

**NICKOLAY MLADENOV  
SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS  
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST**

**24 MARCH 2016**

Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,

The past month has been marked by some of the bloodiest incidents in this current wave of violence across Israel and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. On March 8th, 28 year-old American graduate student Taylor Force was killed in Jaffa during a vicious stabbing spree by a Palestinian that left a dozen Israelis and a number of tourists wounded. Less than an hour before that, two Israeli police officers were seriously wounded in a shooting attack near Jerusalem's Old City, while at almost the same time, an Israeli man was stabbed in an attack outside Tel Aviv; thankfully he survived. Israeli security forces killed the Palestinian perpetrators in the first two incidents while in the third; the attacker was reportedly killed by his own knife in a struggle with his attempted victim.

Mr. President,

Six months into this latest round of violence which has killed 30 Israelis and 198 Palestinians – with most of the Palestinians killed while reportedly carrying out knife, gun or car-ramming attacks – it is time that the international community moves beyond mere condemnations of such acts of terror and violence. It is time to send a clear message to both parties.

To the Palestinian people we need say very clearly-- stabbing someone in the street will not bring about a Palestinian state. Nor will praising and glorifying violence in the media. Those radicals determined to poison the minds of Palestinian youth must recognise their central role in the slow evisceration of the dream of Palestinian statehood.

By the same token, we must also be very clear- Israel should understand that building more walls, administrative detentions, punitive demolitions and movement restrictions, all breed anger among people who feel they are being collectively humiliated, punished and discriminated against.

Heavy-handed responses play into the hands of extremists, undermine moderate voices, and further deepen the gulf between the two sides.

Six months after the initial upsurge, it remains blatantly clear that security measures alone will not contain the forces that perpetuate violence.

Israelis and Palestinians must, at long last, face the stark realities that continue to drive the violence and hold the two-state solution hostage. First and foremost this means both sides actively taking steps that will demonstrate their commitment to, and create the con-

ditions for, an eventual return to negotiations to achieve a viable Palestinian state and ensure Israel's long-term security.

But, Mr. President,

We in the international community must also be clear both in our understanding of the conflict and our role in how to help resolve it. Our immediate priority must be ending the violence which is tearing Israelis and Palestinians apart when both face the rise of radicals among their own constituents. We only need to look at the rest of the region to see the dangers of religious extremism, sectarianism and terrorism.

But let us be also abundantly clear that the current security challenges cannot be addressed if we lose sight of the fundamental problems that have led us here -- the persistent inability to achieve a just and lasting solution that meets the national aspirations of the Palestinians and Israelis and allows them to live in two states, side by side, in peace, security and mutual recognition. This is why today we must once again play an important role by saying no, the prospect of a two-state solution is not dead, it remains the best pathway for peace.

The time has come to ring the alarm bells that the two-state solution is slipping from our fingers, that it is disappearing as the realities on the ground - driven by the ongoing settlement activities and confiscation of Palestinian land, as well as the continued lack of genuine Palestinian unity - make the prospect of a viable and independent Palestinian state less possible and less likely. The time has come for us to speak clearly as to the risks that undermine the two-state solution but also point to the way forward to a return to meaningful negotiations.

This is why the United Nations Secretary-General, the EU, the Russian Federation and the United States of America -- all members of the Middle East Quartet, have stepped up their efforts to break the political impasse. The Quartet Envoys have started our work on a report which will review the situation on the ground, identify the dangers to a two-state solution, and provide recommendations on the way forward. We remain seriously concerned that current trends -- including continued acts of violence against civilians, incitement, ongoing settlement activity, and the high rate of demolitions of Palestinian structures -- are dangerously imperiling the viability of a two-state solution.

And yet, Mr. President,

While the international community explores avenues for constructive engagement, there are trends that raise questions about the commitment of the parties to seriously address the main challenges blocking the progress towards peace.

Israel's settlement enterprise continues, despite broad international condemnation. In a particularly troubling development, on March 10th Israel classified 580 acres south of the city of Jericho, in the West Bank as so-called 'state land'. The area includes the 378 acres, reportedly approved, and widely condemned, in January of this year. This is evi-

dence of a continued policy of systematic consolidation of Israeli control of the occupied West Bank, in direct contravention of international law.

