

*Prud*

Statement by Mr. Emil Breki Hreggvidsson

Deputy Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations

General Assembly

Special Emergency Session: Illegal Israeli actions in the Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

16 January 2009

Mr. President,

Iceland firmly supports calls by the UN Secretary-General for both sides to stop the fighting immediately. But the Gaza conflict cannot be addressed as a stand-alone issue. While we must acknowledge the urgency to stop the immediate crisis, we must also put our calls in a broader context of imperatives for sustainable peace: First and foremost the urgent recommencement of the Peace Process; intra-Palestinian reconciliation; the ending of the blockade on Gaza as well as the ending of the closure regime in the West Bank.

The Peace Process must recommence with the active involvement of the UN and the international community. A new approach is needed to find a way out of the impasse. The Arab Peace Initiative is promising but such an international process needs the full commitment of *all* parties involved. Iceland renews its call for the better inclusion of women in the peace process in accordance to Security Council Resolution 1325.

Mr. President,

The firing of rockets from Gaza to terrorize Israeli civilians must stop. Iceland has condemned these rocket attacks. Hamas bears a heavy responsibility for drawing civilians into the conflict zone. Furthermore, the use of civilian facilities as a cover for militant operations is a breach of international law.

This said, Mr. President, one side's breach of international law does not exempt another from abiding by it. Targeting of civilian homes, schools, hospitals and mosques is unacceptable and in violation of international humanitarian law. Growing pockets of the population are trapped in their homes and aid organisations are unable to access them, according to OCHA. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), states that

“wounded people have been abandoned and left to suffer alone, unable to reach hospitals and inaccessible to ambulances and medical workers. Some wounded have even died because ambulances did not receive the required clearances to reach them in time”.

We call on Israel to *permanently* remove restrictions on medical teams and humanitarian aid.

Mr. President,

Iceland stresses the importance of UNRWA's work in the region, especially for Gaza's inhabitants, whose vast majority are Palestine refugees. We welcome the Security Council's call to Member States for additional contributions to the Agency in Resolution 1860. We strongly condemn Israel's attack, yesterday, on UNRWA's headquarters in Gaza, where seven hundred civilians had sought shelter from the shelling and vital supplies were stored. We, UN Member States, must demand full explanation for the number of attacks the United Nations have suffered in Gaza in the past three weeks. These attacks are unacceptable.

Mr. President,

We must break out of this vicious cycle of violence. The international community must play the role of a good physician and do its best to remedy the cause of the conflict. At the same time, Israel and Palestinians must refrain from actions that inflame the symptoms.

This emergency session of the General Assembly should lend its full support for the call for ceasefire in Security Council Resolution 1860 and its immediate implementation.

Thank you, Mr. President.