

May 21st 2021

SVG MAKING ITS CONTRIBUTION ON GLOBAL ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE

Introduction

The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to be an excellent example, that small states do have a voice that needs to be heard at all levels of the international community. The recent debate at the United Nations Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question provided the latest opportunity for this country to showcase the vital role small states like ours can play in addressing issues of international peace and security. Some may question whether with everything that is happening on the ground here; Covid-19, La Soufriere eruption, recent floods and preparation for the impending hurricane season, that time should be spent on “other peoples’ business”. The reality is, as a small vulnerable state, these opportunities are exactly what we need to speak on, to show solidarity with other states, but most importantly, continue to speak out when we believe the fundamentals on which the United Nations was founded, including respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and refraining from the use of force or the threat of the use of force are being breached. We understand the importance of safeguarding these very fundamental principles, as if they are allowed to be flaunted by major powers in the international system against perceived weaker states, then this country will always be vulnerable to such injustices.

This week, we will feature the full statement made by H.E Inga Rhonda King this country’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the situation in the Middle East.

“Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you for organising this open debate today.

I also thank UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, and all other distinguished speakers from the affected countries, including the Secretary-General of the Arab League, for their contributions to today's debate.

Mr. President,

The painstaking quest for peace in the Middle East is gravely imperilled by the Israeli military campaign against the State of Palestine. At this critical juncture, we must show a common resolve to ease tensions and assist both Israel and the State of Palestine towards a two-state solution based on the principles of international law and parameters laid out in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In recent days, we have witnessed the most severe outbreak of violence since the 2014 war against Gaza. Given our responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council, as a matter of principle and of morality and international law, must not remain silent on this issue. We must do all that we can, in accordance with our Charter mandate, to find a solution to this issue with the hopes that future generations of Palestinians and Israelis can be unshackled from this painful cycle of occupation and violence. We welcome the efforts of individual States, particularly members of the Middle East Quartet to de-escalate tensions, and we urge all members of the international community to spare no effort to facilitate peaceful dialogue between the parties.

Mr. President,

We join the UN Secretary General's call for an immediate ceasefire. The recent airstrikes targeting the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, which have killed over 180 Palestinians, including children, and injured some 1200 others, are unacceptable. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines unequivocally condemns these actions, and we reiterate our call for the Occupying Power to cease its military aggression against Palestinians. To be sure, we also sympathize with the families of those who died in Israel.

Furthermore, we believe that international law against the targeting of civilians must be upheld, and that those responsible for breaches of such law should be held accountable for their crimes. The right to self-defence cannot cloak the wrongs of a party that fired the first shots and is using military capabilities far beyond that of the weaker party. Let us remember that Palestinians do not have shelters or protection to wait out the hail of airstrikes. This Council is their only protection. International law is their only protection, and we are failing them.

We are alarmed by the escalating attacks, provocations, and incitement by Israeli forces on various holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound, where hundreds of Palestinians worshippers have been injured. We call on all sides to desist from violence, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric and act in a responsible manner. We also reaffirm that Jerusalem remains the Holy City of the three monotheistic religions, to be treasured by all of humanity, and we reject any unilateral attempts to change its historic status.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains deeply concerned about the potential eviction of Palestinians from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem, including families in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of the City. The ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and remains a significant threat to lasting and comprehensive peace. Yet again, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines calls on Israel to cease all settlement activities, and to abide by its legal obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Further, as reinforced by resolution 2334 (2016), we condemn all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory. The international community must be candid and upright regarding these illegal actions. Don't the lives (and the dignity) of Palestinians matter too? In conclusion, Mr. President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms that an internationally agreed two-state solution, based on pre-1967 borders, remains the most credible path to resolving this issue. Only through dialogue and good faith negotiations, respectful of the bedrock principles of international law, can security for Israel and

the State of Palestine be assured, and for Palestinian claims to dignity, equality, and human rights be honoured. The international community must deepen its commitment to take the political, diplomatic, and legal steps necessary to de-escalate tensions. The imperative is clear; we must stand together, firmly, and resolutely, and demand peace and justice for all. It is time!

Thank you!”