Since the early 1980s, Israeli authorities in the West Bank have adopted, based on a controversial interpretation of the Ottoman Land Law, a policy of declaring as “state land” land that is not otherwise registered as private. This has resulted in the State seizing control over certain areas where Palestinians claim ownership and has proved to be a precursor for settlement construction. Any such declaration, particularly of a large scale, raises justified concerns over further settlement expansion. Settlements are illegal under international law and I urge Israel to halt and reverse such decisions.

The demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures across the West Bank has also surged in 2016 with some 468 houses and other structures demolished since the beginning of the year. On March 23, Israeli authorities demolished 53 structures in Khirbet Tana, including 22 homes, the third demolition this year in this particular community because Israel has declared by Israel as a firing zone. The total number of structures demolished or confiscated in these first 12 weeks of 2016 has now reached 85 per cent of the total number demolished or confiscated in all of 2015. As Palestinians are consistently denied permits to build legally, residents in the affected areas are left with few options but to build without permits, leaving them in constant fear of their homes and livelihoods being destroyed. I urge Israel to respect international humanitarian law and cease such unfair and unjust planning processes in the West Bank.

Mr. President,

Allow me to turn briefly to political developments on the Palestinian front. Achieving a genuine Palestinian unity on the basis of non-violence, democracy and the PLO Principles would constitute a crucial building block for the foundation of a Palestinian state. The formation of a National Unity Government that abides by the PLO programme and the holding of long-overdue elections are important elements of this process. Sadly we are nowhere near this goal as recent discussions between Palestinian factions in Qatar have yet to yield any agreement. I strongly encourage the factions not to squander this important opportunity to reach a consensus that can enable the advancement of the long-term Palestinian national goals as well as near-term fiscal and development goals for the Palestinian people.

I take the opportunity to welcome the suspension, on March 12th, of the month-long Palestinian teachers’ strike, following President Abbas’ commitment to fully implement a 2013 trade union deal that provides a ten per cent salary increase to teachers.

I also note that, on 10 March, Najat Abu Bakr, a Fateh member of the Palestine Legislative Committee ended her 18-day sit-in at the Parliament building after the Attorney General cancelled an arrest warrant against her; issued after she had raised allegations of corruption. Such allegations must be duly investigated.

Mr. President,

Turning to Gaza, the security situation remains volatile, as a number of factors continue to produce a highly combustible environment.

Despite a relative pause over the past month, the past weeks saw five rockets fired from Gaza to Israel. In response, on March 12th, Israel conducted four airstrikes, in which two Palestinian children, Israa and Yassin Abu Khusa, were tragically killed. These incidents point to the fragile nature of the current ceasefire. I call on Palestinian factions to uphold the current ceasefire, which is vital for Gaza's recovery.

As the Gaza reconstruction mechanism continues to enable the purchase of materials for critical repairs and rebuilding, the reconstruction of fully destroyed homes remains painfully slow, in large part due to the slow disbursement of donor pledges. I strongly encourage all Member States, who have not done so, to disburse their commitments without delay.

Failure to comprehensively address the chronic problems affecting Gaza risks another escalation in the future.

Mr. President,

Very briefly on Lebanon, the Security Council was briefed on 16 March by Special Coordinator Kaag. The Secretary-General welcomes the press statement adopted subsequently by the Council, reaffirming its united support for Lebanon's stability and state institutions. The Secretary-General is currently on a two-day visit in Lebanon, jointly with the President of the World Bank. This visit in itself illustrates the strong commitment of the UN and international community to help Lebanon address the multiple challenges it faces as a result of the impact of the Syrian crisis.

Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,

In closing, I would like to emphasise that there can be no peace without hope. But fostering hope requires courageous leadership willing to articulate a clear political horizon; it requires moving beyond unilateral actions and ending the policy of eternal management of the shifting status quo; and it requires a commitment to improving the dynamics on the ground with the genuine aim of reaching a negotiated two-state solution which still remains the stated goal of both sides. The obstacles are many, certainly, but not insurmountable.

People often say that the lack of trust between the parties precludes any advance towards peace. Certainly, re-establishing that trust and laying the foundations for a peaceful resolution must remain our collective focus, but change certainly requires political will from the parties. Without that political will, Palestinians and Israelis will continue to face an uncertain and dangerous future as the Middle East's violent and unpredictable tectonics continue to shift around them.

Thank you.