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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION
IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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Mister President,

Excellencies,

Today the world looks on in horror as the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continues to deteriorate to levels not seen in recent history.

Over twenty-two months into the hostilities, Gaza is sinking deeper into disaster, marked by rapidly mounting civilian casualties, mass displacement, and, now, famine. The hostages held by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups continue to languish in appalling conditions.

Meanwhile, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is also facing an unprecedented crisis. Relentless expansion of settlements, demolitions, and intensifying violence continue to undermine any prospect for peace.

The choice could not be clearer: continue the current path of perpetual conflict, entrenching the occupation — or recommitting to a political process that will resolve the conflict, end the occupation and realize a two-State solution.

Mr. President,

Tragically, there is no end in sight to the conflict in Gaza. Despite a renewed push by the mediators to reach a ceasefire and hostage release deal, a breakthrough remains elusive.

Israeli military strikes have intensified throughout Gaza, hitting IDP tents, schools, hospitals, and residential buildings.

The human toll of these hostilities has been staggering. Since 23 July, at least 2,553 Palestinians were killed according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Some 271 were reportedly killed while attempting to collect aid, including in the vicinity of militarized distribution sites. Palestinian armed groups also continued to target the IDF and sporadically launch rockets towards Israel.

Journalists continue to be targeted, with over 240 journalists killed in Gaza since the conflict began. On 10 August, an Israeli airstrike hit a tent used by journalists in Gaza City, killing 6 journalists. The IDF said they were targeting Al Jazeera correspondent Anas al-Sharif, who they said was the head of a Hamas cell.

On 25 August, Israeli strikes on Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis killed at least 20 Palestinian civilians, including medical personnel and journalists. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an independent and impartial investigation into these killings.

The UN and its partners are working tirelessly to assist the population, but the security risks are extremely high, and the current mitigation measures are woefully insufficient.

On my recent visit to Gaza, I was stunned at the scale of the destruction and suffering. I met humanitarian workers risking their lives to deliver aid, while themselves living in intolerable conditions. I saw the immense personal toll on the population, including the UN's own staff – but was also inspired by our staff's unshakeable commitment to do their work. As we speak, they remain present and continue to deliver essential life-saving services throughout Gaza, including in Gaza City.

Mr. President,

According to Israeli sources, 50 hostages, including one woman, are still being held captive by Hamas and other Palestinian groups in Gaza, 28 of whom are believed to be deceased.

While visiting affected communities in Israel, I saw the shattered homes of Nir Oz, where one in four residents was either murdered or abducted on 7 October. I met survivors who carry unbearable loss and trauma. I acknowledge the presence of Ilana Gritzewsky, who will speak today about her experience as a survivor of Hamas captivity, and I pay tribute to her immense courage and fortitude.

I have also met with the family members of other hostages held by Hamas, including Evyatar David, who briefed this Council recently. In my meetings, I could see unimaginable pain in their eyes. I was also impressed by their remarkable strength.

The videos released by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad depicting emaciated Israeli hostages are deeply disturbing. The ill-treatment and abuse of hostages constitute a blatant violation of international law. Hostages must be treated with dignity and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. President,

Unthinkably, Gaza's population is now facing yet another deadly escalation. On 8 August, the Israeli Government announced its decision to take over Gaza City. The resulting military operation is ongoing as we speak. For a population already struggling to survive, Palestinians in Gaza are seeing their worst fears becoming reality in front of their eyes.

Already over 86 per cent of the Gaza Strip lies within Israeli military zones. Expanded military operations in Gaza City will have catastrophic consequences, including displacing hundreds of thousands.

I am deeply alarmed by the findings of the latest IPC analysis, confirming that famine is engulfing Gaza Governorate.

Ending famine is a race against time. It will require a dramatic increase in the quantity and quality of food entering Gaza. It will also require restoring the basic systems – such as water and sanitation, health services, and food production – all that is needed to sustain human life.

My colleague, Assistant Secretary-General Msuya, will cover the IPC findings in more detail in her briefing.

Mr. President,

Recent steps by Israel, including the 27 July announcement of a daily pause in operations in specific areas of western Gaza, and its approval on 5 August of a mechanism for the controlled entry of commercial goods, have increased the supply of essential items to Gaza. Israeli authorities have also approved the entry of a more diverse array of supplies, including animal feed material starting this week. But let's be clear: these steps are nowhere near sufficient to address the vast scale of needs.

