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

27 June 2022

Mister President,

Members of the Security Council,

The Secretary-General's report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) that you have already received covers the period between 19 March and 16 June 2022. I will devote my briefing today to developments since the end of the reporting period and highlight some key observations from the report.

Before turning to the most recent developments, I would like to express my alarm over the levels of violence we have witnessed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel over the past months.

In recent months, violence has continued at a high level, leading to scores of Palestinian and Israeli casualties. Since mid-March, 49 Palestinians have been killed in demonstrations, clashes, Israeli security operations, including in Area A, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and in settler-related violence. The period has also been marked by the most serious terrorist attacks inside Israel in years, in which 11 Israelis and three foreign nationals were killed.

The firing of a rocket from Gaza towards Israel, the first since April, is also a concerning reminder of the fragility of the situation in the Strip.

Mounting violence has been further fueled and exacerbated by provocative steps and inflammatory rhetoric.

It is crucial that all parties take immediate steps to lower tensions and reverse negative trends that undermine prospects for a peaceful two-State resolution of the conflict, with a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State. This will require not only specific actions to defuse crises and maintain calm, but also redoubled efforts to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and support a broader strategy that can ensure that collective efforts by the parties and the international community are geared towards establishing a two-State reality.

Mister President,

In the period since 16 June, violent incidents have unfortunately continued throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

On 17 June, Israeli security forces (ISF) shot and killed three Palestinians and injured six others in the context of an Israeli military operation and subsequent armed clashes between ISF and Palestinians in Jenin. In a statement, ISF said soldiers had returned fire towards a vehicle after armed men inside it had shot at them. The men were later claimed as members of Palestinian militant groups.

On 19 June, ISF shot and killed a Palestinian man near the Separation Barrier in the West Bank city of Qalqilya. An ISF spokesperson said that soldiers had shot at a “suspect who vandalized” the Barrier. The man was reportedly trying to reach a work site in Israel.

On 21 June, an Israeli settler killed a Palestinian man, stabbing him during a scuffle which broke out when Israeli settlers set up tents on Palestinian-owned property near the village of Iskaka in Salfit. Israeli police arrested a suspect.

On 24 June, ISF shot a 16-year-old Palestinian near Silwad village, near Ramallah, who later succumbed to his wounds. An IDF spokesperson said that he was shot during an arrest operation among a group of youth throwing stones at vehicles.

On 25 June, Israeli settlers from Adei Ad outpost, assaulted and injured two Palestinian farmers, one critically, and set fire to three Palestinian vehicles near al-Mughayyir village, northeast of Ramallah.

Turning to Gaza, on 18 June, a rocket was fired by Palestinian militants in the Strip towards the Israeli city of Ashkelon. The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome system, causing no injuries or damage. In retaliation, Israeli Defense Forces struck Hamas targets in the Strip, including several observation posts near the Gaza perimeter, with no injuries reported.

Mister President,

I will now turn to several observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains deeply troubling. Settlements constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law. They undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

The continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, is also disturbing. In particular, I am deeply concerned by the potential implications of the Israeli High Court’s ruling on Masafar Yatta and the humanitarian toll on the communities in question if eviction orders are enforced.

I call upon the Government of Israel to end the demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned property, prevent the possible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law, and approve plans that would enable Palestinians in Area C and occupied East Jerusalem to build legally and address their development needs.

Mister President,

I remain gravely concerned by continuing violence against civilians which exacerbates mistrust and undermines a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The violence must stop and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

I condemn the terrorist attacks carried out by Palestinians and Arab-Israelis against civilians in Israel in recent months. These attacks, the deadliest in years, can never be justified and must be clearly condemned by all.

I also condemn the continued killings of Palestinians, including children, by Israeli security forces, related in particular to incidents where they did not appear to present an imminent threat to life. I note that to date in 2022, 15 Palestinian children have been killed in the West Bank as compared to nine children killed in the West Bank during the same period in 2021. Children must not be the target of violence or put in harm's way. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint, and intentionally use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

I am appalled by the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh and disturbed by the behavior of some Israeli security services in the context of her funeral. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an independent and transparent investigation into her killing and to ensure those responsible are held accountable. Journalists must never be the target of violence.

I reiterate that the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centers is prohibited by international humanitarian law and must stop immediately.

I also remain concerned by the multiple instances in which officials used dangerous and hateful rhetoric that has raised tensions and sparked violence in the reporting period.

Mister President,

The fragility of the political and security situation, particularly in the occupied West Bank, is highly concerning. The persistence of conflict drivers and the absence of political will to change course have empowered extremists and are eroding the perception among Palestinians and Israelis, alike, that a resolution of the conflict is achievable.

In Gaza, the situation remains fragile, and the risk of escalation persists. Efforts by the United Nations and international partners to improve Palestinian lives, and measures by Israel to ease restrictions and facilitate more economic activity, including increasing access to the Israeli labor market for workers from Gaza, have enabled the fragile ceasefire to continue.

Keeping the calm, however, is neither sufficient nor sustainable. More needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation and enable the economy to grow, with the eventual goal of a full lifting of the Israeli closures, in line with UNSCR 1860 (2009). Only sustainable political solutions will relieve the pressures on the long-suffering population in Gaza.

Mister President,

The Palestinian Authority's financial crisis – compounded by the constraints of the occupation, the absence of serious Palestinian reforms and unclear prospects for donor support – requires

urgent attention. In this regard, I welcome the renewed financial support from the European Union that will give critical temporary relief to the Palestinian Authority.

As commodity prices spike, humanitarian needs and costs are rising across the OPT. The cost of some basic food items, such as wheat flour, has increased by some 20 per cent in the West Bank and more than 40 per cent in Gaza. The cost of shipping alone is more than 25 per cent higher than last year. To sustain current operations in the OPT until the end of the year – and offset increasing costs – World Food Programme requires an additional 36 million USD. Facing similar constraints across the OPT and the region, UNRWA's shortfall remains at 100 million USD.

I thank all Member States that have already funded the Agency this year and those that confirmed additional funds at the pledging conference on UNRWA in New York last week. I encourage donors to provide the necessary financial resources to meet these growing costs. Ensuring that basic services continue and humanitarian needs are met is not only a humanitarian imperative, but also vital for stability going forward.

Mister President,

As events over recent months have demonstrated yet again, managing the conflict in perpetuity is not a viable option. There is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict.

I urge Israelis, Palestinians, regional states and the broader international community to take steps that will enable the parties to regain the path towards meaningful negotiated solutions and, ultimately, peace.

The United Nations remains actively engaged in advancing these efforts with all relevant parties, and is committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation through the achievement of a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

Thank you.