



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

Archbishop Stephen today spoke in the House of Lords during the debate on the current situation in Israel and Gaza. The speech follows in full.

My Lords, I too want to begin by expressing great thanks to Lord Ahmad for the grace, wisdom and fortitude with which he has led us in this debate, and welcome the consensus that I have heard across the chamber from all sides. I too like others have learned so much this evening.

I also want to echo what the Archbishop of Canterbury said earlier: I too deeply mourn and cry out for all those who have been brutally murdered in this conflict; and rightly note the duty of Israel to guard and defend her citizens, and yet at the same time cry out on behalf of the innocent in every community and appeal for a peace with justice. Like Lord Godson who we have just heard from, actually I wanted to say a little about an element of this that we haven't discussed that much in this debate, which is the impact of all this here in our own country, and how this in turn affects the world.

We are, as we know, a global community living in an age of instant communication. Our interconnectedness means that this conflict is felt deeply across the world and directly affects communities here in the UK, and immediately, and of course especially Jewish and Muslim communities.

There are of course personal consequences. We have very movingly heard about some of those for some of us, here in this chamber. But even if we don't know people ourselves, we know people who know people, who are related to those in Israel and Palestine who have lost loved ones, livelihoods, homes, even those who are even being held hostage. But at the same time, the unfiltered platform that social media allows to extremist voices, is making this situation worse, creating an atmosphere of palpable fear. This came up in the Questions earlier today, and it is something we urgently need to address. It has no place in our democracy.

And as several noble lords have said, Lord Harrington, Lord Bilimoria, Lord McCrea and Lord Godson have said, antisemitism and indeed Islamophobia are on the rise, but particularly antisemitism. Senseless and pointless attacks on Jewish community buildings, on schools, on individuals, all have increased. As we've heard, the statistics are truly frightening.

But, up and down the country, and built up over many years, we do have across our nation, a very strong network of regional faith forums, many of which I have been involved with, as have almost all the bishops on these benches. And yet, I hear that a number of them, while relationships continue, are struggling to agree joint statements or hold vigils for peace because it is all too raw and emotions are running so high, and because there are still so many unhelpful voices around.

However, some have taken place. This I believe is a vital sign of hope, and something that we must build on. As, although like Lord Godson, I

abhor the hateful voices, I also want to pay tribute to women and men from across our faith communities, and I'm thinking especially of Muslim and Jewish leaders that I know, who are working courageously to lead through this time and at considerable personal cost. There are really inspiring examples of this happening from across the North- in Leeds, in Bradford, and in other places where I serve, and I'm thinking here of teachers, pastors, priests, youth workers, and community workers who are nurturing the values that we hold dear, and caring for one another, and building community across strong difference.

We need to be clear - how individuals and communities act here and now, today, tomorrow, in this country will shape and influence what happens next in the coming days and for the years ahead. Which also means that what we say here, our statements, our policies and our prayers, both in content and tone, matter. I note particularly Baroness Deech's comments earlier about the need to renew our religious education, and particularly education around the Holocaust.

So while we must condemn utterly those who foster fear and hatred in our communities, we also need to galvanise and support those who, at the local level are modelling something different and seeking the way of peace.

Finally, in the last couple of weeks I've noticed two things: first, that human blood is red. Jewish blood, Muslim blood, Christian blood. And, secondly, like the ocean, tears are saltwater. And, the flood levels are rising, and unless we pay attention, both internationally and at home, to the things that make for peace, unless we are clear about the evils we face, about the need to strengthen international law, to make safe passage, then we might be overwhelmed.

Therefore, locally, could I ask the Minister, what efforts are being made to support those at the local level who are working for community cohesion and are busy making peace?

This contribution by the Archbishop of York is published in full at [Hansard](#).

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