

**KHALED KHIARI  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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

**5 January 2023**

Mister President,

Thank you for inviting me to address the Council on recent developments in occupied East Jerusalem. At the outset, please allow me this opportunity to welcome Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, and Switzerland as the new elected members of the Security Council.

Mister President,

I would like to note that Special Coordinator Wennesland will provide his regular and full briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January.

We are, however, concerned about the events of this past week in Jerusalem and the broader ongoing tensions and violence in the occupied West Bank.

On 3 January, Israel's new Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir conducted a visit, accompanied by heavy security detail, to the Holy Sites in Jerusalem. The visit was the first to the site by an Israeli minister since 2017.

While the visit was not accompanied or followed by violence, it is seen as particularly inflammatory given Mr. Ben Gvir's past advocacy for changes to the status quo.

The visit was sharply condemned by the Palestinian Authority, many others across the region and the international community as a provocation that risked sparking further bloodshed. Many also warned against any changes to the status quo at the Holy Sites.

Following the visit, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and other senior Israeli officials emphasized that the Government is committed to upholding the status quo and that the visit did not represent a deviation from it.

Mister President,

As we have seen numerous times in the past, the situation at Jerusalem's Holy Sites is deeply fragile, and any incident or tension there can spill over and cause violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in Israel and elsewhere in the region.

With that reality in mind, I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for all parties to refrain from steps that could escalate tensions in and around the Holy Sites, and for all to uphold the status quo, in line with the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Over the past several days, the United Nations has remained in close contact with relevant parties to de-escalate the situation, and these engagements will continue in the coming days and weeks.

At this sensitive moment, all efforts to lower tensions should be encouraged, while provocations, inflammatory steps, unilateral actions and threats of violence must be categorically rejected.

Leaders on all sides have a responsibility to lower the flames and create the conditions for calm.

The United Nations remains ready to assist and support these efforts.

Thank you, Mr. President.