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

**30 November 2021**

Mister President,

Members of the Security Council,

I brief you today as we face a series of heightened and interrelated risks across the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

In the West Bank, a severe fiscal and economic crisis is threatening the stability of Palestinian institutions. At the same time, ongoing violence and unilateral steps, including Israeli settlement expansion and demolitions, continue to raise tensions, feed hopelessness, erode the Palestinian Authority's standing and further diminish the prospect of a return to meaningful negotiations.

In Gaza, the fragile cessation of hostilities continues to hold, but further steps are needed by all parties to ensure a sustainable solution that ultimately enables a return of legitimate Palestinian Government institutions to the Strip.

Amid these concerning developments, on 17 November, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met in Oslo at the Ministerial level. Participants commended the parties for approaching the meeting with a constructive attitude, urging them to implement reforms and follow through on commitments to help stabilize the Palestinian economy and strengthen its institutions. Participants expressed support for a package of recommended steps for the parties and the donor community.

On the margins, I met with my fellow Middle East Quartet Envoys. In a joint statement, the Quartet Envoys expressed concern regarding negative developments across the OPT, including ongoing acts of violence in the West Bank, the advancement of new settlement units, an untenable fiscal crisis within the Palestinian Authority and threats of violence from the Gaza Strip.

The Quartet Envoys also reiterated the need to take constructive steps to advance a two-State solution and called on all parties to help address the current urgent challenges through fiscal and other reforms, as well by avoiding unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and undermine the prospects for peace.

Mister President,

Violence continued daily throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations and other incidents resulted in the death of four Palestinians, including two children, and injuries to 90 Palestinians, including 12 children, caused by Israeli Security Forces. One Israeli civilian was killed and nine civilians, including one woman and one child, and six members of Israeli Security Forces were injured in the course of these events.

On 5 November, Israeli Security Forces (ISF) shot and killed a 15-year old Palestinian boy during clashes near Nablus. According to the Israel Defense Forces, the incident is being investigated.

On 16 November, ISF shot and killed a 26-year-old Palestinian during a search operation and subsequent clashes in Tubas. ISF stated that its personnel had returned fire after they were shot at and an IED was thrown at them from a passing vehicle. No ISF were injured. Palestinian Islamic Jihad later claimed the man as a member.

Tensions and clashes between Palestinians and ISF also heightened in and around Jerusalem's Old City.

On 17 November, a 16-year old Palestinian from al-Issawiya neighbourhood in occupied East Jerusalem stabbed and injured two ISF personnel in Jerusalem's Old City. In response, an Israeli civilian and ISF shot the perpetrator, who was pronounced dead shortly afterwards. According to eyewitnesses, the perpetrator was being restrained when shot.

On 21 November, a Palestinian man opened fire at Israeli civilians in Jerusalem's Old City, killing one Israeli civilian and injuring two others. ISF returned fire and killed the attacker. Two ISF were injured. Hamas claimed the assailant as one of its members. Following the attack, ISF reportedly conducted search and arrest operations in the Shu'afat Refugee Camp, where the perpetrator was living, detaining several of his family members. All were later released.

Violent attacks and acts of terrorism can never be justified and must be condemned by all.

Mister President,

Settler-related violence remains at alarmingly high levels, amid continued tensions over settlement expansion and the annual olive harvest season.

Since the harvest began on 4 October, some 3,000 olive trees have been damaged or have had their harvest stolen. Physical attacks on Palestinian farmers, volunteers and humanitarian staff have also been recorded, some reportedly taking place in the presence of Israeli Security Forces.

Overall, settlers and other Israeli civilians in the occupied West Bank perpetrated some 54 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in 26 injuries, including five children and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated 41 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians, resulting, as reported above, in one death and nine injuries, including one child and one woman, and damage to property. Most incidents resulting in injury or damage were caused by stones and Molotov Cocktails thrown at civilian vehicles and buses.

On 24 November, a Palestinian man was critically injured, and his ten-year-old son injured, after their car overturned near al-Mughayyir village in the West Bank due to an object thrown from an oncoming car. According to witnesses, the car was hit by objects thrown by Israeli settlers. Israeli authorities have opened an investigation into the incident.

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

Mister President,

On 24 October, Israeli authorities announced tenders for some 1,350 housing units in settlements. About half are in the settlement of Ariel, at the heart of the northern West Bank. The announcement also included a reissuance of tenders for some 80 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos, where construction would further risk severing the link between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

On 27 October, after a hiatus of some eight months, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 3,200 housing units in Area C, with many located in outlying settlements.

I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

Meanwhile, in a rare development, on 28 October and 1 November, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 6,000 housing units for Palestinians in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of al-Issawiya and some 1,300 housing units for Palestinians in Area C.

