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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2334 (2016)

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Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

Today I will devote my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to presenting, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the tenth report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which covers the period between 25 March and 10 June 2019.

Let me reiterate that developments during this reporting period cannot be divorced from the broader context: Israel's continued military occupation of Palestinian territory and settlement activity; Hamas' continuing hold over Gaza and its militant activity; the persistent threat of war; unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts and severe challenges to the fiscal viability of the Palestinian Authority. All these developments collectively erode the prospects of a two-state solution.

I would like to also highlight, from the beginning, that UNRWA continues to face significant financial challenges. It is now operating on the basis of a projected shortfall of USD 211 million on its USD 1.2 billion budget for the year and is facing serious cash flow issues. This could impact operations, including UNRWA's ability to maintain food assistance to over 1 million Palestine refugees in Gaza. I note that UNRWA's annual Pledging Conference will take place on 25 June here in New York and call upon Member States to continue their support.

Mr. President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem" and to "fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard". No steps have been taken to this effect during the reporting period.

During this period, Israeli authorities advanced, approved or tendered nearly 6,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This constitutes the largest settlement advancement in two years and includes plans for some 4,450 units in Area C settlements, of which at least 200 have reached the final stage of approval.

These plans include 700 units in Efrat and 600 units in Ma'ale Adumim, two large settlements in strategic locations that hamper the possibility for a contiguous Palestinian state and North-South,

East-West connectivity. Another of the plans would retroactively regularize, under Israeli law, the illegal outpost of Haresha by incorporating it into the existing Talmon settlement.

Tenders were also announced for some 950 housing units in Area C settlements and for 550 units in East Jerusalem.

About 20 per cent of all the plans advanced or tendered are in settlements in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

In addition, on 3 June, Israel's National Infrastructure Committee rejected a series of objections against a controversial plan to construct a cable car between West Jerusalem and the Old City and submitted the plan for government approval. This plan has raised concerns among Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and Israeli NGOs that it seeks to deepen Israeli control over the area.

Mr. President,

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities also continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, during the reporting period. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, 92 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished or seized, resulting in the displacement of 104 people. As the Middle East Quartet already highlighted in its 2016 report, these permits are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. Demolitions in East Jerusalem also peaked in April, reaching 58, more than any other single month since OCHA started monitoring in 2009.

The situation in Wadi Yasul area, in the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem, is also of concern. Eleven people, including seven children and two women, were displaced on 30 April, after their homes were demolished. Some 50 legal cases concerning other homes and structures in this area are pending in Israeli courts.

Punitive demolitions also continued during the reporting period with Israeli authorities demolishing four homes belonging to families of Palestinian perpetrators of various attacks. As a result, three families comprising 13 people, including six children, have been displaced.

In addition, the Israeli army continues to conduct military training exercises in areas designated by the Israeli army as firing zones in the Jordan Valley of the West Bank. As a result, around 184 Palestinians, 80 percent of whom are women and children, from the Tell al-Khashaba, Lifjim and Humsa al-Baqai'a communities were forced to temporarily evacuate their homes on eleven occasions, including during Ramadan. On 22 May, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a petition against the recurrent displacement of these communities.

Mr. President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) also "calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction". However, the reporting period saw a very dangerous escalation of violence in Gaza, and continued violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Last month, I reported to the Council that over the course of 48 hours, on 4 and 5 May, Gaza saw the worst escalation since 2014, with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad launching over 700 projectiles towards Israel.

In Israel, several houses, two kindergartens, a school and a hospital were directly hit by rockets fired from Gaza. In these incidents, 4 Israelis were killed and 200 injured.

In Gaza, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that it hit over 300 militant targets. Twenty-one residential buildings were hit by Israeli airstrikes, one of which was a residential building in northern Gaza. Twenty-seven Palestinians, including two children were killed and 150 injured.

On 30 March, 50,000 Palestinians demonstrated, largely peacefully, marking the anniversary of the “Great March of Return” and even though violence at the Gaza perimeter fence has declined, some nine Palestinians, including three children, were killed by Israeli fire during the demonstrations in the reporting period.

