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PROCESS**

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

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Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,

At the outset, on behalf of the UN family in Jerusalem, I would like to extend my deepest condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims of the abhorrent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and the Sinai. These tragic events serve to reinforce the reality that the extremism and terrorism that has infected many parts of the Middle East is not constrained by borders. It can strike anywhere, anytime, and poses a grave threat to international peace and security. Against this backdrop we cannot separate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from this global threat. Establishing a Palestinian state, while addressing Israel's substantial security concerns, would yield major dividends not only for Israelis and Palestinians alike, but for the entire region.

Over the past month, there were 36 reported attacks, including stabbings or attempted stabbings, shootings, or car-rammings, by Palestinians against Israelis in Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They left seven Israelis dead and 36 injured, including today's attack in Tel Aviv and an attack just now in the settlement of Gush Etzion. The two apparent sniper attacks in Hebron on 10 November, which would be the first of their kind since the current escalation began, and the brutal drive-by shooting south of Hebron, on 13 November which killed a father and his son are worrying signs of escalation from the use of knives to firearms. Of the suspected Palestinian assailants, 25 were killed.

According to OCHA, during the reporting period, in clashes across the West Bank and Gaza 11 Palestinians were killed and over 3,500 injured, with seven others injured in settler-related violence.

I must, once again, reiterate the United Nations' resolute condemnation of all terrorist attacks and I call on political, community and religious leaders on all sides to speak out against terror and all forms of violence.

Mr. President,

Since our last briefing, the epicentre of violence has moved to Hebron, which like Jerusalem, has holy sites revered by both Muslims and Jews and has been a cause of friction for decades.

Hebron is the heart of the Palestinian economy. Its vitality is unmistakable and its vast potential for growth is broadly recognised. It is the West Bank's largest city with a population of some 170,000. It is also its industrial and commercial engine. Annual exports to Israel amount to over 240 million dollars. The city's continued development is, thus, integral to the economic viability of a future Palestinian state.

A walk through the Old City, however, evokes a starkly different image: streets barricaded and unnaturally cut off; houses emptied of life and activity; lives caged in by metal grids and turnstiles.

Over the past twenty years the city's Palestinian and Jewish populations have been physically separated. The economic impact of the violence raging in and around Hebron has been severe for the entire district. Once thriving markets are now eerily abandoned. Over the last decade hundreds of shops located in the Israeli controlled "H2" area have been shut down either by military order or due to lack of business.

I plan to return soon to Hebron with the UN Country Team to discuss with the Governor and the Mayor what programmes we can initiate to support the recovery of the area and to support community dialogue.

Mr. President,

Ending the violence and de-escalating the overall situation in Jerusalem, Hebron and other areas must remain our immediate priority. But as the Secretary-General has consistently stated, this cannot be achieved through security measures alone. All parties must play a part in implementing measures that could have a positive impact. These include:

1. Immediate efforts by all political, religious and community leaders to stop the hate-fuelled incitement that glorifies the murder of Jews or that brands all Palestinians as terrorists;

2. Recent understandings on upholding the status quo at Haram-Al Sharif / Temple Mount must also be implemented;
3. It is necessary to address the apparent impunity for settler violence against Palestinians;
4. The sanctity of burial rituals must be recognised and Palestinians must be allowed to bury their deceased without unnecessary delay;
5. Within Hebron restrictions must be eased and Hebron's main commercial artery, al-Shuhada Street, should be reopened in accordance with the 1994 Hebron Protocols;
6. Taking steps to bolster security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to prevent any further deterioration of the situation;
7. Finally, the use of firearms by Israeli security forces should be employed only when less extreme means are insufficient to address an imminent threat of death or serious injury.

Mr. President,

Dealing with the threats that kill the prospect of a two-state solution is also critical. The reality in which a settler state is emerging in the occupied West Bank must be reversed if hope is to be reignited.

I am concerned by the decision announced on November 18th to issue tenders for 436 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo, the first such tender announcement in over a year. Equally worrisome are the five punitive demolitions of family houses of alleged perpetrators of terrorist acts carried out by Israel over the past week. I reiterate that settlement activity and punitive demolitions are illegal under international law. They also deepen mistrust between the parties and further aggravate an already highly tense environment.

