

Statement by Peter Gooderham, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UK Mission to the UN and other International Organisations in Geneva, at the Human Rights Council on 1 June 2010

Mr President, it is right that this Council meets today to address an urgent country situation of concern. We welcome the UN Security Council's statement of this morning, and hope that this Council can support that outcome with a similarly strong consensus outcome. As my Foreign Secretary said yesterday, the UK deeply deplores the loss of life during the interception of the Gaza Flotilla. The UK believes that it is a matter of grave concern that Israeli action should end in such heavy and tragic loss of life.

Mr President, there is an unambiguous need for Israel to act with restraint and in line with its international obligations. Given the number of casualties in this incident, Israel now bears a responsibility to provide a full account of what occurred, what efforts were made to minimise the loss of life, and why the death toll was so high. It will be particularly important to establish especially whether enough was done to prevent deaths and unnecessary injuries. We support the UN Security Council's call for a prompt impartial credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards.

Mr President,

These events are clearly very serious. But we cannot view them in isolation. They must be set against the context of the intolerable and unsustainable situation that pertains in Gaza. It is clearer than ever that Israel's restrictions on access to Gaza must be lifted in line with Security Council Resolution 1860.

The current closure is unacceptable and counter-productive. There can be no more important international response to this tragedy than to ensure an urgent and durable resolution to the Gaza crisis. This will remain among the highest international priorities of the new British Government.

The international community must meet its responsibilities as well. The UK continues to work to alleviate suffering in Gaza. We call on all concerned to continue to assist with humanitarian and reconstruction aid and economic development.

These events also highlight the need to find a comprehensive and lasting resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is essential that proximity talks progress and that the parties enter direct negotiations as soon as possible.

Mr President,

We urge all sides to act with transparency and restraint to make sure that this incident leads to no further violence, and no further deterioration of the situation in Gaza. Last night in the Security Council we called on the Israeli authorities to:

- first: provide a full, timely and transparent account of the incident that led to the loss of life, and the subsequent actions taken; including what measures are in hand to ensure an impartial and comprehensive investigation, and to ensure there is no further such loss of life.
- second: to provide full information and immediate consular access to all Embassies whose nationals are involved in this incident.
- third: to open the crossings to allow unfettered access for aid to Gaza, and to address the serious concerns about both the deterioration in the humanitarian and economic situation, and about the effect on a generation of young Palestinians. Israel must allow the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods, and persons to and from Gaza, consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1860.

Finally Mr President, we also urge Hamas and all parties to comply with the call in 1860 for renewed and urgent efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace with secure and recognised borders.