

**SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS
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**REMARKS AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN BRIEFING
ON THE MIDDLE EAST**

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Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General.

Your Excellency, Foreign Minister Goffin, President of the Security Council,

Your Excellency, President Mahmoud Abbas,

Members of the Security Council,

On 28 January, the United States presented its vision for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which it proposed as a basis for negotiations between the parties.

The Palestinian Government has rejected the proposal. The League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation also released statements rejecting the proposal, saying it did not meet the minimum rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people. The EU High Representative said that the proposal departs from “internationally agreed parameters.” A number of African Union member states also rejected the proposal during their recent summit.

Senior figures in Israel’s Government have welcomed the proposal, saying that they would be willing to use it as the basis for direct negotiations.

Some Member States have expressed their hope that the release of the vision would be an opportunity to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, in the interest of advancing a two-state solution.

The United Nations policy on the issue is defined by relevant UN resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

Mr. President,

In the days since the proposal was unveiled, we have unfortunately witnessed some sporadic violent incidents throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in and around Gaza.

Further escalation or provocations would be a concerning development. They could complicate the situation on the ground and would serve only those who seek to radicalize people and undermine efforts to achieve peace. Today, all must show restraint and clearly and unequivocally condemn violence wherever it occurs.

Following the release of the U.S. proposal, senior Israeli officials vowed to unilaterally annex large portions of the West Bank, including all Israeli settlements and the Jordan Valley.

The United States has announced that it will establish a joint committee with Israel to produce a more detailed version of the conceptual maps included in the proposal, which would in turn allow it to recognize an Israeli decision to apply its laws in specified areas in the West Bank.

The Secretary-General has consistently spoken out against unilateral steps and plans for annexation. Such steps, including the possible annexation of territory in the West Bank or similar moves, would have a devastating impact on the prospect for a two-state solution. They would close the door to negotiations, have negative repercussions across the region, and severely undermine opportunities for normalization and regional peace.

Just as unilateral steps will not resolve the conflict, those who reject the proposal should not turn to violence. That would be the worst possible response at this sensitive moment.

Indeed, what is needed is political leadership and serious reflection on what needs to be done to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

Mr. President,

I hope that this Council will join the Secretary-General's call for a negotiated solution to the conflict and constructive engagement between the parties. The United Nations has long supported a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN resolutions, international law and prior agreements.

Today it is not enough to reaffirm our positions.

Today is the time to hear proposals on how to move the process forward and to find our way back to a mutually agreed mediation framework that ensures meaningful negotiations can restart.

Mr. President,

While it is hard to envision a comprehensive agreement between the parties under the current circumstances, let me deeply underline that we must avoid continued entrenchment in the status quo.

Continuing on the current trajectory, described in the 2016 Middle East Quartet Report, would only push Palestinians and Israelis further apart, deepen the occupation, and imperil the future viability of the two-state solution.

The United Nations remains deeply committed to working with Israelis and Palestinians and with our international and regional partners to realise the objective of a lasting and just peace.

As the Secretary-General has said, this goal can only be achieved through realizing the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

There is no other road to achieve this goal, except through negotiations.

There is no other framework except the one that Israelis and Palestinians together agree on, a framework based on relevant UN resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. In the absence of a credible path back to negotiations, we all face a heightened risk of violence. Violence, which will drag both peoples – and the region, into a spiral of escalation with no end in sight.

Thank you.