In a troubling development, Israeli forces have carried out several raids on hospitals, including at Al Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem and at al-Ahli hospital in Hebron. My deputy and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory has called on the authorities to respect health facilities and the right of all individuals to receive health care.

Mr. President,

During the reporting period, the security situation in Gaza was relatively calm compared to the West Bank, despite three fatalities as a result of clashes near the border fence. Having said that however, seven rockets were fired toward Israel, three of which impacted Israeli territory, without causing fatalities. Palestinian militants also test fired 14 rockets at the sea. The IDF responded with six airstrikes and three limited incursions into the Gaza Strip. On at least four occasions, Israeli forces opened fire at Palestinians at sea, resulting in injuries to at least two persons. In a worrying development Israel intercepted the attempted illegal transfer of 450 litres of TDI (Toluene di-isocyanate) a hazardous substance that can be used for the production of a large quantity of rockets.

I call on all factions on the ground in Gaza not to engage in activities that risk destabilising the situation and undermining the reconstruction process. Particularly as the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) continues to function effectively. In October, a new stream was introduced to simplify access to construction materials to finish housing units, which had been started – but not completed – prior to last year’s conflict. Under this stream, over 6,000 applicants have so far been introduced into the system.

In a welcome development, as of mid-October, Israel removed aggregate from the list of dual-use materials. The good news, however, has been tempered by the addition of other items, including timber, to the list this year. These additions hinder Gaza’s reconstruction and I call on the Israeli authorities to reconsider their decision.

Mr. President,

Based on developments on the ground, the current conditions make a return to negotiations a challenging prospect.

Trust must be rebuilt and, for that, bold and significant steps on the ground must be taken in order to tangibly improve lives and irreversibly move towards the end of occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

In the period before an eventual return to negotiations, the parties and their international partners must pursue measures that strengthen institutions, economic prospects and security. This will require substantial policy changes on the ground by Israel.

The Middle East Quartet remains the principle international entity to support and encourage negotiations towards a comprehensive and just resolution of the conflict. The Quartet envoys plan to travel to the region in the coming period to engage directly with the parties.

Meanwhile, we continue to look to the Security Council for any additional guidance on developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict.

Mr. President,

Turning to the wider region, you were briefed yesterday on developments in Lebanon, including in Beirut. I will therefore not add anything on that issue.

Let me say, however, the Syrian conflict for its part continues to take a devastating toll on the Syrian people and beyond and poses an even graver threat to international peace and security. For all of these reasons, the Secretary-General is greatly encouraged that in Vienna the international community has finally re-engaged in searching for a political settlement to the Syrian conflict based on the transition elements of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. It is important that key international and regional players follow through on their commitments to actively insist on their Syrian allies to engage constructively in all of these areas. This is vital in order to give political backing, leverage and credibility to our efforts.

Turning to the Golan, the situation remains volatile with clashes between the Syrian government forces and armed groups, shelling and occasional airstrikes continuing in the areas of separation and limitation, in particular in Ufaniyah, Jabbata Al Khashab and Al Baath in the central part of the area of separation. In the context of these clashes, fire from the Bravo side has impacted across the ceasefire line. On 13 October, the Israel Defence Forces notified UNDOF that they had retaliated to spill-over fire from the Bravo side by firing three missiles at Syrian armed forces positions in the area of limitation. UNDOF did not observe the alleged firing from the Bravo side. These events have the potential to escalate tensions between Israel and Syria, jeopardising the ceasefire between the two countries. Under these challenging circumstances, however, UNDOF continues to use its best efforts to carry out its mandate.

Mr. President,

In closing, let me say I refuse to be convinced that Israelis and Palestinians want to live “by the sword” and in a state of perpetual violence. We owe it to

the people of this troubled land, who, despite endless setbacks and disappointments, have continued to maintain hope that negotiated peace can be realised.

I can assure you that the Secretary-General remains steadfast in his support of any effort to restore the hope that a two-state solution can be achieved through negotiations.

But the long road ahead requires leadership. Leadership that has been glaringly absent to date.

Thank you.