

KHALED KHIARI
ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

23 July 2025

(As Delivered)

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

I brief you today as intensive talks continue over a potential Gaza ceasefire agreement and release of hostages. It is crucial that this leads to a permanent end to the war and the release of all hostages. It is long past time for the fighting to end, for hostages to return home, for adequate humanitarian aid to enter the Strip, and for recovery and reconstruction to begin in the context of a return to a political path towards a two-State solution.

While talks are ongoing, the horrific situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, with Israeli military operations and hostilities expanding throughout the Strip and the human toll mounting by the hour. This nightmare of historic proportions must end immediately.

The intensive Israeli military operations in Deir al Balah that has resulted in still further Palestinian displacement and direct strikes on two UN guesthouses has further exacerbated the dire situation and impeded humanitarian operations.

At least 1,891 Palestinians were killed in Gaza since my last briefing on 30 June, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Some 294 were reportedly killed while attempting to collect aid, including in the vicinity of militarized aid distribution sites. Israeli forces continued to issue evacuation orders, causing the repeated displacement of the population. Food insecurity and the broader humanitarian situation continued to worsen, despite the limited increase in the approval of entry of humanitarian supplies.

According to Israeli sources, 50 hostages, including one woman, are still being held captive by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, including 28 that are believed to be dead. Since 30 June, 13 IDF soldiers were killed in hostilities in Gaza. Palestinian militants also continued to sporadically and indiscriminately launch rockets towards Israel.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly condemned the continued holding of hostages by Hamas and other armed groups. Hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally.

I echo the Secretary-General's call for the repeated displacement of the population in Gaza to cease. Any forced displacement of the population from any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory would constitute a breach of international law obligations. International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties, at all times, and civilians must be protected.

On 17 July, the Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Gaza City was hit by an Israeli strike, which killed three and injured several others. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem condemned what it said was a targeted strike on the church and said the extensive damage had forced the evacuation of some 600 Palestinians seeking shelter in the compound, including children and those with special needs. The Secretary-General condemned the strike, stressing that attacks on places of worship are unacceptable. The incident also prompted widespread condemnation and calls for accountability from Member States. The Israeli Prime Minister's Office said that Israel "deeply regrets that a stray ammunition hit" the church and noted that Israel is investigating the incident.

On 10 July, EU High Representative Kallas announced that the EU and Israel had agreed on "significant steps" to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Since then, Kallas has reiterated the need for implementing the agreement, and that far more assistance is needed.

Since 9 July, following 130 days of a full blockade on fuel, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of a small number of fuel trucks through the Kerem Shalom/Karim Abu Salem crossing for medical facilities and other essential services. This amount is a fraction of what is required to run essential life-saving services in Gaza, where nearly every aspect of life depends on fuel.

Mr. President,

The situation in the occupied West Bank also remains deeply concerning, with high levels of violence driven by ongoing Israeli military operations, many involving civilian casualties and

extensive damage to homes and infrastructure, attacks by settlers against Palestinians, and attacks by Palestinians against Israelis.

On 1 July, Israeli Security Forces (ISF) shot and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian boy during an operation in Ramallah. He was reportedly shot from inside an armoured vehicle while walking with a relative.

On 10 July, two Palestinians shot and killed an Israeli man in the Gush Etzyon settlement. The Palestinian perpetrators were reportedly shot and killed by Israeli civilians at the scene.

On 11 July, Israeli settlers attacked and killed two Palestinians, one of them a visiting American citizen, near the village of Sinjil. One of them reportedly bled to death after being shot and the other was beaten with bats and sticks. On 16 July, US Ambassador to Israel Huckabee condemned the attack as a “terrorist act” and said Israel must ensure accountability.

Settlement advancement also continues, as numerous ministers and Members of Knesset intensified their calls on the Government to formally annex the West Bank or parts of it.

Further exacerbating the situation, the Palestinian Authority continues to face a dire fiscal crisis. The continued withholding of clearance revenues by Israel, amounting to 2.7 billion USD, has severely impacted the Palestinian Authority’s ability to meet its core obligations and sustain essential public services.

Since May, the Palestinian Authority has been unable to pay civil servant salaries, including those of the security forces, or provide social support. In an emergency session held on 17 July, the Palestinian Cabinet issued a stark warning that the Palestinian Authority may be forced to temporarily shut down vital sectors. Beyond the immediate risks to healthcare and basic service delivery, the Palestinian Authority also cautioned that similar disruptions across other institutions could erode social cohesion and undermine overall stability.

Unless urgently addressed, the deterioration of the Palestinian Authority’s fiscal and institutional situation could have catastrophic consequences, undermining the significant progress made over many years to build up Palestinian institutions. It is essential that the international community provide immediate support to address the Palestinian Authority’s fiscal challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza.

Mr. President,

In the midst of these multiple crises, UNRWA continues to face immense operational, political, and financial pressures. UNRWA's operations have been impeded in Gaza and the occupied West Bank; 330 Agency staff have been killed in the war in Gaza. I reiterate the Secretary-General's message that UNRWA cannot be replaced. And I cannot overstate enough how serious the Agency's financial crisis is. Based on current forecasts, there is not enough money to sustain all operations in all fields beyond August 2025.

Mr. President,

We remain concerned by the precarious situation in the region, marked by sporadic developments and recurrent volatility.

The situation along the Blue Line remains stable but fragile. The Israel Defense Forces maintain a presence north of the Blue Line, while unauthorized weapons belonging to non-state actors are still being uncovered in southern Lebanon by the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL. In this context, the Lebanese authorities have reiterated their commitment to bringing all arms under the exclusive control of the State. I urge both Lebanon and Israel to honor their obligations under the cessation of hostilities and to take concrete steps toward the full implementation of resolution 1701, restoring and sustaining stability in the area.

Syria is contending with another episode of violence that puts at risk its path to a peaceful, credible, orderly and inclusive political transition. Fighting in Suweida has resulted in hundreds of casualties, including Druze and Bedouin civilians. I reiterate the Secretary-General's unequivocal condemnation of all violence against civilians, including all acts that fan the flames of sectarian tensions and rob the people of Syria of their opportunity for peace and reconciliation after fourteen years of brutal conflict.

Against this backdrop, citing the violations against the Druze community and pledging to protect them, between 12 and 16 July, Israel resumed and intensified its airstrikes on Syrian territory.

It is essential that both Israel and Syria uphold the terms of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement to preserve the ceasefire between both parties, and refrain from any action that would further undermine it and the stability of the Golan region.

Mr. President,

Repeated and increasingly desperate appeals for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza have been made in this Council. Today, the situation inside the Strip – especially for women and children – is more dire than at any time in this crisis.

I implore the parties first and foremost to end this war, release all hostages and allow the Palestinian population in Gaza to receive the humanitarian assistance they so desperately need. I urge all Member States, including those in the Council, to take all possible steps to bring about this end.

Urgent steps are needed to reverse the deeply concerning trajectory we see across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Addressing the high levels of violence, including stopping the escalating settler attacks, in the occupied West Bank, alongside fiscal relief for the Palestinian Authority are key priorities.

There will be no lasting solution to this crisis without a political horizon to resolve the conflict and an end to the occupation.

The upcoming ministerial meeting to support a two-State solution, co-hosted by France and Saudi Arabia, is key to highlight international consensus around these goals, and reaffirm the principles sustaining the two-State solution. It is also a crucial moment to express support for the Palestinian Authority, identify ways to strengthen it, and encourage further reforms in line with its commitments. And to demonstrate, through tangible steps, our unwavering commitment to the two-State solution.

Our goal is clear: realizing the vision of two States – Israel and a 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.

Thank you.