Incendiary kites, balloons and other devices also continued to be launched from Gaza, starting fires in southern Israel. At least 70 fires were reported, resulting in the burning of over 30 hectares of land during this period.

The reporting period also saw continued violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Four Palestinians, including one child, were killed by Israeli Security Forces (ISF), including during demonstrations, clashes and various security operations. Two Israelis were injured by a Palestinian in a stabbing attack.

On 27 March, a 17-year-old Palestinian medic was shot by ISF near al-Duheisha refugee camp in Bethlehem, dying of his wounds later. On 24 April, following the arrest, tying and blindfolding of a 15-year-old Palestinian boy for allegations of stone-throwing, IDF soldiers shot him twice in his lower body as he attempted to escape while still blindfolded.

On 31 May, in a stabbing attack, a Palestinian severely injured an Israeli civilian and a child in the Old City of Jerusalem. The perpetrator was shot dead by the ISF. Later on the same day a 16-year old boy was killed and a 21-year old man was injured by ISF as they attempted to cross the separation barrier between West Bank and Jerusalem near Bethlehem.

The situation at the holy sites, Mr. President, also remained tense during the reporting period. For the first time in decades, Israel’s Jerusalem Day commemoration coincided with the final days of Ramadan. Israeli authorities had announced that Jews would not be allowed to visit the compound towards the end of Ramadan in keeping with practice, but later declared that limited visits would be permitted based on the circumstances on the ground. Against this backdrop, on 2 June, clashes erupted between Israeli police forces and Palestinians inside the compound.

Settler-related violence also continued during the reporting period. According to OCHA, one Palestinian was killed, 32 were injured and 41 incidents of damage to property by settlers were reported.

On 17 May, on two separate occasions, Israelis were filmed torching Palestinian lands in Nablus, and the ISF later confirmed that one of the perpetrators was an off-duty IDF soldier, who has since been suspended, pending a police investigation.

In the same period, OCHA reported that seven Israelis were injured and 22 incidents of damage to property by Palestinians have been reported.

Mr. President,

During the reporting period, there were some developments regarding ongoing cases before Israeli authorities, pertaining to the perpetrators of acts of violence. On 14 May, the Israeli minor accused of killing Aisha al-Rabi, the Palestinian mother of eight, in 2018 was released on bail to house arrest with electronic monitoring. Prosecutors also reached a plea bargain with the Israeli suspected of conspiring to carry out the 2015 arson attack that killed the Dawabsheh family. According to the deal, the suspect, who was a minor at the time of the attack, will plead guilty to conspiracy to arson out of racist motives, as well as for other hate crimes. His trial over the remaining charge of membership in a terrorist organization will proceed.

Meanwhile, on 15 May, the Israeli Military Criminal Investigation Unit closed its investigation into the killing of a double amputee at the Gaza fence demonstrations in December 2017, concluding that there was no evidence that the man was killed by direct Israeli army fire.

Several Palestinians were also prosecuted for involvement in attacks on Israelis, including one indicted for planning under Hamas' instructions a suicide car bombing on Israel's election day and two other men for planning a shooting attack at Tel Aviv's beach.

Mr. President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls upon the parties "to refrain from provocative actions, incitement, and inflammatory rhetoric." Unfortunately, such actions continued during the reporting period.

On 15 May, a senior Hamas official addressed a rally in Gaza and warned Israelis that the "day of your slaughter, extermination and annihilation is near" and called on them to leave and search for a place "in Europe...or in hell, or in the sea." The official Hamas television channel also repeatedly continued to glorify perpetrators of terror attacks against Israelis, and broadcast songs with graphic lyrics encouraging viewers to blow up Jews. Fatah's official social media pages also continued to glorify perpetrators of terrorist attacks.

Israeli officials also continued to make highly provocative statements. An outgoing Member of Knesset confronted families of Palestinian prisoners and threatened to "eliminate" them and "bury [them] with pigs." Another politician called on the Prime Minister to allow hunger striking Palestinian prisoners to die, while many boasted about the damage Israel was causing in strikes in Gaza in response to rocket attacks.

