

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Israeli settlements: UK statement

An FCO Spokesperson said: The position of the UK on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and threaten the viability of a two-state solution. We urge Israel to halt its counterproductive settlement expansion.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/israeli-settlements-uk-statement>

The importance of Israel and Palestine living in peace: Statement by Ambassador Karen Pierce, UK Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on the Middle East

... 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. ... 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 look to Israel to apply the same conditions on Palestinian traders as they do on Israeli ones. ...

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 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. ...

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.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-importance-of-israel-and-palestine-living-in-peace>

United Nations

Israeli-Palestinian Escalation in Gaza Shows Urgent Need for Political Progress on Middle East Peace Process, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council

... **Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process**, noted that the meeting was taking place in the aftermath of the recent serious escalation between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza, with the situation remaining highly volatile. It occurred after Israel's targeted killing of Islamic Jihad commander Baha Abu al-Ata, which in turn was followed by the launch of more than 500 rockets towards Israel, he added, emphasizing that such indiscriminate launching is unacceptable and must stop immediately. In Israeli attacks responding to the rocket attacks, 34 Palestinians were killed, including 20 identified as militants as well as three women and eight children, he said, stressing that there is no justification for killing civilians anywhere.

Recognizing Egypt's efforts to calm the situation, he cautioned, however, that the danger has not passed, with sporadic rockets and retaliatory strikes continuing and the violence threatening to undermine reconstruction and development in the Gaza Strip. "Gaza ultimately requires a political solution," he said, adding: "Militant activity cannot continue to undermine the chances for peace and development. He continued: "Israel cannot continue with its policy of closures that stifles development. Palestinian leaders cannot continue to avoid the devastating consequences of their internal political division." ...

Noting that the protests at the Gaza perimeter fence have dwindled but continue, he called upon Israeli forces to exercise maximum restraint and upon Hamas to prevent provocations while ensuring that the protests remain peaceful. ...

He went on to cite negative trends on the ground — including additional planning and approvals of housing units in the occupied West Bank — reiterating regret over the 18 November announcement that the United States no longer views settlements as inconsistent with international law. The position of the United Nations remains that settlement activity is a flagrant violation of international law and an obstacle to a peaceful solution, he stressed. ...

In closing, he reaffirmed the importance of holding credible Palestinian elections, emphasizing: "A whole generation's voice for the future has yet to be heard." Describing the intra-Palestinian division as "a cancer eating away at the aspiration for statehood, peace and the commitment to democracy", he pledged that the United Nations will do everything necessary to support a successful Palestinian election process, while continuing efforts to prevent another devastating war. At the same time, "upholding the international consensus on resolving the conflict and all final-status issues on the basis of the two-State solution, as per relevant resolutions, international law and mutual agreements is just as important", he stressed ...

Tania Hary, Executive Director, Gisha Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, said she was born in northern Israel and moved to the United States at age five, returning to Israel in 2007, just before its near-total lockdown of the Gaza Strip. ... Outlining her organization's work, she said it takes on a broad caseload in defence of the right of

Palestinians to free movement, pointing out that Israel continues to control many aspects of daily life in Gaza, including the main crossing points, as well as the movement of humanitarian and commercial goods. People in Gaza are only permitted to travel in what Israel calls “extraordinary cases”, she added. Far from ensuring security, however, such restrictions constitute an effort to apply pressure for political gain, she emphasized ... she stressed: “It gives me no joy to expose these decisions that are made senselessly, ostensibly in my name.” ...

Israel must also refrain from leveraging such basic services as electricity as part of its political strategy, she continued. ... She went on to state that while many in Israel might view her appearance before the Council as an act of disloyalty, she rejects the idea of the conflict as a zero-sum game, underlining instead that Palestinian prosperity is closely linked to the security of Israelis. ...

