



**Statement by UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process,
Tor Wennesland, on the Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory
and Israel**

Jerusalem, 12 March 2024

“As the Holy Month of Ramadan has begun, we have now entered the sixth month of a devastating war in Gaza that will impact the Middle East for years to come. I call for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be upheld and respected.

I take note of the guarantee by the Israeli authorities to allow the Muslim population of the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, access to the Holy Sites. I call upon all sides to refrain from provocations and demonstrate maximum restraint.

The war in Gaza has significantly imperiled the fragile stability in the region. This year’s Ramadan is marked by the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis and a breakdown of law and order in Gaza, the increasing number of civilian casualties and mounting instability across the West Bank.

There is a growing risk of a wider political and security calamity. This must be avoided at all costs. Any attempt by extremists to turn the conflict into a religious one must be staunchly rejected. Failure to do so will only sow discord and reap more violence and extremism.

I reject calls by Hamas and other Palestinian factions to escalate the situation during this Holy month. The sanctity of Ramadan cannot and should not be used for political gains and calculations.

After over 150 days of war, the population of Gaza must see an end to the horrors they continue to endure. The hostages still held in captivity must be reunited with their loved ones who are also experiencing tremendous pain. The fate of the victims cannot be used as a leverage. Civilians on both sides should no longer pay the price for this terrible conflict.”

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