to accelerate reconstruction efforts, including by implementing the United Nations mechanism agreed with the Palestinian Authority and Israel to allow the import of construction materials. Urgent progress is also needed to improve access to electricity, clean water and sanitation.

This third conflict in Gaza in six years underlines that a return to the status quo is unacceptable. Why should the international community spend billions of dollars rebuilding Gaza, when there is no guarantee that it will not be destroyed again within a few years? There must therefore be rapid progress towards a durable ceasefire that ends this cycle of violence and addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns. The ceasefire should be underpinned by a comprehensive monitoring and verification mechanism that provides guarantees to both sides. It is crucial that the Palestinian Authority returns to Gaza and restores effective and accountable governance capable of providing people with services and security.

Madam President

We continue to have serious concerns about deteriorating conditions on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We deplore Israel's recent decisions to advance settlement plans in Givat Hamatos and plans to expropriate land near Bethlehem. We are deeply concerned about an impending decision by Israel to proceed with proposals to relocate the Bedouin population from around the sensitive E1 area. We urge the government of Israel to change course now and to reverse these plans.

We are also concerned about tensions at Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem in recent weeks and urge the Israeli and Jordanian authorities to work together in order to stabilise the situation.

Madam President

We are clear that the best way for both Israeli and Palestinian families to live without fear of further violence is for a comprehensive negotiated solution to be agreed without delay.

The United Kingdom will continue to work closely with international partners to support efforts towards a negotiated solution which will deliver an independent Palestinian state, alongside a safe and secure Israel. We urge all parties to make the difficult choices required for meaningful progress.

Madam President

We continue to witness appalling violence in Syria.

While an international coalition has been trying to save Kobane from falling into the hands of ISIL, the Assad regime has continued its murderous policy of indiscriminate attacks and aerial bombardments on Syria's civilian population, including around Aleppo and Damascus.

There should be no doubt that Assad cannot be part of the solution to the crisis in Syria. There needs to be a government in Damascus that enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the Syrian people, credibility with the international community and that can take effective action against extremism. For as long as Assad remains in power, there will be no peace in Syria. We strongly support the efforts of the UN Special Representative and urge all parties to work towards a Syrian-led political transition.

I>n Iraq, the security situation remains very serious, with ISIL maintaining control of significant swathes of territory. It has made advances in Anbar Province in recent days, including taking control of the city of Hit and attacking the provincial capital, Ramadi. Liberating this territory from ISIL will take months and years, not days and weeks. And the horrific effects of ISIL - on governance, security, and on Iraqi society - will be felt for even longer.

We welcome the steps taken towards the formation by Prime Minister al-Abadi of a Government of national reconciliation. To preserve the integrity of the Iraqi state, its government must commit to a more inclusive approach; to the de-centralisation of power to Iraq’s communities; and to a more equitable sharing of Iraq’s natural resource wealth.

It is vital now that all parties in Iraq have the courage to build bridges to each other, in particular to appeal to the Sunni populations, who are living under, and in some cases, acquiescing in, ISIL’s brutal regime, and who must be brought back into the political fold if ISIL is to be comprehensively defeated.

I thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/middle-east-we-urge-all-parties-to-make-difficult-choices-required-for-meaningful-progress