

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL KHALED KHIARI**  
**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE**  
**EAST, REPORTING ON UNSCR 2334 (2016)**

**18 December 2024**

Madam President,

Members of the Security Council,

Since the submission of the Secretary-General's written report on Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), hostilities and violence have continued throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the Gaza Strip, hostilities between Israel Defense Forces and Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, including heavy Israeli bombardment throughout the Strip, have resulted in heavy casualties. In the occupied West Bank, high levels of violence persist amid ongoing Israeli operations, exchanges with armed Palestinians, settler violence and Palestinian attacks against Israelis.

Among other deadly strikes in Gaza, from 14 to 15 December, at least 69 Palestinians, including women and children, were reportedly killed in four Israeli strikes on schools sheltering IDPs in Gaza City, Beit Hanoun and Khan Younis, including 20 killed in an airstrike hitting an UNRWA school in Al-Mawasi, Khan Younis. The Israel Defense Forces said they were targeting Hamas militants. More than 250 Palestinians have been killed in such strikes in Gaza over the past week, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health.

The death toll of this war continues to mount. Since October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, more than 45,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza according to the Ministry of Health and over 1,700 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in attacks in or originating from Gaza according to Israeli sources.

In the occupied West Bank, on 12 December, an Israeli boy was killed in a shooting attack on a bus near the Al Khader junction in the occupied West Bank, south of Jerusalem. Israeli authorities said that the Palestinian perpetrator later turned himself in. The same day, Israeli forces reportedly killed a Palestinian man in an exchange of fire in Balata refugee camp near Nablus.

Serious clashes have also taken place between Palestinian armed groups in the occupied West Bank and Palestinian security forces since the written report, particularly in Jenin camp following a Palestinian arrest operation and the seizure of Palestinian Authority vehicles by militants. Over several days, PSF have killed an unarmed 19-year-old and detained numerous Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants, while the clashes have caused significant damage to the camp.

Madam President,

I will now highlight some of the Secretary-General's observations regarding the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016).

I once again strongly condemn the horrific attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the continued holding of more than 100 hostages in Gaza. Nothing can justify these acts of terror. All remaining hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. I remain appalled that there are reasonable grounds to believe that hostages may be subject to ongoing sexual violence and abuse. While in captivity, hostages must be treated

humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the Red Cross. I reiterate that there is no justification for the deliberate killing, maiming, torture, and abduction of civilians and other protected persons -nor using sexual violence against them. The use of human shields and the firing of indiscriminate rockets towards Israeli population centres are violations of international humanitarian law and must cease.

Turning to the situation in Gaza, a ceasefire is long overdue. The continued collective punishment of the Palestinian people is unjustifiable. The relentless bombardment of Gaza by Israeli forces, the large number of civilian casualties, the blanket destruction of Palestinian neighbourhoods, and the worsening humanitarian situation are horrific. The widespread devastation and deprivation resulting from Israel's military operations in North Gaza – especially around Jabalya, Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun – are making the conditions of life untenable for the Palestinian population there. I condemn Israel's use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in densely populated areas that has caused massive casualties and damage to residential buildings, schools, hospitals, mosques and UN premises. United Nations premises are inviolable at all times.

I reiterate my unequivocal condemnation of the widespread killing and injury of civilians in Gaza, including women and children, and the deprivation of essentials to survive. I am concerned over what may amount to violations of international humanitarian law in the conduct of hostilities, including noncompliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attacks and against the effects of attacks. International humanitarian law always applies to all parties to a conflict, and its application does not depend on reciprocity. The protection of civilians is paramount. There must be full accountability for any atrocity crimes that have been committed.

I mourn the United Nations personnel killed in Gaza and strongly condemn the killing of all health and humanitarian personnel and journalists. I also condemn the looting of aid in the context of a breakdown of law and order. These are unacceptable and must stop immediately. I reiterate my call for the full investigation of all such incidents and accountability for any violations of international law.

Due to continued restrictions imposed by Israel, looting by armed Palestinians, and overall insecurity, supplies have entered Gaza at levels that are inadequate to meet the overwhelming needs of the population, including large numbers of IDPs living in extremely overcrowded conditions. To address the needs, the United Nations and its partners urgently require the predictable entry and unimpeded movement of food, shelter materials, medicine and fuel and the capacity to repair essential, life-saving infrastructure, including the health-care system. Noting its opening of additional entry points for humanitarian aid, I call upon Israel to fulfil its obligations as Occupying Power under international law, including allowing and facilitating rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need into and throughout Gaza and to create the conditions that will permit the return of Palestinians to their homes.