While such steps are welcome, I urge Israel to advance more such plans and issue building permits for all previously approved plans for Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem.

Mister President,

Israeli demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes and other structures continued during the reporting period.

Overall, Israeli authorities demolished, seized, or forced owners to demolish 84 Palestinian-owned structures, in Area C and 17 in East Jerusalem, displacing 83 Palestinians, including 24 women and 39 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 25 October in Hammat al-Maleh, in the northern Jordan Valley, Israeli authorities confiscated a medical clinic serving five communities.

On 2 November, four Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah rejected a proposal by Israel's Supreme Court that would have recognized them as protected tenants in exchange for nominal rent payment to the settler corporation seeking to evict them, significantly delaying their eviction. The settler corporation also reportedly raised reservations to the Court's proposal. The Court had previously announced that if the parties did not accept the proposal, it would issue a ruling on the case.

I urge Israel to cease demolitions and evictions in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Mister President,

In another concerning development, on 22 October, the Israeli Ministry of Defense announced the designation of six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations. The MoD accused them of constituting "an inseparable arm" of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a designated terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan and the

European Union. The IDF extended the applicability of the designations to the occupied West Bank through military orders on 7 November.

These designated NGOs work closely with the United Nations and the international community, including on human rights and humanitarian response, and several receive a significant proportion of their funding from Member States.

The legal implications of the designations are potentially wide-ranging and add to increased pressures on civil society organizations across the OPT. The Secretary-General has expressed concern about shrinking space for civil society around the world, including in Israel and the OPT.

The United Nations has engaged with Israeli authorities, the designated NGOs and donors to receive more information about the allegations and their implications.

Mister President,

Turning to Gaza, humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction efforts continued, alongside steps to further stabilize the situation on the ground.

During October, some 9,400 truckloads of goods entered Gaza through the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing, some 20 per cent above the pre-escalation monthly average. In addition, almost 3,000 truckloads entered Gaza through the Egypt-controlled Rafah crossing. As of the end of the reporting period, some 8,500 permits have been issued for traders and merchants in Gaza to enter into Israel.

While the gradual easing of restrictions on the entry of materials and the flow of goods and people into Gaza is encouraging, the economic, security and humanitarian situation in the Strip remains of serious concern. The goal remains the lifting of all closures, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1860 (2009).

In the meantime, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) continues to play an important role in facilitating access of items and materials that would otherwise not be allowed into Gaza.

In a positive development, on 5 November, Israel began providing additional water to Gaza through the new Bani Said connection point, allowing an increase of 5 million cubic meters of water per year it sells to Gaza.

Mister President,

I welcome the strong support expressed for UNRWA at the ministerial conference co-hosted by Jordan and Sweden earlier this month. Despite welcome additional pledges, I am concerned that UNRWA still lacks USD 60 million to sustain essential services to millions of Palestine refugees across the region through the end of the year. The Agency has yet to pay the November salaries of over 28,000 UN personnel, including teachers, doctors, nurses and sanitation workers, many of whom support extended families, particularly in Gaza where unemployment is high. I call on Member States to do everything possible to protect services by urgently advancing the disbursement of announced pledges and by providing additional contributions in the coming days and weeks.

Mister President,

Both parties sent high-level delegations to the COP-26 meetings in Glasgow. There is a growing Israeli, Palestinian and regional interest in cooperating on shared environmental threats and climate change action. In this regard, the renewed direct engagement after an extended hiatus between Israeli and Palestinian environment ministers is a welcome step.

In a separate positive development, on 7 November, the Israeli Government approved the issuance of some 500 permits over the next three years for Palestinians to work in the Israeli tech sector.

Mister President,

I was encouraged by the engagement between Israeli and Palestinian delegations at the AHLC meeting in Oslo and took note of the concerns shared by all participants about the fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, nearly all participants expressed serious concerns about the overall trajectory of the conflict.

It is essential that the parties avoid unilateral steps, reduce flashpoints and violence across the OPT, solidify the cessation of hostilities and support economic development in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, steps by all parties are urgently needed to shore up the economic and institutional stability of the PA, including through the implementation of needed reforms.

But, Mister President, even a full and immediate financial package may not be sufficient or come quickly enough – if at all – to help buffer the consequences of the current situation. I, therefore, emphasize again the importance of concerted efforts by the parties to calm things on the ground. I am concerned that if we do not act quickly and decisively, we risk plunging into another deadly escalation of violence.

Recent developments on the ground are worrying. We need a coordinated approach to encourage all parties to implement policy shifts and reform, address quickly and in parallel the key conflict drivers - at the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in Gaza and those facing the PA - and restore a political horizon that will help stop the endless cycle of crisis management and move back towards meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and resolve the conflict on the basis of UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

The Quartet will continue its consultations with the parties and key regional actors.

Thank you.