



August 2011

Rioting and looting in the UK...

On Monday evening, 8 August, disorder and violence began in Hackney in East London and quickly spread to other parts of the capital: south (Croydon, Clapham, Colliers Wood and Woolwich), north (Camden and Enfield), east (Lewisham, Peckham, Newham, East Ham), and west (Ealing).

The trouble began after police shot a man dead in Tottenham the previous Thursday.

A peaceful protest in Tottenham the following Saturday (6 August) over the fatal shooting of Mark Duggan, 29, was followed by violence which spread into Sunday and Monday.

On Monday night hundreds of people attacked and looted shops in four other cities across England in what police called 'copycat criminal activity'. Jeremy Ball, Social Affairs Correspondent for East Midlands Today, said: *"One woman said the street was like a war zone. She said it was like a battlefield with groups of youths standing on cars kicking their feet through windscreens."*

The violence, which escalated in intensity, was pointless and unnecessary. The rioting, arson and looting served no purpose other than causing damage and, when asked, people involved often had no idea why they were rioting, other than a vague notion of some unclear perceived injustice.

The rioters and looters were 'fed' through social media and mobile devices, as well as opportunistic looters on the move, particularly around the capital. The arson, looting and violence were immediate and instant, with no chance for clear-thinking, as people got caught up in the moment and the 'mob mentality'.

The riots in London particularly have had a severe effect on people's lives, livelihoods and property – and all for no discernable gain.

Mr Tim Godwin (acting commissioner of the metropolitan police) said on Tuesday (9 Aug): *"The key bit for me is that it's a sad day for London; it's a sad event that we saw overnight."*

"This is not just a game. This is criminality, this is burglary, this is violence, and we will pursue each and every one that has been involved in this."

Some people, including former London mayor Ken Livingstone, have suggested that the Tottenham riot and escalating violence was an unleashing of pent-up resentment, due to the weak economy, high unemployment rates and deep budget cuts, especially the decreasing government funding for poor communities and grass-roots charities. He blamed a sense that young Britons are facing 'the bleakest future'.

These sentiments sound familiar, especially when taken in the context of the Middle East – many people, especially young people, in Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon, experience resentment and frustration, and can look to violence as a way of expressing themselves and showing solidarity with others.

The Middle East is a tinderbox of frustration and perceived injustice by all sides, and appealing to human logic and reason is often ineffective. While we hope and pray that the riots in the UK are over as quickly as they started, many of our partners' and their beneficiaries' lives continue to be challenging, with livelihoods being affected and personal safety being compromised on a regular basis.

In the UK we need peace, justice and reason to prevail. The Middle East needs that too. Let's pray it will be so...

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