

**Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari's remarks to the Security Council  
on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**29 December 2023**

Thank you, Mr. President.

The situation in the Middle East is alarming. This includes several interconnected theatres conflict.

In Gaza, Israeli intense ground operations and fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas and others continued in most areas. Hamas and other Palestinian factions continue to fire rockets from Gaza into Israel. Civilians from both sides, particularly in Gaza strip currently, continue to bear the brunt of this conflict.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The implementation of the Security Council resolution 2712 will be reported next week pursuant Security Council resolution 2720.

The risk of regional spillover of this conflict with potential devastating consequences for the entire region remains high given also a multitude of actors involved.

The continued daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line pose a grave risk to regional stability. Increasingly, there have been strikes on civilian areas, with civilian casualties, on both sides of the Blue Line, in addition to a rising number of fatalities among combatants. While most of these exchanges have been contained to areas within a few kilometres either side of the Blue Line, there have been several instances of strikes deeper into the territories of Lebanon and Israel, raising the spectre of an uncontained conflict, with potentially devastating consequences for the people of both countries.

With the risk of miscalculation and further escalation increasing as the conflict in Gaza continues, it is vital that all actors immediately de-escalate and return to a cessation of hostilities under the framework of resolution 1701(2006).

Attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria take place now on daily bases with US conducting some airstrikes against groups suspected of these actions in Iraq and Syria. There are also reported Israeli air strikes inside Syria.

The continued Houthi threat to maritime navigation in the Red Sea is of growing concern. It risks exacerbating regional tensions, and further escalation, and also has potentially grave political, economic, and humanitarian ramifications for millions in Yemen and the region. This threat also has potential ramifications at a global scale if regional and international shipping and supply chains are adversely impacted by further escalation in the Red Sea.

The United Nations continues to encourage de-escalation and a cessation of attacks and threats so that traffic through the Red Sea can return to its normal state and the risk of Yemen being dragged

into a regional conflagration be avoided. The United Nations underscores the importance of ensuring that international law is respected in full in relation to maritime navigation.

We appeal to all members of the international community to do everything in their power to use their influence on the relevant parties to prevent an escalation of the situation in the region.

Across the occupied West Bank, heightened tensions between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, intensive violence and widespread movement restrictions have continued. Recent weeks have seen some of the most intensive Israeli operations in the West Bank since the Second Intifada. Many Palestinian casualties in the occupied West Bank occurred in the context of Israeli operations in Area A, including some during subsequent armed clashes.

Since 7 October, 304 Palestinians, including 79 children, have been killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Additionally, two Palestinians from the West Bank were killed while carrying out an attack in Israel on 30 November. Over 70 per cent of the Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank since 7 October have occurred during ISF operations, including some – mainly in Jenin and Tulkarem governorates – involving exchanges of fire with Palestinians.

Since 7 October, four Israelis, including three members of the Israeli forces, have been killed in attacks by Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Another four Israelis were killed during an attack by Palestinians in West Jerusalem.

Earlier today, four Israelis were wounded in a reported car-ramming attack southwest of Hebron. The Palestinian driver of the vehicle was shot and killed by ISF. On 28 December, two Israeli security forces personnel were stabbed and injured by a Palestinian in a check point near Jerusalem. The perpetrator was shot and killed by the ISF. Also on 28 December, Israeli security forces killed a Palestinian man during an operation that involved an exchange of fire in Ramallah City. This incident took place in the context of a widespread ISF operations in Ramallah and other cities in the occupied West Bank targeting foreign exchange and money transfer agencies, which Israel said were being used to fund Hamas. On 27 December, ISF conducted an operation in Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarem, which led to clashes, during which Palestinians used Improvised Explosive Device and ISF conducted drone strikes which killed six Palestinians, including two children. The IDF said the strike targeted an armed group of militants who had thrown explosive devices at ISF.

Settler violence remains a grave concern and continues at high levels. However, there has been a reduction in the settler attacks throughout November and December since the spike in violent settler attacks against Palestinians following 7 October.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published on 28 December its reports on the deterioration of human rights situation in West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

To prevent the recurrence of war and endless cycle of violence, the current hostilities throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) must end with a plan to meaningfully advance the parties towards a negotiated solution.

We must restore a political horizon and move towards the only viable possibility for a peaceful future -- a two-State solution, with Gaza as an integral part of an independent Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, in peace and security, based on the 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, in line with the resolutions adopted by this Council and international law.

Thank you.