
UN Human Rights Council
55th Regular Session – 29 February 2024

Item 2 - ID with the HC

Ambassador Meirav Eilon Shahar
Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva

Thank you, Mr. President,

Israel is at war with a terrorist organization that perpetrated one of the most heinous and deadly terrorist attacks of modern times.

In the early hours of October 7, thousands of terrorists - yes terrorists Mr. High Commissioner, not simply armed groups - entered Israel, leaving devastation in their wake.

By nightfall, over 1200 innocent people had been butchered, with countless others subjected to unspeakable acts of violence at the hands of Hamas.

The minimal reference to these horrific attacks in your statement today, is an affront to the victims, and supports those who seek to remove these crimes from the narrative altogether.

Israel is fighting in a battlefield that Hamas has created in Gaza.

One in which terrorists hide behind and within the civilian population.

One that the UN has witnessed being built around and below them for years and chose to ignore.

One in which 500km of terror tunnels snake beneath civilian infrastructure, homes, schools, and UN headquarters; where thousands of rockets are launched indiscriminately at our cities, and where innocent civilians are intentionally placed in harm's way.

The use of Palestinian civilians as human shields by Hamas in Gaza is well known and yet constantly ignored by the High Commissioner and this Council.

Israel has been told time and time again that the terrorists who have diverted aid, built terror tunnels, brutally murdered innocent civilians, raped, beheaded, burnt families alive - cannot be touched because they hide among the civilian population.

Yet we have no choice. We must go after Hamas, or they will continue to come after us.

But let me be clear, even as Hamas rains down rockets on us, even as our hostages remain in captivity, even as Hamas continues to carry out heinous terrorist attacks, Israel is absolutely committed to conducting itself in accordance with IHL.

It is why Israel has so many mechanisms in place: to ensure our full commitment to international law, including through the use of early warnings to civilians and a robust legal framework to ensure distinction, proportionality and precaution.

And it is why we have facilitated the transfer of 264,000 tons of humanitarian aid into Gaza, why we opened the Karem Shalom crossing in Israel to get more aid in, and why just yesterday, Israel cooperated with partners to airdrop 160 packs of food and medical equipment into Gaza.

Mr. High Commissioner,

For years, the United Nations has ignored Palestinian terrorism, destruction, hatred and incitement.

For years it has disregarded and ignored Israel's security concerns.

For years, it has ignored the hundreds of Israelis murdered on our streets.

Neither in your report or statement today did you mention the Israelis killed by terrorists before and after October 7. Do they not matter?

Nor did you mention the Palestinian Authority's pay-to slay policy, where it rewards those who carry out such murderous attacks.

Tell me, if Israel withdraws from Gaza tomorrow, do you think Hamas would lay down its arms?

Do you think Hamas will commit to not rebuilding its tunnels and restoring its terrorist arsenal, and instead commit to justice and peace?

You think if Israel stops this war today, Hamas will return all our hostages tomorrow?

Mr. High Commissioner, the answer is simply no.

Therefore, Israel has a duty to its population to ensure that never again can Hamas attack our lands, never again can it seek to eradicate our people.

Sitting behind me, are Aviva Siegel and Raz Ben Ami.

For over 50 days, these two courageous women endured unspeakable horrors in Hamas captivity.

As we speak, their husbands, Keith and Ohad are still languishing in Gaza.

These halls should have been a symbol of hope for Aviva and Raz and all the hostages; that the world would act for their human rights and for their release. Yet unfortunately, they have become a mere footnote in the discourse of this Council, as reflected in the statement just made by the High Commissioner.

For Israel, as long as even a single person remains ensnared in the clutches of terror, we will not rest.

So, you can continue to speak in this echo chamber where the human rights of Israelis and Jews mean nothing.

Meanwhile, we will continue to do all we can to bring our people home.

