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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Madam President, Members of the Security Council,

I address you at a time when the risk of escalation in Israel and Palestine is palpable. The past month has witnessed unconscionable crimes of hatred by extremist elements, reprehensible retaliatory violence, provocations at Jerusalem's holy sites, and a worrying increase in rockets launched from Gaza towards Israel.

The coming days will mark the one-year anniversary of the conclusion of last year's devastating Gaza conflict – a conflict from which the Palestinians of Gaza have yet to recover. One year on, their continued suffering highlights the inadequacy of our collective response to date. Thus, I begin my briefing to you today with an appeal to political, military, community and religious leaders on all sides to work together to reduce tensions, reject violence and prevent extremists from escalating the situation and hijacking the political agenda.

Madam President,

I reiterate the Secretary-General's strong condemnation of the horrific terrorist arson attack against a Palestinian family in the occupied West Bank village of Duma, during the early hours of 31 July, apparently committed by extremist Jewish settlers. The attack killed 18 month-old Ali Dawabsha; his father died of his wounds five days later, while his mother and four year-old brother continue fighting for their lives.

The Secretary-General welcomes the strong condemnations of the attack by Prime Minister Netanyahu and other Israeli officials, as well as by political and religious leaders from across the spectrum. At the same time, we denounce calls made by Hamas and by Islamic Jihad to escalate violence and to carry out revenge attacks. At a moment of heightened emotions and anger, such incitement can only serve to

bring about more tragedy. I urge the Israeli Government to promptly bring the perpetrators of this heinous act to justice.

I further note the 2 July Israeli Cabinet decision to strengthen the legal and institutional means of addressing terrorism by Jewish extremists and to ensure that the new anti-terrorism law applies equally to all perpetrators. However, I am concerned by the decision to extend the use of prolonged administrative detention, which the United Nations has consistently opposed. This practice, whether used against Palestinians or Israelis, is incompatible with international human rights standards and should be ended. All administrative detainees should be promptly charged or released.

I underscore that this attack, like so many others over the years, including against Israeli settlers, occurred in the context of a chronic lack of adequate law enforcement in the West Bank. Such violence is possible because of the environment created as a result of Israel's decades-long policy of illegal settlement activities.

Madam President,

The goal is clear. But over 20 years of failed negotiations have bred mistrust and, worse, the slow and painful withering of hope. In such a contentious environment, restoring confidence, before a return to realistic negotiations, is a must. What is needed now is a comprehensive approach on three levels – on the ground, in the region, and with the international community – to alter fundamentally the current negative dynamics and begin to shape a clear and positive pathway towards peace.

On the Israeli side, this should reflect significant policy shifts to enable the growth of Palestine's sovereignty, economy and security. On the Palestinian side, unity is critical – the legitimate Palestinian authority must represent all of Palestine and all Palestinians. I am encouraged by the increased cooperation between the Quartet and key regional actors and I fully support enhanced exploration of how the region, including through the Arab Peace Initiative, may contribute to resolving the conflict. The Secretary-General supports the Quartet's work to connect these various levels of engagement.

Madam President,

In the West Bank, after failed attempts to form a Palestinian National Unity Government, a Government reshuffle resulted in the appointment of five new

ministers on 31 July. The process was met with some resistance among Palestinian factions.

The reporting period was marked by continued violence, including incidents causing Palestinian casualties as well as a number of attacks against Israelis and Israeli security forces. Israeli security forces conducted some 188 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrest of some 292 Palestinians. A total of 203 Palestinians were injured, including 40 children and seven women. Six Palestinians were shot and killed by Israeli security forces, including a 17-year-old. Twelve members of the Israeli security forces were also wounded, with no fatalities reported. I reiterate that any use of force by Israeli security forces in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must be consistent with international human rights law.

Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers in the West Bank resulted in injuries to nine Palestinians, including four children, and seven Israelis. In an apparent retaliatory attack for the administrative detention of several Jewish extremists, on 12 August, another arson attack was reported in Ein Samia, where a tent belonging to a Bedouin was set on fire and completely burned, reportedly by Jewish extremists.

Israel's practice of demolishing homes and structures also continued. This month, 86 structures, including 26 residential structures, were demolished in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, displacing 177 Palestinians, including 89 children. On 17 August 22 structures were demolished in four communities in the planned E-1 area affecting in particular vulnerable Palestinian Bedouins which displaced 78 people, including 49 children. This was the largest number of Palestinians displaced in the West Bank in one day in nearly three years. And yesterday, 27 structures, including eight residential structures were demolished resulting in 42 displaced, including 27 children in the Jordan Valley Area C community of Fasayil al Wusta. The Secretary-General calls on the Israeli authorities to halt demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, to revoke plans that would result in the forcible transfer of Palestinian communities, and to implement an inclusive planning and zoning regime that will enable Palestinians' residential and community development needs to be met.

