

Full text of Tony Blair's speech to Cairo Conference on Gaza

Sunday, Oct 12, 2014 in Office of Tony Blair, Office of the Quartet Representative

We all agree we need a new approach to Gaza.

Unfortunately, we have said this before. Many times. And it should not take a war and the deaths of so many innocent people to make us repeat it and act on it. Because we know what is necessary: Gaza should be free, open and connected to the world. The rockets, tunnels and other forms of terrorism should cease. Gaza and the West Bank should be united in one sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine. Israel and its people should be able to live within their proper borders, secure and recognised by the region.

We know too that Israel will never subdue the spirit of the Palestinian people and their aspiration for statehood. And we know that no amount of terror will ever force Israel to agree to a Palestinian state. This will only ever happen through a process of genuine negotiation.

For such a negotiation, we need the Israeli government to be prepared to conduct the negotiation on the basis of the borders of 1967, amended by agreed land swaps. We need a Palestinian politics that is united around the principles of peace. And we need the powers of the region, willing to advance the Arab Peace Initiative with practical measures of political and economic support.

But we begin with Gaza. Because without Gaza re-united with the West Bank, politically and economically, there can be no state. And without hope for Gazan people, the cycle of violence will recommence. And if it does recommence, then hope disappears.

So we need practical steps to put one Palestinian government back in charge of Gaza, and we need a political horizon for statehood.

Some small important steps have been taken: The Consensus Government met for the first time in Gaza. There is progress in the deployment of Palestinian Authority staff at the border crossings. The humanitarian payment for staff in Gaza unpaid has been announced by PM Hamdallah.

Israel is reconsidering its policy of "separation" between the West Bank and Gaza – as it should. A limited number of Gazans were permitted to pray at the Haram al Sharif during Eid – for the first time in seven years. The Israelis have acknowledged the need to open Gaza to goods. And a mechanism is being worked on, as you know, through the UN, to get the much-needed construction materials into Gaza for international projects, but also for private construction as families try to repair and rebuild their homes, and their lives.

It would also help enormously to allow agricultural trade from Gaza to the West Bank, with other sectors to follow, which would have a huge impact on individual livelihoods and the Palestinian economy. But much more will of course be needed in the coming weeks and months.

We intend to work closely with the Palestinian Authority on issues of governance and issues to do with the private sector. As the Palestinian Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan states, recovery and reconstruction will quickly lose traction if a security vacuum is allowed to take hold in Gaza. So we will work with the government on restoration of the rule of law, to develop unified structures of governance, reunified systems of justice, and eventually establishing sovereign power over all armed forces.

We will work with their advisory board on reconstruction, and support the establishment of the unit to implement that reconstruction.

We have modified the [Initiative for the Palestinian Economy](#) better to address the private sector needs in Gaza. We are going to work closely with the private sector in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – and I am glad to see several representatives present here today.

There are also measures that the government of Israel is going to have to take – they are well known – to allow the Palestinian economy to flourish, particularly in the development of Area C, a vital part of a future State.

However, the recurrent theme today is that all of these things will not come to anything unless there is a political horizon for statehood. We know that the credibility of the political process has been severely damaged. And we know trust between the parties is low. But we also know this: We have a U.S. Secretary of State who has been absolutely tireless in his efforts, who despite all the other issues incumbent upon, still comes here today to recommit the United States and himself personally to drive this process forward. We have powers in the region, like Egypt, who are prepared to stand up and offer leadership. And we have an international community here today, led by the UN Secretary General – and what an extraordinary turnout for the international community – which should show the people of Gaza that we do care passionately about Gaza, its future, its people and the need for it to have hope.

And we also have this: the single-most frustrating thing in this whole business of destruction and reconstruction is that despite everything, we have two peoples – the Israelis and Palestinians – who when asked will still say they want peace, still say they want it on the basis of two states, and still are prepared to believe that statehood could be possible in the future. The gap that we have now is not a gap of principle; it's a gap of credibility.

It's up to us therefore at this conference not merely to take the practical steps of reconstruction, but to show to the Palestinian people and the Israeli people that what they want to attain – two states for two people living side by side – can actually be attained.

What people should take from this conference today is that on this matter, the international community is united, it's determined, and whatever the challenges – it's going to carry on, pursue this course for peace until it is satisfied that the Palestinian and Israeli people have some hope for the future.

It begins with Gaza. And it begins with today.

Notes to editors and further information

- Mr Blair was one of the co-chairs of the Cairo Conference, along with the UN, EU, France, Italy, the Arab League, Jordan and Japan.
- The conference was hosted by Egypt, Norway and the Palestinian Authority.
- Read the [chairs' conclusions](#).
- The National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza is available online [here](#).
- For more on the conference, visit the [Cairo Conference website](#)

<http://www.quartetrep.org/quartet/news-entry/blair-cairo-conference-gaza-speech/>