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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**  
**26 July 2022**

Mister President,

Members of the Security Council,

I am pleased to deliver this briefing on behalf of Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, covering the reporting period of 27 June – 21 July.

While the specific developments of the conflict fluctuate, the structural reality has not changed.

We continue to witness concerning levels of violence against civilians, which exacerbates mistrust and undermines a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

For years, illegal settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has been steadily shrinking the land available to Palestinians for development and livelihoods, limiting their movement and access, and eroding the prospects for establishing a viable Palestinian State.

Three hundred and ninety-nine demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures and evictions this year in Area C have left over 400 Palestinians displaced.

There is a growing sense of hopelessness among many Palestinians who see their prospects for statehood, sovereignty and a peaceful future slipping away.

Internally, they also see a crumbling and constrained Palestinian economy, lack of progress in advancing intra-Palestinian unity and governance reform, and the urgent need for renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including through a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine.

Many Israelis also understand the perils of continuing along the current path. They see endless cycles of violence, the constant risk of escalation and the absence of prospects to end the conflict.

Against this worrying backdrop, U.S. President Biden's visit to the region earlier this month signaled renewed consensus for a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines. During the visit, for the first time in years, Israeli, Palestinian and American leaders also reiterated their support for a two-State solution as essential for the future of Palestinians and Israelis alike. In addition to meeting with Prime Minister Lapid and President Abbas, President Biden made a noteworthy visit to Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. We must build on these reaffirmed commitments and work collectively to encourage steps that allow for a return to a meaningful political process.

Mister President,

Daily violence continued throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory during the reporting period.

Three Palestinians were killed in the occupied West Bank during search and arrest operations and 287 Palestinians, including 28 children, were injured by Israeli security forces (ISF) during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, and other incidents in the West Bank. Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated 27 attacks against Palestinians resulting in 12 injuries and/or damage to Palestinian property, including 1000 olive trees.

In all, eighteen Israeli civilians, including two women, and seven Israeli security personnel were injured by Palestinians in shooting and stabbing attacks, clashes, and the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated 50 attacks against Israeli civilians, 39 of which were stone-throwing incidents, resulting in injuries and/or damage to Israeli property.

On 29 June, ISF shot and killed a 25-year-old Palestinian in the context of clashes following an arrest operation conducted in Jenin in the West Bank. According to ISF, the man had thrown explosive devices towards Israeli soldiers. Palestinian Islamic Jihad later claimed the man as a member.

On 2 and 6 July, ISF fatally shot two Palestinians in the village of Jab'a, near Jenin. On 2 July, according to video and eyewitnesses, a 17-year-old was shot from some 30 meters as he was turning away after having thrown stones towards the soldiers. ISF said they fired after the boy had thrown a Molotov cocktail. On 6 July, a Palestinian man was shot and killed as he left his house during a nearby ISF arrest operation. ISF said the man had been shot after trying to run away.

On 5 July, an Israeli man was seriously injured after being stabbed on a pedestrian bridge in Bnei Brak in central Israel. On 6 July, ISF announced they had arrested a Palestinian man suspected of carrying out the attack.

On 19 July, an Israeli was stabbed and moderately injured by a Palestinian on a bus in Jerusalem. The assailant was subsequently shot and injured by an Israeli civilian.

On 2 July, the Palestinian Authority transferred the bullet that killed Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh to U.S. authorities to undergo forensic testing. On 4 July, following an analysis overseen by the U.S. Security Coordinator, the U.S. announced that the examiners “could not reach a definitive conclusion regarding the origin of the bullet” due to its damaged condition. The U.S. also said that, after viewing the results of both Israeli and Palestinian investigations into Aqleh’s death, it had concluded that “gunfire from Israel Defence Forces positions was likely responsible,” and that it “found no reason to believe that this was intentional.”

Mister President,

Settler-related violence continued during the reporting period, with particularly concerning incidents in the West Bank community of Ras al-Tin.

On the night of 6 July, individuals believed to be Israeli settlers set fire to four points around the community, damaging several structures, including tents. The attack comes on the heels of additional settler attacks against the community in recent weeks, during which two residents were injured.

I reiterate that perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and brought swiftly to justice.

I also reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

Mister President,

On 20 and 21 July, thousands of Israelis participated in a widely publicized campaign by a settler organization to establish settlement outposts across the West Bank. In advance of the campaign, Israeli Defense Minister Gantz issued a statement that such efforts “are illegal activities that the security services are preparing to thwart.” The Israel Defense Forces and Israeli police also issued similar statements. On 21 July, ISF removed the seven makeshift encampments that had been set up and evacuated the Israeli civilians from the area.

