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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,**  
**REPORTING ON UNSCR 2334 (2016)**

**25 June 2024**

Mister President,

Members of the Security Council,

Before turning to my regular briefing, allow me to express my serious concerns about the risk of escalation in the region, particularly between Israel and Hezbollah along the Blue Line. I reiterate the Secretary-General's concerns that further military escalation will only guarantee more suffering, more devastation to communities in Lebanon and Israel, and more potentially catastrophic consequences for the region. In complement to the efforts of UNSCOL and UNIFIL, I am encouraging all sides to immediately take urgent steps to de-escalate the situation.

The ongoing hostilities in Gaza are further fueling regional instability. There must be an immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and an immediate humanitarian ceasefire – there is a deal on the table and it should be agreed – and fast. I welcome the efforts, including by Egypt, Qatar and the United States, to reach such a deal. The UN stands ready to support its implementation.

I will now turn to my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East devoted to the thirtieth report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016). The Secretary-General's written report covers the period between 19 March and 10 June 2024.

Since the submission of the written report, intensive hostilities between Hamas and Israel Defense Forces in Gaza have continued, resulting in hundreds of fatalities.

The devastating impact of the hostilities on the civilian population in Gaza, and the unprecedented humanitarian crisis remain deeply alarming. I have witnessed the deterioration of the security situation on each of my visits. Ongoing military operations and a near total breakdown of civil order have resulted in multiple reported incidents of theft of relief supplies and shootings that posed significant risks to the population and humanitarian workers. A shooting incident on 15 June that resulted in the killing of two Palestinians while an aid convoy was on the road prompted the cancellation of convoys to Kerem Shalom between 16 and 18 June to mitigate risks.

Effective mechanisms for humanitarian notification, safe conditions for humanitarian operations, and sufficient access to humanitarian needs remain sorely lacking and must be put in place without delay. Following another series of serious security incidents this last weekend impacting humanitarian actors in Gaza, the UN welcomes the opportunity to clarify with the IDF on how the current situation can be clearly improved.

Hunger and food insecurity persist. While projections of imminent famine in the northern governates have been averted through an increase in food deliveries, food insecurity has worsened in the south. Nearly all of Gaza's population continues to face high levels of food insecurity, with nearly half a million people facing "catastrophic" insecurity.

I welcome the high-level conference convened on 11 June in Jordan, by Jordan, Egypt and the United Nations, which urged all parties to do their part to ensure we can fully address the urgent needs of the population in Gaza.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority's fiscal situation remains very precarious amidst broader economic and security concerns across the occupied West Bank. Announcements by Israel's Finance Minister that he intends to continue blocking the transfer of all clearance revenues to the PA, and to take measures that would end correspondent banking relations between Israeli and Palestinian banks at the end of this month threaten to plunge the Palestinian fiscal situation into an even greater crisis, potentially upending the entire Palestinian financial system.

I take note of the recent appointment by the Head of the Israeli military's Civil Administration of a civilian deputy and the delegation of authority to that position for oversight of many areas of land management and development, planning, and day-to-day life in Area C of the occupied West Bank. That the appointment and delegation of authority is expected to expedite Israeli settlement expansion and regularization under Israeli law of illegal outposts is concerning and undermines the prospects for a two-State solution.

Mister President,

Allow me to reiterate several observations of the Secretary-General regarding the implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) during this reporting period.

I once again strongly condemn the horrific armed attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israel on 7 October 2023 and the continued holding of hostages in Gaza. Nothing can justify these acts of terror. All remaining hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. The use of human shields and the firing of indiscriminate rockets towards Israeli population centers are violations of international humanitarian law and must cease completely.

The scope of death and destruction in Gaza has been catastrophic and horrifying. Israel's use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas has destroyed entire neighborhoods and damaged hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, schools, mosques, and United Nations premises. I unequivocally condemn the killing and maiming of civilians in Gaza, including women and children.

The protection of civilians is paramount in any armed conflict. International humanitarian law applies to all parties to a conflict at all times.

The impact of the ongoing hostilities on the humanitarian situation in Gaza is deeply concerning. The life-threatening conditions facing the more than 1.7 million internally displaced people in Gaza, where nowhere is safe, must be addressed immediately.

The level of essential goods, including humanitarian assistance, that has been allowed into Gaza continues to fall short of meeting the needs of the population. While it is positive that Israel has opened additional entry points for humanitarian aid, others have been closed, and it is imperative that all necessary access points be opened, and made operational, and humanitarian access be sustained. All parties must protect humanitarian workers at all times. Attacks on humanitarian aid workers and facilities are unacceptable, must cease immediately and should all be investigated.

The financial contributions of donors to UNRWA are welcome and further financial support is needed to meet needs in Gaza and throughout the region, however, attacks on the Agency's facilities and activities are deeply concerning.

I remain deeply troubled by continued Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I reiterate that all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and are in flagrant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity immediately.

The escalating violence and tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are deeply worrying. Intensified armed exchanges between Palestinians and Israeli security forces alongside lethal attacks by Palestinians against Israelis and by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, have also exacerbated tensions and led to exceedingly high levels of casualties and detentions. All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. I urge Israel to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population.

I reiterate that security forces in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life.

I am encouraged by the PA's reform plan. The United Nations will continue to support the PA to implement critical reforms and urges the international community to provide immediate support to address the PA's financial challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza.

Mister President,

Palestinians and Israelis can no longer wait to establish a viable political horizon. Efforts to address security and humanitarian challenges that ignore or sidestep fundamental political questions are doomed to fail. All stakeholders must urgently take steps that will lead towards a two-State reality. The UN will continue to support all such efforts.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting steps towards ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State – 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.

I thank you.