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AND PEACEBUILDING AFFAIRS
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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Thank you Mr. President,

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be locked in a dangerous paralysis that is fueling extremism and exacerbating tensions in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

There is a growing risk of more unilateral actions and the loss of hope that peace can be achieved through negotiations.

This outcome is not inevitable. We need to support creating an environment conducive to advancing peace and paving the way for negotiations on all final status issues, including Jerusalem. In order to get there, we need leadership, political will, and a determination to make tangible progress, despite the difficulties.

We must work together to bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table in order to resolve the conflict on the basis of international law, relevant UN resolutions and previous agreements.

Mr. President,

Without the prospect of viable negotiations on the horizon, facts on the ground continue to undermine the possibility of achieving a two-State solution.

In June, the District Court in Jerusalem ruled that four houses in the Alei Zahav settlement could be retroactively regularized under Israeli law, despite having been built on private Palestinian land. This decision is the first implementation in practice of the so-called “market regularization” principle, according to which up to 2,000 housing units in settlements could be legalized.

Further, on 8 July, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee approved for deposit a plan for the addition of 48 housing units in the Gilo settlement in East Jerusalem.

I reiterate that settlements remain a substantial obstacle to peace and are a violation of international law.

Mr. President,

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities also continued. 66 structures were demolished or seized, mostly on the grounds of lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. This practice must stop.

According to OCHA, this resulted in the displacement of 90 Palestinians, including 58 children.

On 11 June, Israel's High Court dismissed a petition by the Palestinian residents of the Wadi Hummus/Sur Bahir neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, giving them until 18 July 2019 to demolish nine buildings due to their proximity to the separation barrier. The structures were demolished by Israeli authorities on 22 July, resulting in the displacement of 24 Palestinians, including 14 children. As Deputy Special Coordinator McGoldrick stated yesterday, Israel's policy of destroying Palestinian property is not compatible with its obligations under international humanitarian law and contributes to the risk of forcible transfer facing many Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

On 27 June, six Palestinian-owned structures in the Bethlehem community of Zatar al Kurshan were demolished, displacing some 46 people.

On 10 July, a Palestinian family was evicted from a property in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. This was done after the Court ruled in favour of an Israeli organization, which had obtained ownership of the majority of the property.

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

The past month has again seen a reduction of violence in Gaza, while protests at the perimeter fence have continued. One Palestinian was killed by Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and another 736 were injured, including 234 children and 39 women.

There were also fewer launchings of incendiary balloons and kites by Hamas and other Palestinian militants from Gaza. Despite this, some 130 fires were started by some 100 devices in Israel during the reporting period.

Similarly, there has been a reduction in the number of rockets launched by militants towards Israel since the last dangerous escalation in May. Two rockets were fired during the reporting period, causing no injuries or damage.

The launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian populations is prohibited by international humanitarian law – Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad must cease this practice immediately.

Sadly, the reporting period also saw continued violent incidents in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

On 27 June, a 21-year-old Palestinian was shot and killed by an Israeli policeman after he allegedly shot fireworks towards Israeli forces during clashes in East Jerusalem. Clashes ensued in the area for several days, during which 88 Palestinians were injured.

On 12 July, a 9-year old Palestinian boy was shot and severely injured during clashes with ISF in the West Bank village of Kafr Qaddum. I call on Israel to promptly launch a thorough investigation

and reiterate that children's lives and rights must come ahead of any other consideration. They must be protected from all forms of violence.

In addition, Israeli security forces injured 154 Palestinians, including 14 children, in clashes that erupted across the West Bank.

On 6 July, a vehicle driven by a Palestinian reportedly rammed into a group of IDF personnel near the entrance of Hizma village, north of Jerusalem, injuring five soldiers.

Settler-related violence also continued. According to OCHA, six Palestinians were injured in six attacks by Israelis. At the same time, two Israelis were injured by stones thrown by Palestinians.

I condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians alike and call on all sides to refrain from violence. All perpetrators must be held accountable for their acts.

Mr. President,

Allow me to return to the situation in Gaza.

The UN continues to work closely with Egypt to mediate and de-escalate tensions. While our joint efforts are beginning to bear fruit, I remain deeply concerned by the humanitarian, economic and political situation there.

The shortage of medicines, equipment and personnel continue to impede the ability of health providers to meet the needs of patients, including those severely injured during the weekly protests at the perimeter fence.

Since the last round of UN and Egyptian-led mediation, the Gaza fishing zone has been expanded from 10 to 15 nautical miles. Israel has also returned 44 confiscated fishing boats to the Gaza Strip and eased some of the conditions for travel of Gaza-based businessmen.

I welcome these developments and urge the continuation and expansion of such actions.

Mr. President,

In line with agreed understandings, the UN is accelerating the implementation of the September 2018 and April 2019 Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee packages, which include interventions that have already started to improve the situation in Gaza.

In this context, the UN's efforts on job creation through UNDP and UNRWA, have thus far created some 9,000 job opportunities including around 3,000 for women. UN Women has also initiated a smaller programme targeting some 250 vulnerable women in Gaza. A recent assessment of the programme revealed that 91% of the beneficiaries had not earned any income prior to this programme. About 83% of the women said that the opportunities improved their livelihoods, 71% said their interhousehold tension has decreased due to the availability of income, and 55% of them reported that the earned income allowed them to participate in decision making at a household level.

The current calm must be sustained in order to gradually introduce longer-term interventions that will support Gaza's sustainable development. I take this opportunity to thank the Member States that have contributed to date and strongly urge others to support these vital efforts, particularly in the areas of job creation, healthcare, water and sanitation, and energy.

Yet, the root of Gaza's problems remains political. I call on all Palestinian factions to take concrete steps to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic, and legitimate national government. Gaza is, and must remain, an integral part of a future Palestinian state as part of the two-State solution.

Mr. President,

Discussions aimed at resolving the Palestinian Authority's (PA) financial crisis are ongoing, but no solution has yet been found. For the fifth consecutive month, the Palestinian Government has refused to receive Israel's partial transfer of tax revenues owed to it. Despite the PA's announced austerity measures and the support package committed by Qatar, the PA remains under tremendous strain and may soon reach the breaking point.

The economy is increasingly showing signs of decline, with a noticeable reduction of purchasing power contributing to an overall reduction in economic activities.

I call on both sides to engage in a constructive manner to ensure compliance with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations.

In the meantime, it is critical to adopt temporary measures to address the PA's fiscal crisis and I encourage Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work together to find such solutions.

The recent decision by the League of Arab States to support with up to USD 100 million per month the Palestinian Authority should provide a welcome respite until a viable solution is found.

The recent Memoranda of Understanding between the Government of the Palestinian Authority and Jordan, in the areas of energy, health and transportation are also welcome.

During the reporting period we have seen additional international support for Palestine's economic development. I note the 3rd High-Level Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, under the co-chairpersonship of Japan and Palestine.

I also note the "Peace to Prosperity" economic workshop that took place in Bahrain on 25-26 June, which was attended by government officials, business leaders, representatives of international organizations and religious leaders, among others.

Humanitarian and economic support for the Palestinian population is crucial to creating an environment conducive to viable negotiation. Such measures should be followed by a comprehensive peace agreement that addresses all final status issues.

Mr. President,

In closing, I would like to emphasize the severity of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the urgent need for tangible steps to reverse the negative trajectory.

The circumstances will hardly ever be ideal for advancing peace. But let us do our utmost with conviction, hope and creativity to support the creation of those circumstances. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in their efforts to end the conflict and to realizing the vision of two States, living side by side in peace and security.

Thank you.