I welcome the statements and actions by the Government of Israel to prevent the establishment of new outposts. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

Mister President,

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 77 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and five in East Jerusalem, displacing 61 Palestinians, including 31 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

In the wake of the 4 May ruling by the Israeli High Court of Justice allowing the eviction of the communities in Masafer Yatta in the southern West Bank to proceed due to their presence in an Israeli-declared “firing zone”, Israeli forces continued to adopt restrictive measures negatively affecting Palestinian communities and humanitarian actors providing support. Such measures include ongoing military training, related movement restrictions, arrests, including those involving use of force, as well as restrictions on the access of staff of international organizations and Palestinian NGOs to the area.

I remain deeply concerned by the potential implications of the High Court’s ruling and the humanitarian toll on the communities in question if the eviction orders are carried out.

In a positive development, on 12 July, Israeli authorities announced that they would advance six plans for Palestinian construction in Area C. I urge Israel to further advance such plans and to issue building permits for all previously approved plans for Palestinians in Area C and in East Jerusalem.

On 21 July, Israel's Supreme Court partially accepted the appeal of a Palestinian family under threat of eviction in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan, freezing the eviction order until proceedings are completed in a lower court.

I call on Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law and to approve additional plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

Mister President,

On 30 June, the Israeli Knesset voted to dissolve itself and call for new parliamentary elections, scheduled now for 1 November. Due to the coalition agreements, on 1 July, Yair Lapid became Israel's Prime Minister and will head the interim Government through the upcoming elections and government formation process. I congratulate Prime Minister Lapid, and the Special Coordinator looks forward to continuing to work with him to advance steps towards a two-State solution and a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Between 13-15 July, U.S. President Biden visited Israel and the OPT, meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. During the visit, the President announced a series of "initiatives to support the Palestinian people." These include: a new multi-year contribution of USD 100 million to the East Jerusalem Hospital Network (EJHN), subject to congressional approval; USD 201 million in funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); an additional USD 15 million in humanitarian assistance for Palestinians aimed at addressing food insecurity; and two new grants under the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA).

On 16 July, in the context of President Biden's meeting with regional leaders in Saudi Arabia, the United States announced that Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also each pledged an additional USD 25 million to the East Jerusalem Hospital Network.

The Biden Administration's announcement that Israel has agreed to allow the Allenby Bridge between the West Bank and Jordan to operate 24-hours a day, 7 days a week by the end of September will go some way to reduce the long wait thousands undergo at the crossing. The U.S. also said Israel had agreed to accelerate the transition to 4G technology in the West Bank, and then in Gaza, and to convene the long-dormant Joint Economic Committee with the Palestinian Authority.

I welcome the crucial U.S. and regional support pledged to East Jerusalem hospitals, vital Palestinian institutions that provide health care to patients from across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Support for structural reform of the health sector is still needed for sustainable operations of the heavily indebted hospital Network. I also welcome and look forward to the implementation of the important commitments made by Israel to improve movement and access for Palestinians at Allenby Bridge and the transition to 4G technology to support economic growth.

In advance of President Biden's visit, on 7 July, President Abbas and Defense Minister Gantz met in Ramallah, and on 8 July Israeli President Herzog and Prime Minister Lapid spoke with President Abbas by phone. The continuing high-level contacts between Israeli and Palestinian officials are encouraging, and I urge leaders on all sides to expand this engagement to encompass underlying political issues.

In addition, on 12 July, Israeli authorities announced the approval of registration of 5,500 previously unregistered Palestinians, and the expansion of a crossing in the northern West Bank to include vehicular traffic between Israel and Jenin for the use of Israeli Arabs.

On 21 July, President Abbas visited France and met with President Emmanuel Macron. At a joint press conference following the meeting, President Macron affirmed his willingness to help mobilize the international community in efforts to support the resumption of a political dialogue towards "a just and lasting peace."

Mr. President,

Statements issued by ten European Foreign Ministries announced their governments had reviewed the 21 October designation of six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations. The statements highlighted that no substantial information had been received that would justify a review of the Member States' policies and in the absence of such evidence, the Member States confirmed that they will continue their cooperation and strong support for civil society in the OPT. Going forward, the Ministry of Defence has requested the three lawyers representing the six NGOs to seek approval before continuing to do so.

