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SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN GAZA**

30 MAY 2018

Mme. President,

Members of the Security Council,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Council on the unfolding events in and around Gaza.

I am afraid that the last two days have seen the most serious escalation since the 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel and a warning to all how close to the brink of war we are every day...

Between 28 and 30 May, according to the IDF, 216 projectiles, rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza towards Israel, some 77 of which hit areas in the Eshkol, Sha'ar Hanegev and Sdot Negev regions. Although most of the projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, one hit a kindergarten yard in a kibbutz near the Gaza border and at least one other damaged a house.

Thankfully there have been no casualties or serious injuries.

In response to these attacks and mortars, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) carried out strikes on 65 Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza and destroyed a two-kilometre tunnel near the Kerem Shalom crossing.

No casualties or serious injuries have been reported in Gaza as a result of the strikes.

On 29 May, Hamas' Qassam Brigades and the Islamic Jihad's Saraya al-Quds claimed joint responsibility for the rockets and mortars fired at Israel. Their joint statement blamed Israel for targeting their fighters and military positions during the preceding 48 hours, cautioned against attempts to "dictate new equations" on the status quo, and warned that they would reciprocate "shelling with shelling and blood with blood."

Prime Minister Netanyahu vowed, meanwhile, that Israel would "respond with great force" to the rocket attacks as for more than 24 hours Israeli communities around Gaza lived with the fear having mere seconds to seek shelter from incoming rockets.

Mme. President,

Such attacks are completely unacceptable. The firing of rockets and mortars against civilians cannot be justified under any circumstances.

I take this opportunity to call on the international community to join me in unequivocally condemning the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and the dangerous escalation in Gaza.

This dangerous escalation comes after a series of warnings by the United Nations and in the context of recent developments on the ground. It cannot be divorced from the context of the two months of protests at the Gaza fence in which some 110 Palestinians were killed and large numbers were injured.

Throughout this period, militants have also placed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the perimeter fence and attempted – sometime successfully – to breach it, with the intent of damaging military infrastructure and perpetrating attacks against Israelis. Particularly in the days following 14 May, several such incidents were filmed and posted on social media, prompting a response by Israel on targets inside Gaza.

On 27 May, in response to an IED found by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) adjacent to the fence, IDF targeted a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) observation post and killed three members of the group. Islamic Jihad issued a statement, vowing to retaliate for what they described as a “dangerous escalation.” Subsequently, on 28 May, the IDF announced it had fired a tank shell at another observation post, killing a member of Hamas’ military wing. The shelling took place after Israeli troops came under fire, reportedly by Hamas militants, while arresting two Palestinians who had crossed the perimeter fence into Israel. During the night of 28 May, machine gun fire from Gaza also hit the Israeli city of Sderot, causing damage to several buildings and a vehicle.

The next day the situation escalated.

Mme President,

Since the early hours of this morning, the situation has quieted down and since 5am there have been no projectiles launched from Gaza, nor any IDF strikes on locations inside the Strip.

In this respect I welcome the efforts of Egypt to ensure that calm prevails and reiterate my call on all sides to uphold all understandings and prevent the recurrence of any incidents that jeopardize the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

It is imperative that this period of calm be preserved at all costs. No one in Gaza can afford another war. No one has the right to play with the lives of two million people who have lived through hell in the last decade. No one should live in fear of an indiscriminate rocket attack. Everyone has a responsibility to do their part to de-escalate and step back from the brink in the interests of their own people and the future of their own children.

As demonstrations and protests in Gaza continue into the month of June, I am concerned that we may experience further violence and further risks of escalation.

Mme. President,

Despite the dangerous escalation, Gaza's civilian infrastructure did not sustain any significant damage as a result of Israeli retaliatory fire yesterday. Moreover, the crossing points for people and goods remained open and functioned normally. The Rafah crossing into Egypt continued operations for the 19th consecutive day and both Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings into Israel functioned with only minor delays.

Nevertheless, fire from Gaza has caused damage to electricity installations on the Israeli side, resulting in a reduction of over 30 per cent of the only electricity supply to Gaza and it will take a few days at least to repair them.

As I recently briefed the Council, Gaza's electricity, water and health systems continue to experience unprecedented strain. Egyptian electricity lines have been effectively down since February and the Gaza Power Plant has not functioned since April. Today the total supply for Gaza is barely enough to provide three hours of sustained electricity.

Mme. President,

Finally, during my briefing to the Council last week, I was greatly encouraged by the willingness of Council Members to consider ideas to change the reality in Gaza. Under the current circumstances failure to act immediately with a set of relatively modest, achievable interventions will not only amplify the humanitarian crisis but drastically increase the risk of confrontation.

The goals that I outlined last week remain as valid as ever: to prevent a war with potential regional implications; to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the population; and to support Egyptian reconciliation efforts.

This means that we need to urgently implement already approved projects, revive efforts to empower the Government to take up its responsibilities, and very importantly to sustain the 2014 ceasefire understandings on the ground, and halt the militant buildup.

The UN will move forward on immediately enhancing our capacity and presence to facilitate project implementation in Gaza and improve coordination with Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority to overcome the political, administrative and logistical blockages. It is important that all sides agree to improve movement and access restrictions and ensure uninterrupted and upgraded water and electricity supply to the population.

This plan is the only sustainable way to ensure that we do not slide again into another devastating conflict, that we do not allow Gaza to become a pawn in someone else's plans, another tragedy on an already crowded map of regional Middle East conflicts.

But let me also use this opportunity to send a very clear message to Palestinians in Gaza. We hear your plight, we see your suffering, and we will do all that we can to ensure that you have a future beyond mere survival. A future of freedom and development, a future focused on peace

and prosperity where you are the masters of your own fate. A future for all Palestinians, under a single, democratic and legitimate Government living in a State of Palestine side-by-side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

That is why we need to make sure that calm persists, that the militant build-up ends and that we deny those who want to disrupt peace any opportunity to do so. Without these conditions, it will be impossible to move forward towards achieving our longer-term political and development goals.

It is high time that we intensify our calls on Israelis and Palestinians to undertake concrete steps that will advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace. Such actions must encompass the overarching political objectives: the unification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Authority; an end to the occupation; and a resolution of the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution and in line with previous agreements and relevant UN resolutions.

This latest round of attacks is a warning, a warning to all of how close to the brink of war we every day.

Thank you.