The lack of law and order also presents a significant obstacle to humanitarian operations. The unbearable conditions in Gaza have led to looting by desperate civilians, while looting by organized groups also continues to undermine relief efforts. It is imperative to restore the required conditions for functional community-based distribution systems to reach the most vulnerable.

Israel's imposition of new requirements on INGO registration is further constraining the humanitarian response. With the deadline looming to meet the new requirements, many INGOs operating in Gaza may be forced to cease their activities, leaving vulnerable communities without essential support. I urge the Government to rescind the new registration requirements.

All parties must allow rapid, safe, unimpeded, and large-scale delivery of humanitarian aid. Civilians – including humanitarian workers, and those seeking aid – must be protected.

Mr. President,

For the sake of humanity, I urge all sides to put an end to this brutal war immediately. The only way to stop the immense and indescribable human suffering is through a full, immediate and permanent ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages.

Mr. President,

The situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues to spiral dangerously downward. The territory envisioned for a future Palestinian state is shrinking, while a one-state reality of unlawful occupation and perpetual violence is rapidly advancing.

During the reporting period, Israeli security forces continued operations in northern cities and refugee camps. More than 32,000 residents of three camps remain displaced as a result of these ongoing operations. They must be able to return to their homes, and services, including those of

UNRWA, which must be restored. In total in the West Bank, nine Palestinians, including 4 children, were killed by the Israeli Security Forces during the reporting period.

Attacks by Israeli settlers have continued, often in the presence of Israeli forces, resulting in three Palestinians killed, damage to Palestinian property and displacement of Palestinian families. Attacks by Palestinians against Israelis have also continued, with no fatalities reported in the last month.

On 28 July, Palestinian activist Awdah Hathaleen was shot and killed by a settler in Masafer Yatta, as his five-year-old son Watan stood by, witnessing his father's death. When visiting the family, I held Watan in my arms and thought about the enormous tragedy of his future life - without a father, and with his community facing the constant threat of violence and displacement. No child should face such horror.

Perpetrators of settler violence must be held to account. Palestinians must be able to live safely on their land.

Mr. President,

Since 7 October 2023, settler attacks have escalated in frequency and become more violent and deadly. These attacks have increasingly led to forced displacement.

Frequently, settlers then move into areas that were fully displaced and establish outposts, often with the acquiescence of Israeli authorities. This leads to further settlement expansion and consolidation of Israeli control.

Corresponding Government decisions are fast-tracking settlement expansion, including in the most highly strategic areas.

On 20 August, the Israeli High Planning Committee approved a plan for the construction of more than 3,400 housing units in the E1 area. If implemented, the move would effectively sever the connection between the northern and southern West Bank. As such, it would undermine the possibility of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. I urge Israel to immediately cease any steps towards construction in E1 area, and recall that all establishment of settlements violates international law.

Meanwhile, Israeli authorities continued to demolish Palestinian-owned structures, leading to the displacement of 175 Palestinians, including 70 children.

These moves align with broader efforts to entrench control over the West Bank, including last month's decision by the Israeli Knesset to adopt a non-binding and symbolic motion calling for the application of Israeli sovereignty across all settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Alongside these developments, the Palestinian Authority continues to face an unprecedented economic crisis. According to the PA, since May of this year, Israel has not transferred any clearance revenue collected on behalf of the PA. Overall, more than 2 billion USD of Palestinian clearance revenues is withheld by Israel. The correspondent banking relationship with Israel is

under constant threat, and accumulation of excess shekels in Palestinian banks has escalated into a systemic crisis. All this presents a grave threat to the Palestinian economy and banking system. If left unattended, it could threaten the viability of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. President,

The developments I have described are taking place in a volatile regional context, with violence and tensions continuing to plague the Middle East. This week alone saw another exchange of fire between the Houthis in Yemen and Israel, continued Israeli strikes in Lebanon, and an IDF incursion into Syria. I welcome ongoing diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions and urge the implementation of all relevant UN resolutions and existing agreements.

Mr. President,

This alarming picture compels us to act with determination to reverse the present trajectory - starting with a ceasefire and the release of all hostages.

What is needed now is bold action to resolve the conflict, end the occupation and re-establish a political horizon.

In this regard, I welcome the convening of the High-Level Conference on the Implementation of the Two-State Solution co-chaired by France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The message from the international community is clear: the two-State solution remains the only viable path toward a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We must work collectively now to advance practical steps, including through our engagements at the upcoming UN General Assembly high-level week in September. With Gaza immersed in a situation so horrendous that it defies basic humanity and with the West Bank facing genuine threats to its long-term existence, we can no longer wait.

Thank you.