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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE
EAST

28 January 2026

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

I brief you today at a moment of both profound opportunity and considerable risk.

In front of us we see a potential turning point for Gaza, a genuine chance for a better future. But many uncertainties remain. In parallel we also see a continued unraveling in the occupied West Bank, and a region mired in tension.

The announced start of the second phase of President Trump's 20-point Comprehensive Plan is a critical step in consolidating the ceasefire in Gaza, alongside the establishment of the subsidiary bodies of the Board of Peace, including the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza and the Office of the High Representative for Gaza.

I have just returned from Cairo, where I met with the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza to discuss how the United Nations can best support the Committee's efforts to provide critical public services, facilitate humanitarian aid, and lay the groundwork for reconstruction in Gaza, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (2025).

The task at hand is monumental. It requires full coordination among all stakeholders, taking into account the existing systems and capacities.

The United Nations stands ready to support the Committee and Palestinians in Gaza as they start the arduous work of rebuilding.

I welcome the recovery of the last hostage in Gaza and am relieved that they have been returned to Israel for burial. I extend my condolences to the family of Ran Gvili. With all hostages returned, I hope that the process of healing for the families and all those affected may begin.

Implementation of the next phase of the Comprehensive plan must advance in good faith. I am encouraged by Israel's announcement on 25 January that Rafah crossing will open to pedestrian movements in both directions. Demilitarization of the Gaza Strip is an essential enabling condition and security arrangements are urgently needed to facilitate the work of the National Committee across the entire Strip.

Mr. President,

My last visit to Gaza affirmed one truth – the people in Gaza are ready and eager to lead the way to a better, more stable future.

Less than two weeks ago, amidst enormous misery and pain, I witnessed inspiring resilience and hope: youths taking their exams – and excelling – in the most difficult of circumstances. Farmers unable to import seeds but still finding ways to plant in greenhouses repaired with makeshift

materials. Small business owners devising ingenious solutions when faced with scarce materials and a devastated market. Such efforts are being replicated across Gaza – they deserve our support.

Nevertheless, nearly the entire population in Gaza remains in need of humanitarian assistance.

Heavy rainfall and cold temperatures have exacerbated the suffering of more than 1.5 million displaced Palestinians in Gaza who had little or no means to seek safe shelter. I heard firsthand how families sat vigil through the night just trying to hold down the four corners of their tents. I saw a little girl carrying heavy stones just to prevent her shelter from blowing away in the wind.

The shelter response has suffered from restrictions on the entry of vital materials and technical expertise. As a result, shelter sites in Gaza do not meet the scale of needs or international standards.

Transitional shelter sites must provide access to much needed essential services. Above all, they must be voluntary and dignified, and in line with humanitarian principles. The support of all stakeholders is needed.

Mr. President,

Across all sectors, humanitarian actors are still unable to operate at scale in Gaza. Their work is being hindered by insecurity, customs clearance challenges, the limited number of partners authorized by Israeli authorities to bring cargo into Gaza, delays and denials of cargo at crossings, and limited routes available for transporting supplies within Gaza.

While the Jordan corridor remains a humanitarian lifeline, current volumes entering Gaza through back-to-back arrangements represent only a fraction of what was previously achieved when the direct route was operational. Since 10 October, only 9 per cent of 2720-processed aid has entered Gaza via Jordan. Fully utilizing existing, proven regional corridors remains essential to saving lives in Gaza.

Entry of mobile homes, rescue equipment, fuel, and medical supplies continues to be severely restricted, endangering the lives of tens of thousands of IDPs and patients. To address this, materials must enter at scale.

Access to public infrastructure and agricultural land also remains restricted. Meanwhile, regular detonations of residential buildings are continuing, and repeated population displacements have occurred.

On 30 December, Israel announced that it plans to suspend the operations of some international NGOs. The Government also notified 37 INGOs that their registrations would expire at the end of 2025, due to what Israel says is their failure to comply with new Israeli regulations, triggering a 60-day review period.

Banning these INGOs will have a significant impact on the humanitarian response across the OPT. I urge Israel to immediately reverse this decision.

Despite the ceasefire, the Israeli military continues to conduct military operations with airstrikes, shelling and gunfire occurring across the Strip. Armed exchanges have also persisted with Palestinian militants.

Attacks in the vicinity of or beyond the so-called “yellow line” are happening daily. Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire began, including many women and children. Civilians must be protected at all times.

Amid the obstacles, we have also seen some welcome actions. The continued arrival of aid via Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the occupied West Bank and Cyprus has been critical. This has helped increase the volume of supplies brought into Gaza and led to improvements in nutrition for the population. More needs to be done.

Mr. President,

I would like to devote the remainder of my briefing to addressing the spiraling dynamics in the occupied West Bank.

