



THE ARCHBISHOP  
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of Lords debate on the situation in Israel and Gaza.

***Read the Archbishop's speech as delivered:***

I thank the Noble Lord, the Minister, for his eloquent and powerful opening speech. In it he set out the complexity of the situation that is being faced. And one of the great dangers of such complexities is we seek to find simple answers, and there are none.

In a recent trip, I got back on Sunday, in Jerusalem, meeting large numbers from both sides, it was perfectly obvious that there were a number of factors that we need to bear in mind.

One was the raised prestige of the United Kingdom, owing to its solid support, and tribute is owing to the FCDO, to the Foreign Secretary, to the Ministers with him and to the Prime Minister for his determination and courage, and also to the Leader of the Opposition, who has set such a clear example of cross party support.

Secondly, however, the innumerable deaths on October 7th and the taking of over 200 hostages has created a situation of trauma in Israel that it is hard to exaggerate. I'm very glad to hear that the Foreign Office has been meeting with relatives.

On Sunday morning I spent time with families who had lost eight members of their family, who talked about the first pogrom on Israeli territory and their absolute shock, and with a family whose son had been killed on October 7th, a soldier called Yusef – a British Israeli soldier.

He had been married – and I spoke with his wife at length – for one year and three days. He gave his life against overwhelming odds as wave after wave of terrorists sought to kill people in one of the kibbutzim.

I wonder if the Government is considering, given he is a British citizen, what official recognition of his supreme courage can be offered. But as well as that there was, although huge anger, an absence of hate from those families. And that dignity that they are showing is the first ray of light to which I will refer in this speech, in a situation of almost unredeemed darkness.

I ask whether the Government is working to ensure not only that every effort, as they've already said, is being given to the negotiation of the release of hostages, but also to ensuring that it is one effort, and not a disparate set of efforts which reduce its effectiveness.

From there, on Saturday and on Friday evening, I saw the religious leaders, the Christian leaders of the Holy Land. Two or three things were visible. One that they stand shoulder to shoulder, they sat literally shoulder to shoulder on the day after the destruction at Al-Ahli Hospital.

They sat with the Anglican Archbishop, it's an Anglican hospital, and surrounded him with their support, as the extraordinary Archbishop Hosam Naoum spoke of the need for peace and reconciliation – with the knowledge of his friends who died and the hospital, which I visited in 2019 and opened a section of, which has been so badly damaged.

That visible sign of unity is a second ray of light.

Will the Government consider supporting that hospital in its rebuilding - financially, not just with words? And will it also make it clear that the Christian community is essential to the Holy Land? For the other great message I got is they believe this may be the end of their existence after 2000 years, for they are caught between the upper and the nether millstone.

And that brings us to the Palestinians in the West Bank. The Noble Lord, the Minister, made absolutely clear his horror at the huge number, over 74 when I heard on Saturday from their representatives – 74 murdered almost entirely unarmed, almost entirely by settlers in illegal settlements in Area C. That strengthens Hamas and weakens the Palestinian Authority. Can that be in the interest of a long term peace?

And fourthly, we turn to that question of the objectives of the war. The hopes of peace and reconciliation are set not only after a military victory, but also by how that victory is achieved.

The more heavy the casualties, the less chance there is of a renewed peace, and Gaza has gone from level to level of violence over the last 15 years. That aim of war conducted is not fair. Lord Turnberg quite rightly said this isn't a question of fairness, or it may have been Lord Campbell, both spoke so eloquently, but there is no equivalence between Israel and Hamas.

The latter is a terrorist organisation. The former is a legitimate state whose citizens since 1945 have written much of the laws of war. They know how to do this. May they be encouraged and continued to be encouraged by governments around the world, and also by the success of David Satterfield, President Biden's brilliant envoy, and our government and other governments pressure which has opened the way for more than 50 trucks to go into Gaza. That is a huge success.

And my final point though, is about the innocent sufferers. I visited two institutions on Saturday morning. One was a hospital linked to Al-Ahli Hospital, the other the Princess Basma school, of which 30% of its members are deeply disabled children. The hospital cannot get children out of Gaza for chemotherapy, let alone for the wounds they've received. It can't get children out.

Can there be a corridor of sanctuary at least on a temporary basis to enable them to get the treatment without which they will die, very rapidly. It is difficult. The call for a formal ceasefire is probably beyond hope. But can there be that humanitarian action, for the children with autism and with other extreme disabilities? Can they be allowed to come out so they can attend the school and not be in the midst of a war, for what that does to them is beyond imagination.

I'm well over my time my Lords, please excuse me, but I want to say that the work done by our Government has been remarkable. It continues to be, but the international community must not act again disparately, with a series of heads of state and other politicians emerging on the scene, sometimes for their own reasons.

It must be a united effort with United Nations and the ICRC and the United Nations, which has lost over 50 people, killed in the last two and a half

weeks in Gaza. May we pay tribute to those who are taking such risks, sacrificing their lives for the future, and continue to hope that these two rays of light – of unity and of dignity – seen on both sides may lead to peace and reconciliation before too long.

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