Madam President,

Recent changes in Israeli law and policy affecting the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem risk compounding the already-precarious human rights situation.

On 30 July, the Knesset amended the Prisons Act to allow a judge to order force-feeding of a hunger-striking prisoner to prevent imminent death, if recommended by a doctor. While Israel insists that it has established a careful legal mechanism in order to strictly limit this means of enforcement to instances where a threat to life exists, numerous human rights and medical bodies have questioned whether force feeding meets international standards of medical ethics, safety and human rights. Careful consideration should be placed on addressing the underlying human rights concerns which lead prisoners to such extreme protests, including prolonged administrative detention.

We are aware that the status of prolonged hunger striker Mohammed Allan may be evolving.

On 20 July, the Knesset also amended the Israeli Penal Code to extend harsh punishments for stone-throwing at moving vehicles. It allows for sentences of up to 20 years. The law is likely to affect children disproportionately.

In another legal development, the Israeli Supreme Court legitimized the applicability of the Absentees' Property Law of 1951 to Palestinian property in East Jerusalem when the owner is in the West Bank. This move allows for the expropriation of property from Palestinians who have become absentee through no fault of their own.

Madam President, Members of the Security Council,

Turning to Gaza, the unrelenting pressure on the socio-economic situation due to the continued closures, the lack of electricity and water and the slow pace of reconciliation, continue to feed the discontent of the population.

While much remains to be done, I welcome some positive developments on reconstruction, particularly under the Residential Stream of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, which enables the reconstruction of fully destroyed homes. Since its launch in June, and thanks to financial assistance from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Germany 2,250 families have been processed, of which some 630 have already purchased construction materials.

Although the mechanism is working, current resources are insufficient to meet the massive demand for assistance. In a recent letter to the Foreign Ministers that participated in the October 2014 Cairo conference on Gaza's reconstruction, the Special Coordinator urged donor countries to fulfil their pledges.

We welcome Egypt's opening of the Rafah crossing for several days this week. The Secretary-General encourages the Egyptian authorities to allow the Rafah crossing to be opened on a more regular basis, taking into account Egypt's security concerns.

Security incidents in Gaza continued to be recorded. The Secretary-General condemns the 24 rockets fired at Israel by Palestinian militants in Gaza, one of which impacted Israel, with no reported injuries. Palestinian militants also test fired seven rockets at the sea. Israeli security forces conducted four airstrikes inside Gaza. On 7 August, in response to a rocket fired from Gaza, the Israeli Air Force struck a Hamas training site, injuring four Palestinians. In incidents that took place following the Duma arson attack, a 17-year-old Palestinian was shot dead and two others were injured by Israeli security forces in the vicinity of the wall.

Madam President,

The Secretary-General is relieved by the announcement today by Commissioner-General Krähenbühl that the UNRWA schools will indeed open in time. The Secretary-General joins the Commissioner-General in expressing appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden and the Slovak Republic. The governments of host countries, in particular, the State of Palestine; the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; and Lebanon, have spared no effort during this challenging period. The Secretary-General extends his sincere gratitude for their support. A sustainable solution must still be found to address UNRWA's long-term funding needs so that we can ensure the provision of basic services such as education are no longer at risk for all Palestine refugees.

Madam President,

A few words about the situation in Lebanon and Syria.

In Syria, the air raids by Syrian forces on a market place in the town of Douma, which reportedly killed and injured over 300 civilians on 15 and 16 August, was one of the bloodiest since the conflict started in March 2011. This would be yet

one more crime for which those responsible must be held accountable. Hostilities must end and the parties must show genuine commitment to resolving this conflict through an irreversible political transition by engaging in the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, as endorsed by the Security Council Presidential Statement.

In Lebanon, political differences continued to hinder the proper functioning of Lebanese state institutions despite Prime Minister Salam's commendable efforts to run the government. We continue to call on Lebanon's leaders to act urgently and responsibly by filling the presidential vacuum without further delay. The situation along the Blue Line and in UNIFIL's area of operations has remained calm, despite Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis.

Madam President,

In conclusion, the recurrent violent incidents and radicalization in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza threaten to further destabilize an already tense environment. The incidents share a common thread: they are the inevitable product of the failure to make the tough choices necessary to resolve this conflict. They are the ramifications of the failure to prioritize the pursuit of a shared future built on trust rather than fear. We can no longer accept this reality. It is time to reverse the perilous tide that we are now facing and restore, to Israelis and Palestinians alike, the hope that is in danger of being stifled by those promoting their hate-driven agendas.

Thank you.