

Secretary-General's Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East [As delivered]

New York, 21 April 2015

Your Excellency Mr. Nasser Judeh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Affairs of Jordan, and President of the Security Council for the month of April, Distinguished Members of the Council, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to the Kingdom of Jordan for organizing today's session.

It comes at yet another crucial period in the evolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as the whole region is threatened by violent conflicts and extremism.

Over the years, we have seen determined efforts to achieve a comprehensive, negotiated peace based on a two-state solution.

Instead of peace, however, there have been decades of missed opportunities and failures that have come at an enormous human cost. The prospect of a two-state solution continues to recede, with potentially explosive consequences.

In the coming weeks, a new Israeli Government will be formed. I strongly urge the incoming Government to reaffirm Israel's commitment to the two-state solution and to take credible steps to foster an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations, including a freeze of settlement activity.

I welcome the agreement reached last week between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel, under which Israel has now transferred more than \$470 million in revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. I wish to underline, however, that the recurrent withholding of such revenues is counterproductive, and seriously undermines the ability of the Government of Palestine to carry out its responsibilities. I urge the parties to find a sustainable solution on tax collection in line with the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords.

Mr. President,

Seven months since my last visit to Gaza, I continue to be concerned by the fragile security situation, the lack of progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the pace of reconstruction.

Gaza is facing a crushing financial crisis. Public sector employees remain unpaid. The impact of the conflict and of extreme poverty on Palestinians in Gaza has been severe. I urge the international community to support a second humanitarian payment to Palestinian civil servants in Gaza as an integral part of the necessary and agreed crucial reforms.

I welcome ongoing efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation. The Government of National Consensus must assume its leadership of Gaza, including control of border crossings.

Until the crossings are fully re-opened within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860, the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism continues to serve as a critical tool to alleviate the suffering of Gaza's people.

To date, the Mechanism has enabled approximately 70 per cent of households in need of shelter repairs to procure the necessary materials. Additionally, 60 of 130 projects funded by the international community and the private sector have been approved by Israel, with six of these currently under way.

These are promising developments, yet the needs remain enormous. Despite the generosity of some donors, critical funding gaps threaten stability. Humanitarian agencies are struggling to raise the \$720 million needed for temporary shelters for 100,000 internally displaced people. Without immediate funding, the World Food Programme will be forced to suspend its food assistance to 95,000 Palestinians in Gaza by July. Gaza's water and energy supply is also perilously unstable, with no long-term solution in sight. I again urge donors to fulfil pledges made in Cairo last October.

In the West Bank, clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians continue, along with the destruction of Palestinian-owned structures. Administrative detentions are increasing at an alarming pace, including the recent arrest and charges against a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Such realities feed frustration and tension in a vicious cycle that undermines the path to peace.

Both sides need to see more constructive actions, such as Israel's recent approval of a master plan for building 2,500 housing units and public buildings for the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. Such steps can help to reduce pressure. But they also need to lead to tangible results.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Council Members,

The international community must do more to promote a return to negotiations that will end nearly half a century of occupation and allow two states, Israel and Palestine, to live side by side in security and peace. I am encouraged by current discussions among Member States. The United Nations is committed to supporting such efforts.

Both sides face difficult choices. But one choice stands above all: whether to choose peace or the death, destruction and suffering that has defined the conflict for far too long. Too many lives have been lost, too many families have been destroyed, too many livelihoods have been shattered, and too much distrust has been sown.

Ultimately, the parties themselves must demonstrate the commitment and courage necessary to chart a viable course towards a better future.

Thank you. Shukran