I note the relative success of the polio vaccination campaign. While falling short of our targets in the north of Gaza, the use of tactical pauses and examples of functioning coordination with Israel demonstrated what is possible and achievable.

I reiterate my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages in Gaza. The UN is continuously engaged with all stakeholders towards these objectives and stands ready to support the implementation of an agreement. I welcome the continued efforts, including by Egypt, Qatar and the United States to overcome the significant obstacles and reach a deal.

I remain deeply alarmed by the relentless Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that is fueling tensions, impeding access by Palestinians to their land and threatening the viability of a future independent, democratic, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State. I reiterate that all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and are in flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. I am deeply concerned that, over the past year, the Government of Israel has continued to systematically promote policies that have strengthened the involvement of civilian officials in control over the occupied West Bank, including transferring some security functions to civilian control, while some Government officials called for the annexation of areas in the occupied West Bank. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity immediately.

I note in this regard the recent findings by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024, which declared, inter alia, that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and must end as rapidly as possible.

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, as well as structures related to income generation and the provision of essential services, entail numerous violations of international law and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer. I once again call upon the Government of Israel to end this practice and prevent the displacement of Palestinians, in accordance with its international obligations under international law, and to approve plans to allow Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

The escalating violence and tensions in the occupied West Bank are highly concerning and could trigger a broader explosion. Intensified operations by Israeli forces, increased settler violence and attacks against Israelis have also exacerbated tensions and led to exceedingly high levels of casualties, detentions and destruction. I am alarmed by the lethal attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, including sometimes in the proximity and with the support of Israeli security forces, and by Palestinians against Israelis. All perpetrators of attacks must be held accountable.

I reiterate that Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life. I call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law, and ensure thorough, independent and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force, holding those responsible to account.

I am particularly appalled that children continue to be victims of violence on all sides. I am also concerned that Palestinian children continue to be arrested in large numbers and held for prolonged periods of time, including in administrative detention. I reiterate my call for Israel to use detention as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period, to prevent all forms of ill-treatment in detention and to end the administrative detention of children, who are entitled to special protection.

I am disturbed at the numerous instances during the reporting period in which officials glorified violence and engaged in dangerous provocations, incitement, and inflammatory language, which will only lead to greater polarization and risks further bloodshed. Leaders have an obligation to clearly and explicitly condemn acts of terror and violence directed against civilians. The incitement to violence must stop immediately.

I reiterate my call to the parties for the status quo at the Holy Sites in Jerusalem to be respected and upheld, taking into account the special and historic role of the Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

I am deeply concerned by the adoption by the Knesset of Israel of two laws concerning UNRWA. These laws, if implemented, could prevent UNRWA from continuing its essential work in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which would have devastating consequences for Palestine refugees, considering that there is no viable alternative to UNRWA which could adequately meet the needs. I again urge Israel to act consistently with its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and its other obligations under international law, including under international humanitarian law and those concerning privileges and immunities of the United Nations. National legislation cannot alter those obligations.

Madam President,

It is vital that the international community provide immediate support to the Palestinian Government to address its fiscal challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza. We must establish political and security frameworks that can address the humanitarian catastrophe, start early recovery, rebuild Gaza, and lay the groundwork for a political process to end the occupation and establish a viable two-State solution as soon as possible. It is vital that these frameworks facilitate a legitimate Palestinian government that can re-unify Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, politically, economically and administratively while reversing the steadily deteriorating dynamics throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Any attempt to establish settlements in Gaza must be firmly rejected. There must be no attempt to reduce or annex the territory of Gaza in whole or in part.

The devastation and misery of the past year have reinforced once again a simple truth: Palestinians and Israelis can no longer wait to establish a viable political horizon. Now is the time to lay the foundations for a better future for Palestinians, Israelis and the broader region. Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community must urgently take steps that will enable the parties to re-engage on the long-delayed political path to achieving a two-State solution.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State of which Gaza is an integral part, – living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.