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

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Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

The Middle East region is undergoing a seismic transformation — marked by volatility, but also by opportunity if seized and supported. Its people demand a future of justice, dignity, rights, and peace.

There can be no sustainable peace in the Middle East without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are no shortcuts. The region's future will remain bound to its unresolved past - unless bold political will and decisions break the cycle.

The two-State solution is on life support; reviving it requires collective action. Peace cannot be a transaction or a partial, temporary arrangement; it needs to be built on international consensus and legitimacy, moving it from managing the conflict to ending it.

Mr. President,

Israel has the right to live in peace and security. This was undeniably shaken by the horrific terror attacks and taking of hostages on 7 October by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. The suffering of the hostages and their families is immense and profound, affecting the entire country. The release of Edan Alexander on May 12<sup>th</sup> was a welcome but for a brief moment of relief. The hostages need to be released unconditionally and an immediate ceasefire needs to come into effect. Hamas and other armed groups must stop launching rockets towards Israel.

Durable security cannot be achieved solely through force. It must be built on mutual recognition, justice, and rights for all. A better path exists that resolves this conflict, de-escalates regional tensions, and achieves a shared vision for peace.

The upcoming high-level international conference in June, co-chaired by France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, presents a critical opportunity. It must not be another rhetorical exercise. It must launch a path towards ending the occupation and realizing the two-State solution based on international law, UN resolutions and previous agreements. A path that unifies the West Bank and Gaza and results in a Palestinian state existing in peace and security alongside Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. We need to pivot ourselves from declarations to decisions. We need to implement rather than adopt new texts.

Mr. President,

Since the resumption of hostilities in Gaza, the already horrific existence of civilians has only sunk further into the abyss. This is manmade.

When speaking of our fellow human beings in Gaza, words such as empathy, solidarity and support have lost their meaning. We should not become accustomed to the number of people killed or injured. These are daughters, mothers, and young children whose lives have been shattered. All have a name, all had a future, all had dreams and aspirations.

Since the collapse of the ceasefire in March, civilians have constantly come under fire, confined to ever-shrinking spaces, and deprived of lifesaving relief. Israel must halt its devastating strikes on civilian life and infrastructure.

The entire population in Gaza is facing the risk of famine. As the Secretary-General has said, families are being starved and denied the very basics.

On 18 May, the United Nations was informed by the Israeli authorities of the approval for the resumption of limited aid entry into Gaza. Since then, very limited numbers of goods have entered and have been distributed by the United Nations and its partners. But this is comparable to a lifeboat after the ship has sunk.

The United Nations, including UNRWA, will continue to provide humanitarian assistance based on the principles of impartiality and neutrality. We have a plan, in line with International Humanitarian Law and Security Council resolution 2720 (2023). We remain committed to engaging with all parties to implement this. We cannot participate in any mechanism that violates humanitarian principles. Allow me to reiterate that aid cannot be negotiable, and there can be no question of forced displacement.

Civilians in Gaza have lost hope, Mr. President. Instead of saying “goodbye”, Palestinians in Gaza now say, “see you in heaven.” Death is their companion. It’s not life, it’s not hope. The people of Gaza deserve more than survival. They deserve a future.

Ultimately, any sustainable solution for Gaza is political. Agreements and work on post-war arrangements for security and governance should not wait any longer. This includes support for a reformed, revitalized and empowered Palestinian Government, to govern Gaza and the West Bank. Israel's legitimate security concerns must be met. The region has a vital role to play, with active engagement by the international community.

Mr. President,

While Gaza rightly captures the world’s attention, the West Bank is on a dangerous trajectory. Developments are best described as accelerating de facto annexation through settlement expansion, land seizures, and settler violence. If not reversed, this will make the two-State solution physically impossible.

Israeli security operations in the northern West Bank, particularly in the refugee camps, and ensuing armed exchanges have resulted in many Palestinians killed, including children, thousands displaced and many without homes.

Attacks by Palestinian militants have also continued, resulting in Israeli civilian casualties including the death of a pregnant woman.

Violence against civilians, from any side, is never justified.

Mr. President,

When talking about the occupied Palestinian territory it is time for the Palestinian leadership to overcome internal divisions and focus on effective and inclusive governance. The Palestinian Authority embodies decades of investment in state-building by this same international community. The international community should continue to support and protect Palestinian institutions. Reforms must continue to ensure the Palestinian Authority’s viability, legitimacy and its ability to resume its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority needs to rise to this historic challenge.

However, the absence of a political process to end the conflict, coupled with stalled reforms and Israeli economic, administrative and security measures, significantly hamper real-time progress.

Mr. President,

In closing, I would like to reinforce the following points:

1. Humanitarian aid and assistance urgently need to reach all civilians across Gaza in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. The UN's position and plan are well known.
2. The people of Gaza cannot afford to wait for the resumption of essential services, livelihoods, and human dignity to be restored. Early recovery needs to resume immediately.
3. Forced displacement of civilians must unequivocally be rejected and prevented as per international law. Palestinians should be supported to stay on their land.
4. Post-war Palestinian governance and appropriate security arrangements in Gaza are needed that address the needs and rights of the Palestinians and the legitimate security concerns of Israel.
5. The territorial and political unity of Gaza and the West Bank must be preserved. Fragmentation undermines the prospects for peace and a viable two-state solution.
6. Unconditional release of all hostages and the return of the remains to their families. they need to come home.

International engagement and alignment are critical. In the spirit of the sculpture by a well-known Palestinian artist Suleiman Mansour in 1996, called 'Palestine Disappearing,' we need to act before it is too late. The responsibility lies with the parties and with us, the international community. We need to act now to reverse the current trajectory. A well-defined, widely supported and timebound political process, accompanied by safeguards and guarantees, is essential.

Statehood is a right, it is not a reward.

Let us not be remembered as the generation that let the two-State solution disappear. Let us be the generation that chose courage over caution, justice over inertia, and peace over politics. Let us be part of the generation that can make this happen.

Thank you.