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Statement of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, on the situation in the Middle East

New York, 15 October 2023 – The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, expresses her strong condemnation at the situation in and around the Gaza Strip, at the very serious risk of military escalation in the region, at the unacceptable withholding of Israeli hostages by Hamas in the area, as well as at the vulnerability of Palestinian and other civilians remaining in or fleeing their homes in light of ongoing and escalating risks of violence irreversibly affecting them. The Special Adviser condemns in the strongest terms last Saturday morning’s multiple and coordinated attacks by Hamas explicitly targeting civilians in Israeli territory and expresses her condolences to the families of all victims, and reiterates that actions that can result into collective punishment should never constitute an answer.

“On 7 October, Hamas viciously attacked Israeli towns near the Gaza Strip and central Israel, including the firing of thousands of rockets toward Israeli population centers. This is unacceptable. Violence against innocent civilians is always inexcusable and cannot be justified. Such violence is particularly vicious when it is targeted on the basis of identity,” said the Special Adviser, who also condemned the abduction of a very significant number of civilians by Hamas.

Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu, gravely concerned at the escalating dynamics of the last seven days, echoes the call by the Secretary-General for the immediate release of all abducted persons and reiterates the need to reinforce all possible diplomatic actions aimed at restraining the risk of further escalation of violence. The Special Adviser is especially alarmed at the continued indiscriminate rocket fire by Hamas into Israeli territory and at the loss of civilian lives resulting from Israeli bombardments in the Gaza Strip, and calls for all possible measures to protect those who are most vulnerable. “Compliance with international law must be prioritized and innocent civilians should never pay the price of a conflict for which they bear no responsibility. Their most basic rights must be protected and preserved. Their humanitarian needs must be met. While an unbearable number of lives have already been lost, and nothing can return them to their loved ones, it is not too late to prevent an even larger catastrophe.”

The Special Adviser reiterates that active steps must be taken to revert a course of escalation which is not inevitable. For this, immediate and urgent action can still make a difference. “I appeal to Hamas to immediately liberate all hostages as a sign of goodwill to prevent an escalation for which the Palestinian population should never bear the price.” The Special Adviser also reiterates the importance that all those in position of influence over the Hamas leadership encourage such step. The Special Adviser also calls on Palestinian and Israeli leaders to return to the dialogue table and demonstrate to the world that out of violence peace can emerge, and that their leadership can and must be directly conducive to such outcome. “A cease-fire must be called immediately for constructive dialogue to be possible. No effort should be spared to take a step forward in the direction of peace. It is only through dialogue that the underlying issues that have led in the past to cyclical violence can be addressed, as they must.”

“When the drums of war are present, the voices for peace are more necessary than ever. Political leaders must heed the silent plea of all victims and must act to prevent further suffering. Community and religious leaders must play their part in preventing incitement to violence and promoting peace in their

communities and across the entire Middle East region. Violence can never be an answer. This war must stop now.”

Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu is also concerned at the impact these concerning dynamics can have in other countries, where proliferation of anti-Semitic and anti- Muslim offline and online hate speech, as well as identity-based violence allegedly inspired by the situation in the Middle East, has been reported. “As in the region itself, all over the world it is essential that all efforts are put in place for communities to co-exist peacefully and for all grievances to be addressed constructively and peacefully.”

“Hatred, vengeance, incitement to, and commission of violence can only contribute to fuel a cycle of hostility and revenge,” stated the Special Adviser. “People in the region deserve a future built in peace and trust, for which all possible support must be rendered. In light of the ongoing circumstances, this is true today more than ever.”

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