

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

---

**REMARKS TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE  
EAST**

**New York, 12 July 2016**

**[as delivered]**

Late last month, I returned from my eleventh visit to Israel and Palestine as Secretary-General.

As it happened, it was also as Israel's occupation entered its 50<sup>th</sup> year.

I carried a clear and consistent message to leaders on both sides: Time is running out.

This fact is also at the heart of the report of the Middle East Quartet. I know the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, has fully briefed you.

Some on both sides have criticized the report's content and sought to dismiss its conclusions and recommendations.

The report's overriding message however is irrefutable: As negative trends grow more frequent – the prospects of a two-state solution grow more distant.

The report's ten recommendations provide a practical approach to end the political stalemate, resume the transition to greater Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and chart a course to negotiations to resolve all final status issues.

I urge both sides to immediately begin discussions with the Quartet on implementing these recommendations -- as we all continue to work in coordination with key stakeholders including regional countries and the UN Security Council -- to restore hope in a political solution. The Quartet Envoys are now taking steps in that direction.

The parties will have to make the necessary compromises for peace. At the same time, the region and the wider international community must exercise its influence to encourage both sides.

French efforts to pursue peace complement these efforts. I welcome their coordination with the Quartet. I also welcome Egyptian efforts, including the recent visit by [the] Egyptian Foreign Minister to Palestine and Israel.

The failure of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to advance peace has created a vacuum. Extremist voices have filled that space.

Recent incidents reinforce the mounting risks. Those responsible for recent terror attacks must be held accountable.

However, closures – such as those in Hebron -- as well as punitive demolitions and blanket

revocations of permits penalise thousands of innocent Palestinians and amount to collective punishment.

I am also deeply troubled by shrinking space for civil society in the region and around the world. I am concerned by Israel's passage of the so-called "NGO Transparency Law" which contributes to a climate in which the activities of human rights organisations are increasingly delegitimized.

All the while, Israel's settlement enterprise marches on.

Days after the Quartet called on Israel to cease settlement construction and expansion, Israel announced plans to advance building approximately 560 housing units in the West Bank and 240 more in occupied East Jerusalem.

This is in flagrant disregard of international law.

These actions constitute an undeniable contradiction to Israel's official support for a negotiated two-state solution. I urge Israel to immediately cease and reverse these plans.

We must ask: How can the systematic expansion of settlements ... the taking of land for exclusive Israeli use ... and the denial of Palestinian development be a response to violence?

Such policies will not bring the two-state solution closer to reality. Such policies will not make Israelis safer or more secure.

As many former Israeli military and intelligence officers have clearly stated, these policies will do precisely the opposite.

Indeed, every brick added to the edifice of occupation is another taken from Israel's foundation as a majority Jewish and democratic state.

At the same time, those Palestinians who celebrate and encourage attacks against innocents must know that they are not serving the interests of their people or peace. Such acts must be universally condemned and more must be done to counter the incitement that fuels and justifies terror.

During my visit, I also made my fourth trip to Gaza.

Militant activity continues, undermining the fragile ceasefire and threatening to provoke another devastating escalation.

Despite significant progress, tens of thousands of people are still displaced following the 2014 conflict. Families are forced to live without electricity for 12 to 18 hours per day. Unemployment remains staggering.

Funds to rebuild Gaza remain elusive. I once again urge donors to fulfill their pledges made in Cairo.

But long-term stability and sustainability for Gaza depends on the lifting of the crippling closures and a re-establishment of a single, legitimate Palestinian governing authority based on PLO principles.

Turning very briefly to the Golan, I would add that the situation remains volatile and continues to undermine the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria, jeopardizing the ceasefire between the two countries.

As we focus on Israeli-Palestinian peace, we must take a hard look at where this conflict stands.

How much longer can the parties and the international community accept political paralysis? And at what grave price?

I encourage the Security Council to support the efforts of the Quartet to work with the parties, the region and interested stakeholders in advancing peace.

The children of Israel and Palestine deserve nothing less.

I will never forget my moving meeting with student leaders at an UNRWA school in Gaza on my final day in the region.

One 15 year-old boy concluded by saying “harsh restrictions drain away the ambitions of any young person. And this is how we see our future -- to be killed by the conflict, to be killed by the closure, or to be killed by despair.”

Surely, we can do better for all the children of Palestine and Israel. Surely, they deserve a horizon of hope.

It is time for the parties to take action to build that future.

The international community, including through the recommendations outlined in the Quartet report, remains resolute in its commitment to support the goal of a peaceful future for both Palestinians and Israelis.

That is why I encourage the Security Council to support the efforts of the Quartet — of the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations -- to work with the parties, the region and interested stakeholders in advancing peace.

Thank you.