

NICKOLAY MLADENOV
SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN GAZA
15 MAY 2018

Mme President,

Members of the Security Council,

For the people of Gaza yesterday was a day of tragedy. There are no other words with which to describe what actually happened. There is no justification for the killing. There is no excuse. It serves no one. It certainly does not serve the cause of peace.

My heart weighs heavy today as I begin by expressing my condolences to the families of those killed yesterday and the last six weeks of demonstrations in Gaza.

Who can possibly find words to console the mother of a child that has been killed? Who?

I call on all to join me in condemning in the strongest possible terms the actions that have led to the loss of many lives in Gaza.

Israel has a responsibility to calibrate its use of force, to not use lethal force, except as a last resort, under imminent threat of death or serious injury. It must protect its borders, but it must do so proportionally and investigate every incident that has led to a loss of human life.

Hamas, which controls Gaza, must not use the protests as cover to attempt to place bombs at the fence and create provocations; its operatives must not hide among the demonstrators and risk the lives of civilians.

Mme President,

Tens of thousands of people in Gaza have been protesting for over six weeks now. People who live in abject poverty, who survive in prison-like conditions, who live with no prospect for the day after. These people want their voices heard; they want a future beyond mere survival. Their leaders have failed them. The promises they have made to them have not been delivered. And now the people are angry. But their anger, if not channelled in a constructive manner will lead to more destruction and suffering.

Whatever we may think of their motivation, we have an obligation to hear their plight.

They have lived through three devastating conflicts. Their lives are marked by personal anguish, scarred by a national tragedy, marred by daily suffering caused by leaders, who use them for their own political ends. For ten years, they have lived under the control of Hamas, separated from their families in the West Bank, isolated behind crippling Israeli closures.

This cycle of violence in Gaza needs to end, for it to end we need everyone of us to prevent and explosion that will drag everyone in the region into another deadly confrontation.

The international community must step in and prevent war, we need to move forward quickly and effectively on all projects that we have been discussed for months and months to solve the energy, water and health crisis of the population. We can only do this in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt.

But before all that, the senseless violence needs to stop.

Mme President,

Yesterday, an estimated 35,000 people participated in demonstrations in Gaza and hundreds in the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Nablus, and in East Jerusalem -- all part of the "Great March of Return", as well as in protest of the relocation of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. While no fatalities were reported in the West Bank, where limited clashes took place between demonstrators and Israeli security forces at several checkpoints, the situation in Gaza deteriorated throughout the day, particularly along the perimeter fence.

According to various reports at least 60 people were killed throughout yesterday, including six children, and more than 1,300 were reportedly injured by live ammunition and rubber bullets. One Israeli soldier was wounded and taken to hospital for treatment.

Since the beginning of the protests on March 30th, over one hundred people have been killed, including thirteen children, over half of whom yesterday alone. This constituted the bloodiest day in Gaza, with the highest death and injury toll, since the conflict of 2014.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad have acknowledged that among those killed were members of their organizations, and the Israeli Defense Forces claims that at least 24 had links to militant activities.

Under cover of the protests Hamas and other militants have also engaged in violent and provocative acts, including the placing of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the perimeter fence and other attempts to breach it with the intent of perpetrating attacks. According to UNDOSS, at least one IED reportedly detonated against an IDF vehicle during an incursion. Eighteen airstrikes and eight shelling incidents were also carried out by the Israeli security forces on 26 Hamas targets in retaliation for what Israel has classified as violent acts.

Mme President,

Against this backdrop, hospitals in Gaza report an unfolding crisis of essential medical supplies, drugs and equipment needed to treat the injured. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator, who is currently in Gaza, yesterday visited Shifa Hospital, where there is a shortage of beds for the number of wounded arriving from the protests at the fence. He witnessed first-hand patients being brought in on stretchers and left in the hospital's courtyard, which was being used as a triage area.

I appeal to Israel, to Egypt, to the Palestinian authorities, to facilitate the exit from Gaza of the seriously wounded for medical treatment and I welcome steps reportedly taken in this direction by Egypt.

Mme President,

I would like to take this opportunity to salute the bravery of the medical staff who continue to put their own lives at risk, such as those working for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, who have endured casualties of their own. I am deeply saddened to note the death of another health worker yesterday during the demonstrations and I reiterate the inviolability under international law of health facilities and medical personnel. Journalists have also been among those injured in yesterday's demonstrations.

The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, about which I have reported time and again in this chamber over the past year, has been compounded by the fact that the Palestinian Authority continues to withhold the payment of salaries to some 20,000 civil service employees in Gaza.

To further complicate a dismal picture, on the 4th and on the 11th of May, Palestinian demonstrators destroyed most of the facilities on the Gaza side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, the main point of entry for goods and materials into the Gaza Strip. Members of my team have conducted an initial assessment of the site and I can report that the damage is extensive and will hinder deliveries of fuel and much needed goods to Gaza for weeks ahead. As we speak, the United Nations is working with Israel and the Palestinian Authority and with Israel to bring in life-saving assistance, despite the destruction and extensive damage to the crossing.

Mme President,

Whoever orchestrated that destruction shares in the responsibility of worsening the suffering of two million people in Gaza.

Mme President,

The Secretary-General and I have repeatedly called on all to exercise restraint, for all necessary steps to avoid an escalation and for all incidents to be fully investigated. I have engaged with all sides to this effect. Public statements and messages by Hamas indicate the intention to use mass protests to infiltrate into Israel and attack Israelis. Such statements and action endanger the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians and cannot be justified.

I wish to underline yet again that it is imperative that civilians, particularly children, not be targeted by anyone, not be used as a cover for militant activity, or be put at risk or in danger in any way.

Mme President,

As the violence continues, technical problems have also resurfaced in further decreasing electricity supply and have currently caused some 22 hours of blackouts in Gaza. This is a critical reminder of the fragility of Gaza's infrastructure. Starting tomorrow, the United Nations, together with international partners will need to focus and redouble efforts to implement projects that will have an immediate impact on improving the electricity, water and health situation as a matter of urgency.

The developments in Gaza are a painful reminder, and extremely painful reminder, of the devastating consequences of the continued absence of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. I would like to reiterate this message, particularly as Palestinians commemorate "Nakba" day or "the day of the Catastrophe", by which they remember the displacement during the war of 1948-1949, and as they continue to demonstrate in Gaza and the West Bank over the coming days. We must step up our efforts in support of a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

We must collectively call on all to refrain from unilateral measures that only steer us away from a peace process and instead work to end the occupation and advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace, culminating ultimately in two states, Israel and Palestine – of which Gaza is an integral part – two states living side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

Thank you.