Cherith Norman-Chalet (United States) clarified the recent announcement by her country’s Government that Israel’s construction of settlements in the West Bank is not in violation of international law per se, emphasizing that the United States is not judging the legality of any particular settlement, or what the final status of such settlements should be in a peace agreement, which must be worked out through negotiations between the parties. Stressing that the focus of discussions in the Council should not be on settlements, she said it should be on attacks against Israeli civilians that threaten peace and security, nearly 500 of which have emanated from Gaza, with support from Iran. ...

Juergen Schulz (Germany) condemned recent rocket attacks against Israel, saying his country remains steadfast in its commitment to Israel’s security. At the same time, the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza is of deep concern ... Germany remains committed to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he affirmed ... Israel’s continuing occupation and settlement activity, therefore, constitute an obstacle to peace, he said, reaffirming his delegation’s view that settlement activity is illegal. ...

Marc Pecsteen De Buytswerve (Belgium) condemned the firing of rockets into Israel and welcomed the ceasefire in Gaza, calling upon all parties to exercise restraint and respect the rights of civilians. He also called for a thorough investigation into an air strike that killed members of a family in Gaza. ... Describing continued settlement activity in the occupied territories as illegal, he said cautioned that it compromises a two-State solution in a fundamental way. ...

Dmitry A. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) decried the announcement by the United States on Israel’s settlements, saying it can only increase tensions and describing it as a gross violation of international law. He went on to affirm that the Golan is Syrian territory illegally annexed by Israel, while expressing serious concern about that country’s rocket fire against Syria. ... he also expressed concern over violence and the humanitarian situation in Gaza, calling for practical measures to extricate the peace process from a dangerous deadlock. ...

Nicholas De Rivère (France) said that Israel’s policy of settlement expansion in the Occupied Palestinian Territory contravenes the Fourth Geneva Convention and Security Council resolutions, compromises the viability of a two-State solution and threatens stability on the ground. ... He also condemned the firing of more than 450 rockets from Gaza into residential parts of Israel, while emphasizing that the latter’s security is not, and will never be, negotiable. ...

Karen Pierce (United Kingdom) stressed that her delegation’s position on settlements has not changed ... Concerning Gaza, she expressed deep concern over the escalation of hostility in the enclave and expressed appreciation for mediation efforts. Condemning indiscriminate rock fire, she said misrule by Hamas is hurting people in Gaza, while urging Israel to ease restrictions on the Strip. She went on to express concern about settler violence and to affirm the need for Palestinians to work together on holding credible elections. ...

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, said the Council is meeting on the heels of an announcement by the Government of the United States ... Describing that decision as yet another in a series of irresponsible recent steps by Washington — including its attacks against the right of return for Palestine refugees', its attempt to declare Jerusalem the “capital” of Israel and its declaration of Israel’s sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights — he emphasized that none of them will bring legitimacy to Israel’s continued colonization of Palestinian land. ...

He went on to stress that Palestinian land is not a present to be offered up to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, adding: “Our blood is not a currency to be bartered.” ...

Danny Ben Yosef Danon (Israel) thanked the United States for “righting an historic wrong” by denying the illegality of settlements in the West Bank and identifying the true obstacles to peace in the region. ... Israel’s peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan demonstrated how far it is willing to go to achieve peace through negotiations, he said, recalling that in 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza in an attempt to pave the way for peace, in spite of the rights of communities there to remain in the enclave. ... The main obstacle to peace is the Palestinian Authority’s incitement against Jews, he said, adding that children are taught to hate them and to deny Israel’s right to exist. ...

In addition, the one-sided narrative undermines a negotiated solution by automatically supporting all Palestinian claims, which Europeans do, and merely delays negotiations since the Palestinians have no incentive to compromise, he said. However, the announcement by the United States creates a level playing field for future talks, he said, calling upon the international community to encourage direct negotiations without pre-conditions.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc14026.doc.htm>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

Scottish Parliament

Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/112997.aspx>

TOP

Consultations ** new or updated today

Draft content of the Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Specified Type A Procedures) (Scotland) Regulations (closing date 11 December 2019)

<https://consult.gov.scot/population-health/human-tissue-regulations-2019/>

Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill (closing date 31 January 2020)

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/113449.aspx>

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