Mr. President,

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for “affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperiling the two-State solution.” Some positive developments were witnessed during the reporting period, most notably with regard to addressing the critical humanitarian and socio-economic needs in Gaza, but they were significantly overshadowed by the negative trends.

The international community has continued its efforts to address the dire situation in Gaza. The Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) met in Brussels on 30 April and reiterated its support for the implementation of a package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions in Gaza by the United Nations.

On 7 May, the State of Qatar announced its continued provision of financial assistance to the Palestinian people including a pledge of USD 480 million, of which USD 180 million is intended for humanitarian assistance to Gaza, some of it to be implemented by the United Nations, USD 250 million as loans for the Palestinian Government, and USD 50 million as grants for projects in the West Bank. This commitment has made a very positive impact on efforts to de-escalate the situation in Gaza.

However, what remains is the necessity to find a sustainable and comprehensive solution, that addresses the dire economic and humanitarian conditions and establishes the conditions for a lasting peace.

In this regard, the UN has enough funding to extend the fuel programme that will provide electricity to Gaza until the end of the year. In parallel to this effort, we are actively working on more sustainable solutions to the energy sector.

The UN is also advancing on the creation of dignified jobs for Gaza’s men and women. The ongoing temporary employment programmes, which UNDP and UNRWA have started with Swiss and Qatari funds, are already making a critical difference to people’s lives. So far, more than 7,500 people have been employed in temporary jobs, with at least 2,500 more likely to follow soon. The program we hope, will continue to expand.

Nevertheless, as I said, negative trends continue to overshadow positive developments.

In Gaza, despite the intensified efforts, the humanitarian, security and political situation remains deeply worrying, as the Egyptian brokered October (2017) intra-Palestinian agreement, including the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, remains unimplemented.

The situation in Gaza was also worsened by the temporary closures of the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings and a series of reductions in the fishing zone introduced by Israel as tensions continued to fluctuate. Seized fishing vessels have yet to be returned to their owners by the IDF.

The reporting period also saw serious movement and access constraints being placed on national staff from UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in Gaza by

Israel. Some 250 personnel, including 149 UN staff and 103 INGO staff, are prohibited from obtaining Israeli-issued permits for travel from Gaza to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem for a period of 12 months. These numbers reflect a significant increase from 2017, when only 40 UN staff faced a similar prohibition.

The reporting period also saw no resolution of the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis, following Israel's decision to withhold part of the clearance revenues of the Palestinian Authority. This was followed by the Palestinian leadership's refusal to accept any transfers from Israel less than the full amounts owed to it. The fiscal crisis and related austerity measures are severely impacting the Palestinian economy with the outlook for the private sector remaining very bleak.

Mr. President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) called on Member States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967." We are not aware of any such steps taken during the reporting period.

The resolution also called upon "all parties to continue, inter alia, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations." No credible efforts have been made in this direction either.

Mr. President,

In closing, I would like to share some broad observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

1. The expansion of Israeli settlements has no legal effect and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, as stated in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). It must cease immediately and completely. Settlement expansion in occupied East Jerusalem, which further undermines the viability of the two-state solution with Jerusalem as the future capital of both Israel and Palestine, is particularly concerning. During the Israeli election campaign, statements were made by some politicians expressing support for the unilateral annexation of all or parts of the West Bank. Such a prospect would be devastating to the potential of reviving negotiations, regional peace, and to the very essence of the two-state solution.
2. The persistent threat of demolitions and displacement of Palestinians in Area C, East Jerusalem and Hebron's H2 area is also of concern. Only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem is designated for new Palestinian residential construction; an estimated one third of housing units in East Jerusalem are built without a permit; and an estimated 13,000 demolition orders issued against Palestinian-owned structures in Area C since 1988 are still outstanding.
3. Demolitions and displacement in Area C and East Jerusalem affect women and girls in particular. Women have to shoulder additional daily responsibilities for ensuring their own survival and that of their families in unfamiliar circumstances. A 2018 report by UN-Women in Palestine has shown that the burden of family responsibility, coupled with the anguish and trauma of sudden loss, takes a huge toll on the women's health and wellbeing.

