

EMILY THORNBERRY, Speech at Central Hall, 31 October 2017

I first went to the Holy Land in late 70s early 80s. We used to drive from Jerusalem all over the West Bank, and I visited Gaza. It is much more difficult to do that now, even to get from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and I haven't been back to Gaza.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament I have become a member of Labour Friends of Israel and Labour Friends of Palestine. It seems to me that to be a true friend to either side you need to recognise the legitimate concerns of both parties.

One thing that the Balfour Declaration reinforces is how very important it is that when British politicians clearly state their policies on the Middle East that these words can make a difference. At the last election I was very worried to see that for only the second time since the Yom Kippur war in 1973 the Conservatives stood on a manifesto that make no mention of Israel and Palestine. The only country they mentioned was Donald Trump's America.

It is clear to me that America is retreating from its global leadership role on this issue. Therefore it seems to me that it is time for Britain to step up and to accept our responsibility for Britain to be a force for good in the world.

We need to move forward and the only way forward it seems to me is for there to be a viable and secure state of Israel alongside a viable and secure state of Palestine. The extremists on both sides of the debate who favour a one-state solution are blocking progress on this issue. I am very concerned that if the Israel Government continues to approve construction of settlements on the scale we are now seeing, the physical barriers to a two-state solution will be even more a barrier to peace. The humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, especially in Gaza, is making it even more important to make steps forward and the UN has said that Gaza will be uninhabitable by 2020.

So let's look to the future. Once we have rightly reflected on the last 100 years, we have a shared duty to look to the future. Britain has a duty to look to the future. Are we really looking at a generation of young people living in Israel and Palestine today, a generation that will know nothing but division and violence and hatred, that they will be badly let down by the current generation because of their own actions or the actions of their own leaders? Will young Israelis grow up into a world where air raids and car rammings and random stabbings are a fact of life? Or where military service is not a compulsion but a necessity because they live in a country that is surrounded by hostile neighbours who deny their right to exist?

Will we also see a generation of young Palestinians growing up into a world where youth unemployment remains at 58%, where there is a demand for humanitarian aid, where they are unable to share the future, where they have no hope? Will they inherit a map where the ever expanding settlements and the

destruction of their own homes make it harder and harder to envisage what an viable independent Palestine could even look like?

We have to recognise Palestine. In November, 2011 another former Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said: 'We reserve the right to recognise a Palestinian state at a moment of our choosing and when it can best help bring about peace.' Well how about now? Let me tell you this. If this Government is not ready to recognise Palestine, the next Labour Government will.