

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller - Statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the oPt

New York, 20 February 2019

As delivered

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to update the Council on the humanitarian implications of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

As the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov noted, the situation on the ground is of concern. At its core, the situation remains a protection crisis. Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are a key driver of high levels of acute vulnerability among Palestinians. The international community is mobilizing to provide assistance, but funding is diminishing while needs and constraints continue to grow. Ultimately, the solution is not humanitarian.

The lives and well-being of people must be placed beyond political considerations, and humanitarian aid facilitated and supported.

Overall, the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, deteriorated in 2018. This includes an increase in casualties associated with the demonstrations at the Gaza fence, limitations on the movement of people and goods, and financial restrictions.

The growing casualty figures cited by Special Coordinator Mladenov are stretching the capacity of health care providers. The health system in Gaza is at risk of collapse, as injuries during protests at the Gaza fence and in related violent incidents continue. Since the start of the demonstrations in March 2018, over 27,000 Palestinians have been injured, more than 6,000 of them by live ammunition. According to the World Health Organization, 122 amputations have taken place since the start of the mass demonstrations, including 21 paediatric amputations

I join the numerous calls of the Secretary-General upon Israel to ensure that its use of force in response to these public demonstrations is in compliance with international law, as a last resort and in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury. I call

upon the organizers of the demonstrations, the demonstrators themselves and Hamas to ensure non-violent protests. I condemn the continued launching of rockets and incendiary devices from Gaza.

Less than two weeks ago, three Palestinian children were killed in Gaza, bringing the total number of children killed this year to four and since March 40 children have been killed in the context of demonstrations. Great effort must be made to spare children from violence. They should never be put in harm's way.

The World Health Organization also reports that since the start of the protests, three healthcare providers have been killed and over 620 others have been wounded. Medical personnel carrying out their duties must be protected, and their work facilitated.

Many of the injuries sustained require complex treatment that is not available in Gaza. However, obtaining treatment outside of Gaza remains challenging. In 2018, 61 per cent of all patient requests to cross the Erez checkpoint with Israel to access appropriate health care were approved and since March last year, 17 percent of the applications by those injured in demonstrations have been approved. Patients are also able to exit Gaza via the crossing with Egypt. This crossing has been open five days per week since July 2018. In December, 98 patients crossed through Rafah.

Compounding the burden on health services in Gaza, essential drugs and medical supplies are scarce. Health care providers continue to coordinate and preposition field treatment posts to minimize loss of life.

The recent boost in the electricity supply, enabled by Qatar's donation of funding to purchase fuel, has remained steady, with 9 to 12 hours of electricity per day. However, emergency fuel for backup generators to run emergency and surgery rooms during the outages is running out. Multiple times in the past year, the provision of essential services in Gaza were at risk of shutdown, with potentially harsh consequences for the population.

The ongoing internal Palestinian divide has contributed to this deteriorating situation and the rising vulnerability of Palestinians in Gaza, who already struggle to meet basic daily needs. Recent reports of reductions or withholding the salaries of some public sector employees are of concern. Over 5,000 people have reportedly had their salaries cut, including in the health and education sectors. Unemployment exceeds 50 per cent and food insecurity is estimated to be nearly 70 per cent in Gaza. In order to avoid a recurring need for humanitarian aid, further sustained action is needed on longer-term projects, such as those of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which Special Coordinator Mladenov updated you on.

As of 2 January, this year, for the first time since 2000, Israel has partially expanded the fishing zone from 6 to 12 nautical miles in the middle area off the Gaza coast. This

expansion may potentially help revive the fishing sector and provide a sustainable source of income.

Mr. President,

While the humanitarian situation in the West Bank is less acute, many Palestinian families and communities in Area C, Hebron city and East Jerusalem face growing pressures. Demolitions, evictions, restrictions on movement and access, and rising settler related violence, continue to foster an environment that heightens the risk of forcible transfer for many Palestinians.

Between 22 January and 19 February, four Palestinians were killed and 85 were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank within the context of search and arrest operations, demonstrations, clashes, and Palestinian attacks and alleged attacks. In addition, OCHA has recorded 20 incidents where Palestinians were injured, and their property damaged by Israeli settlers.

On 26 January, armed Israeli settlers entered Al Mughayyir village, where they reportedly attacked Palestinian residents. Subsequent clashes, also involving the Israeli Defense Forces, resulted in the death of a 38-year-old Palestinian man, and injury to nine other Palestinians. In some 280 incidents during 2018, one Palestinian was killed, and 115 others were injured as a result of settler related violence. This is the highest recorded number of incidents in any single year since 2014.

Israeli authorities have stepped up law enforcement efforts in response to such events. I call on authorities to strengthen these efforts, to ensure accountability and reverse the trend of growing settler related violence.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis have also continued, resulting in one fatality, and at least four injuries. Of note, on 7 February, a 19-year-old Israeli woman was stabbed to death in Jerusalem.

The protection of the Palestinian population in the H2 section of Hebron is of concern. As described by Special Coordinator Mladenov, the departure of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) leaves Palestinians with a greater sense of exposure and vulnerability to settler harassment.

A recent survey coordinated by OCHA in the settlement area of H2, which is home to some 7,000 Palestinians, indicates that nearly 70 percent of families have been exposed to settler related violence and harassment in the past three years. The aid community is examining how it can increase the provision of assistance and promote protection in this changed context.

As reflected by Special Coordinator Mladenov, Palestinians continue to face displacement and loss of property. This occurs due to demolitions of structures lacking Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain. Many families live under the threat of eviction orders. As mentioned, some 200 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem have eviction cases filed against them, predominantly by settler organizations claiming ownership of the buildings.

On 17 February, members of the Abu Asab family were evicted following such a legal battle. Of similar concern is the risk of eviction facing 32 members of the Sabbagh family, who are Palestinian refugees. The Humanitarian Coordinator, UNRWA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have called on the Israeli authorities to immediately halt the eviction of this family and those facing similar actions.

Mr. President,

Alongside the deterioration of humanitarian conditions, our ability to provide humanitarian assistance is increasingly constrained. Funding last year was at a record low, with the 2018 appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory only 46 per cent funded – far below the global average of 60 per cent. This reflects not only cuts to UNRWA, the largest humanitarian provider in the oPt, but also to other UN agencies and NGOs, reducing their ability to provide aid.

For instance, funding cuts have forced the World Food Programme to suspend food assistance to some 27,000 people and reduce rations to another 166,000 beneficiaries. In addition, humanitarian organizations face challenges to their operating space from both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities. There is mounting pressure on human rights defenders and attempts to delegitimize humanitarian action in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2019 requests US\$350 million to provide basic food, protection, health care, shelter, water and sanitation to 1.4 million Palestinians, down from 1.9 million targeted last year. This is based on the maximum number of vulnerable people whose needs we are able to address. Recognizing this lack of funding, the oPt will receive an allocation of \$8 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund. Some 70 percent of this funding will help to address the immediate health crisis in Gaza, as well as water and sanitation issues; some 30 percent will enhance international assistance in Hebron and the rest of the West Bank. However, this is far from enough to bridge the considerable funding gaps. I therefore urge Member States to step up and increase their support to humanitarian operations in the oPt.

In order to reduce vulnerability, it is also critical that all parties uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. And, ultimately, the solution is not humanitarian. It is for stakeholders to continue to work towards a viable political solution.

Thank you.