4. Israel has declared some 18 per cent of the West Bank as firing zones for military training, where civilian presence is prohibited by military order during training exercises. There are 38 Palestinian herding communities with a population of over 6,200 located within these areas who are impacted by a range of measures, including evacuations. There are also eleven Israeli outposts located either partially or completely in the designated firing zones, which have not been subjected to similar evacuations. The practice of evacuating Palestinian communities located in these areas should cease.
5. The situation in Gaza continues to be perilous, with the persistent threat of another major escalation and the continued suffering of the population. It is tragic and unacceptable that people continue to be killed and injured unnecessarily during demonstrations, by indiscriminate rocket attacks or by other hostile acts. The launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian populations is prohibited by international humanitarian law and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad must cease this practice immediately. Consistently with international human rights standards, Israeli security forces have the responsibility to exercise restraint and should only use lethal force against demonstrators when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.
6. I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians, call on all to refrain from violence and on leaders to clearly condemn such acts when they occur, as called for by resolution 2334 (2016). All perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes.
7. The situation of the Palestinian population and human rights defenders in the H2 area of Hebron following the withdrawal of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) remains worrying. UN staff and the diplomatic community have also been harassed and intimidated since TIPH's departure. Humanitarian actors and human rights defenders must be allowed to carry out their activities freely and safely and to ensure that any attacks are thoroughly, impartially and independently investigated and the perpetrators held accountable.
8. I am deeply concerned about developments relating to the clearance of revenues of the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Government is facing a very serious financial crisis which, unless resolved, risks triggering a series of dangerous developments that will be difficult to mitigate and contain, including the potential collapse of the Authority and undermining of 25 years of investment by the international community in supporting a two-state solution under the Oslo process. I echo the call by Palestinian PM Mohammed Shtayyeh upon Israel to restore the revenue transfers in full and call on both sides to engage in a constructive manner to ensure compliance with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations.
9. I remain deeply concerned, Mr. President, by the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. Funding received to date has enabled the temporary increase in energy supply in Gaza. However, sustainable solutions for the energy crisis must be advanced without delay. At the same time, while acknowledging its legitimate security concerns, Israel must continue to ease the restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and

from Gaza, with the goal of ultimately lifting them. It is crucial to ensure that the current calm be sustained in order to gradually introduce longer-term projects that will support Gaza's development.

10. I reiterate my call on all Palestinian factions to actively engage with Egypt on reconciliation. Despite the challenges, it is critical that these efforts continue. The United Nations remains steadfast in its support to Egypt's efforts in this regard, and I call on all Palestinian factions to take concrete steps to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic, and legitimate national government. Gaza is, and must remain, an integral part of a future Palestinian state as part of the two-State solution.
11. I take note of the upcoming workshop convened by the United States and the Kingdom of Bahrain, to discuss the potential for economic investments and initiatives that would be made possible by a future Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement and a solution to the final status issues. Humanitarian and economic support for the population is crucial to creating an environment conducive to viable negotiations. However, I must emphasize that the conflict cannot be resolved through economic measures alone. Such steps can only be complementary to a legitimate political process that ends the occupation and addresses all final status issues in accordance with relevant UN resolutions.

Mr. President,

In closing, let me reiterate that I remain deeply concerned by the state of our collective efforts and the weakening of the international consensus to achieve an end to the occupation and the realization of a negotiated two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the 1967 lines, international law, relevant UN resolutions and previous agreements.

In the absence of any progress to resolve all final status issues, creating conditions for the parties to return to meaningful bilateral negotiations remains critical. Yet we must be clear. On its own, no amount of humanitarian or economic support will resolve the conflict. It requires political solutions. In Gaza, our efforts are continuing to try to de-escalate the situation and provide a semblance of hope to the population, but Gaza's future will rest on the ability of its leaders to summon the political will to devise concrete and sustainable solutions to this crisis. At the same time, the West Bank continues to simmer as it faces a range of challenges that threaten to upend decades of Palestinian and international efforts to support a Palestinian state.

Thank you.