On several occasions in July, Palestinian legal associations organized demonstrations in Ramallah, attended by hundreds of participants, to protest the Palestinian Authority's practice of issuing and amending laws by presidential decree. Protestors called for the election of a new Legislative Council and the resumption of regular legislative procedures.

Mister President,

Turning to Gaza, the situation remains fragile, as efforts by the UN and other partners continue to deliver vital humanitarian and development assistance, as well as further ease restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of the Strip.

On 16 July, following a period of relative calm, militants in Gaza launched four rockets towards Israel. According to Israeli authorities, one rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome system, while the others landed in open areas in Israel. No injuries were reported. In retaliation, IDF conducted airstrikes against what it said were Hamas targets in the Strip, with no injuries reported.

On 19 July, Israeli authorities announced that they had found a bullet in Netiv HaAsara, in southern Israel, which they determined had been fired earlier that day from the Gaza Strip, damaging an industrial building. Subsequently, the IDF launched missiles at what it said were Hamas targets in the Strip, again with no injuries reported.

Reconstruction and repair of damages incurred during the 2021 escalation continues to require additional funding and the timely disbursement of pledged funding. A funding gap remains of at

least USD 45 million for the reconstruction of totally damaged housing units and USD 9 million for repairs of damaged housing.

On 3 July, on the occasion of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, Israeli authorities announced that 400 permits would be issued for men above the age of 55 and women above the age of 50 to visit Jerusalem from Gaza. These are the first such permits to be issued since 2017. In addition, Israeli authorities announced that some 500 permits would be issued for Gaza residents to visit first-degree relatives in the West Bank and Israel over the holiday.

In June, some 72,000 crossings of people holding Israeli-issued permits through the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing were recorded. This is the highest number of crossings in one month since the tightening of the Israeli closures following Hamas's takeover of the Strip in 2007.

June also witnessed an increase of imports into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza, with a 12 per cent increase in the number of trucks compared to May. The number of trucks entering Gaza through the informal Salah ad-Din crossing between Gaza and Egypt, increased by 45 per cent compared to May 2022.

Across the OPT, soaring commodity prices continue to negatively impact Palestinian lives. The UNRWA Gaza Emergency Food Programme requires an additional USD 72 million by September to meet food assistance needs for 1.1 million Palestine refugees in the fourth quarter. World Food Programme needs an additional USD 24 million to continue providing assistance until the end of the year, to compensate for the decrease in purchasing power. In this context, I welcome recent announcements by the U.S. and the EU confirming their 2022 contributions to UNRWA, which will allow the Agency to maintain education, primary health care and other critical services to Palestine refugees during the summer months. I encourage additional contributions from Member States to ensure that needs on the ground can be met.

Mister President,

Turning to the region, while the ceasefire between Israel and Syria continues to be generally maintained, the situation remains volatile with continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties.

The latest reported incident was brought to this Council and the Secretary-General through identical letters of the 22<sup>nd</sup> July from the Permanent Representative of Syria concerning the situation between Israel and Syria. It is important that the parties respect their obligations under the terms of the Agreement and prevent an escalation of the situation between them.

In Lebanon, following the parliamentary elections of 15 May, efforts to form a new government continue. It is of the utmost importance that a new government be formed as soon as possible and that progress is made on reforms needed to address the country's multiple crises.

I also underscore the risks to stability posed by incidents such as the launching of three unarmed drones from Lebanon towards the Karish offshore natural gas field by Hezbollah on 2 July. I urge all parties to exercise restraint and avoid provocative actions that could lead to escalation.

On 15 and 16 July, President Biden visited Saudi Arabia, where he met with leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. Following the summit, the U.S. and the GCC issued a joint statement reaffirming their “joint commitment to preserve regional security and stability, [and] support diplomacy with the aim of regional de-escalation.”

Mister President,

Immediate steps to reverse negative trends and to support the Palestinian people are essential. The violence must stop. The tensions that have been mounting, particularly in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, amidst continued settlement activity and settler-related violence, must be addressed.

However, there is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict.

As the history of this conflict has so painfully demonstrated, if left unaddressed, the factors contributing to this corrosive situation will only deteriorate further. We must focus on reaching the ultimate goal: two States, living side-by-side in peace and security, in line with UN resolutions, previous agreements and international law.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Israelis and Palestinians to move towards a just and lasting peace and we will continue to work with the parties and with regional and international partners to achieve this objective.

Thank you.

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