Every month the United Nations, and many others in this Council, emphasize the gravity of the unfolding situation. But that has yet to translate into any meaningful action on the ground. Negative trends are entrenched daily.

The reporting period was marked by continued violence, with extensive Israeli military operations, settlement expansion, settler violence, demolitions and large-scale detentions.

In late December and early January, Israeli forces conducted intensified raids across Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, and Ramallah, frequently involving live fire and raising serious concerns about the use of lethal force. A 16-year-old boy was shot and killed during a raid in Qabatiya on 20 December after reportedly throwing a brick toward IDF soldiers, and multiple Palestinians were killed or fatally wounded during operations south of Nablus. There have been large-scale arrest campaigns of Palestinians by Israeli security forces, including children, amidst reports of ill-treatment and torture, and continued deaths in custody.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis have also persisted. On 26 December, a Palestinian man killed two Israelis, including a woman, in two ramming and stabbing attacks in northern Israel.

At the same time, settler violence has intensified. In December, repeated settler attacks led to the displacement of the entire community of Khirbet Yanun in Nablus governorate and in January we saw the forcible displacement of some 80 households from Ras Ein Al ‘Auja in Jericho governorate. Demolitions and large-scale land seizures continued across the northern West Bank.

Evictions in East Jerusalem’s Silwan neighbourhood on 4 January and extensive demolitions in Tulkarm’s Nur Shams refugee camp at the end of December underscore how violence, displacement, and territorial fragmentation are converging on the ground.

Meanwhile, settlement expansion has been rapid and relentless. The combination of settlement advancement, state land declarations and persistent establishment of outposts is carving up and making vast swaths of land inaccessible for Palestinian use in the occupied West Bank.

During the reporting period, approximately 1,860 housing units were advanced in Area C. These include over 120 housing units in Sanur, a settlement that was evacuated in 2005.

Additionally, 2,850 housing units were advanced in East Jerusalem. These include two large-scale plans: a plan for 1,500 housing units in residential towers in a government complex between Sheikh Jarrah and Mount Scopus; and a plan in East Talpiyot for 950 housing units in several residential towers. The Israeli government has also published tenders for over 4,770 in area C,

including for 3,401 housing units in E1, which if built would effectively sever the connection between the northern and southern West Bank.

In recent weeks the pressure campaign against UNRWA has also sharply escalated in an effort to end its operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On 29 December the Israeli Knesset passed legislation instructing Israeli authorities to seize UNRWA's compounds in Sheikh Jarrah and Kafr Aqab, and requiring utilities and financial service providers to deny service to UNRWA or any of its facilities. On 12 January, Israeli forces raided an UNRWA health centre in occupied East Jerusalem and ordered it to close.

A week later Israeli forces forcibly entered the UNRWA Headquarters in occupied East Jerusalem with bulldozers, demolishing buildings, and officials also made abhorrent calls for the annihilation of UNRWA staff. These acts are flagrant violations of international law and the privileges and immunities of the United Nations. I call on the Israeli government to abide by the October 2025 advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice, which states that Israel is obliged under international law to facilitate UNRWA's operations, not hinder or prevent them.

Despite significant increases in international support in 2025, the unilateral withholding by Israel of all Palestinian clearance revenues continues. The Palestinian Authority continues to face a growing fiscal crisis resulting in partial payment of civil servant salaries and a reduction in services. Nearly 2.5 billion USD of clearance revenue remains withheld by Israel.

Mr. President,

Israeli government policies have facilitated a number of destructive trends: rapid settlement expansion and its related infrastructure, the creation and legalization of outposts, widespread demolitions and displacement, "state land" declarations, deepening movement and access restrictions, and expansion of municipal boundaries. Persistent and extreme settler violence, frequently accompanied or supported by Israeli security forces, continues to inflame tensions, forcibly displace Palestinians, and exacerbate instability.

The consequences have been severe: deepening of the occupation, fragmented Palestinian space and strengthened territorial contiguity for settlements. Ultimately, these steps are further undermining the prospects for peace and the establishment of a two-state solution. Unless urgently addressed, they may also jeopardize progress on implementing the second phase of the ceasefire agreement.

Mr. President,

The implementation of the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire plan is critical and will require our firm and collective commitment. This is a genuine opportunity to lay the foundations for a more stable and secure future for Palestinians and Israelis, advance the goal of a legitimate Palestinian Government that can reunify Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and chart a course towards ending the occupation and advancing a political process that will ultimately end the conflict.

The UN will continue to support Palestinians and Israelis to end the conflict and to realize a two-State solution, in line with previous United Nations resolutions and international law.

Mr. President, I thank you and this Council for your attention.