

18 October 2023, Beijing

Excerpts from Secretary-General's remarks at the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation

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With your permission and facing this august assembly, I feel, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, the obligation to say a few words about the catastrophe unfolding in the Middle East.

The region is on the precipice.

Immediately before departing for Beijing, I made two urgent humanitarian appeals:

To Hamas, for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages.

To Israel, to immediately allow unrestricted access of humanitarian aid to respond to the most basic needs of the people of Gaza - the overwhelming majority of whom are women and children.

I am fully aware of the deep grievances of the Palestinian people after 56 years of occupation. But, as serious as these grievances are, they cannot justify the acts of terror against civilians committed by Hamas on October 7 that I immediately condemned.

But those attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

Each of my two humanitarian appeals have a value in themselves.

They are not bargaining chips. They are simply the right thing to do.

And I am horrified by the hundreds of people killed at Al Ahli hospital this same day, in Gaza, by a strike that I strongly condemned earlier today.

I call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to provide sufficient time and space to help realize my two appeals and to ease the epic human suffering we are witnessing.

Too many lives - and the fate of the entire region - hang in the balance.

May the spirit of this meeting help those that need to find peace.

Thank you.

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