

TOR WENNESLAND
UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS
SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UN
SCR 2334 (2016)
19 September 2024

Excellency, Madam President,

Members of the Security Council,

I would like at the outset to express my grave concern over the growing risk of a widescale regional escalation. The series of explosions across Lebanon and rockets fired toward Israel in recent days adds to the volatility. I call on all sides to refrain from steps that will further exacerbate the situation and take immediate steps to deescalate.

Now, turning to today's briefing that is devoted to the thirty-first report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). It covers the period from 11 June to 11 September.

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem" and to "fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard." Settlement activity has, nevertheless, continued.

In total, some 6,370 housing units were advanced or approved in settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Of these, 5,840 housing units were in Area C, including three outposts legalized under Israeli law, and nearly 530 housing units were advanced in the Gilo settlement in East Jerusalem. Construction tenders were published for approximately 1,100 housing units in settlements, including 780 in East Jerusalem.

In settlement-related steps, on 18 July, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Central Command signed a military order amending an order from 1995 that implemented the Oslo Accords, so as to grant to the military commander in the area authority over planning and construction in certain parts of Area B that had been transferred to the Palestinian Authority. The civil administration on 25 June declared over 12,700 dunams as state land in the Jordan valley, adjacent to 8,000 dunams declared in March.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, Israeli authorities demolished, seized, or forced people to demolish 373 structures, displacing 553 people, including 250 children. 26 of these structures were donor funded.

Evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem also continued. Following a Supreme Court ruling, on 15 August Israeli security forces (ISF) evicted the Shehadeh family from their home in Silwan, in favour of a settler organization, displacing 35 Palestinians.

One hundred and eighty-eight Palestinians, including 111 children, left their occupied West Bank communities, citing violence and harassment by settlers and shrinking grazing land.

On 19 July 2024, the International Court of Justice rendered its Advisory Opinion on the *Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*. Among its findings, the Court reaffirmed that “the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the régime associated with them, have been established and are being maintained in violation of international law”; and, among other things, concluded that it was of the opinion “that the State of Israel is under an obligation to cease immediately all new settlement activities, and to evacuate all settlers from the Occupied Palestinian Territory”. It stated that “the State of Israel’s continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful”; “that the State of Israel is under an obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible”; “that all States are under an obligation not to recognize as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the State of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”;

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls for “immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction.” Unfortunately, the devastating conflict in Gaza has continued alongside daily violence in the occupied West Bank, with the high number of fatal incidents precluding me from detailing all.

In Gaza, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health (MOH), from 11 June to 11 September, at least 3,920 Palestinians were killed and at least 10,197 were injured. This brings the total reported by the MOH, since 7 October, to more than 41,084 Palestinians killed, a majority of whom are reportedly women and children.

According to Israeli sources, 101 hostages are still being held captive of the 251 hostages abducted on 7 October. On 1 September, the IDF discovered six hostages in Gaza killed by Palestinian armed groups, including 2 women, and in separate operations recovered the bodies of 12 other killed hostages and rescued one hostage alive. Israeli sources also report over 1,580 Israelis and foreign nationals killed by Hamas or other Palestinian armed groups, including at least 338 women and 40 children, and 783 members of the security forces, since 7 October in attacks either in or originating from Gaza.

Israel continued to conduct strikes from air, land and sea resulting in tens of thousands of Palestinian casualties, massive displacement of civilians and widespread destruction, including civilian infrastructure.

Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups continued to hold hostages in horrific conditions with reports of severe maltreatment, launched attacks at Israeli forces and fired rockets and other projectiles indiscriminately towards Israel. Israel stated that Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups continued to place fighters and military equipment among and underneath dense concentrated areas with civilians.

Israeli operations continued throughout Gaza, displacing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. 89 percent of Gaza has been placed under evacuation orders at one point or another since 7 October. New evacuation orders have reduced the size of the Israeli-designated “humanitarian zone” in Al Mawasi to just 11 percent of the size Gaza Strip.

Repeated attacks on 30 schools and airstrikes in densely populated areas continued, resulting in the deaths of internally displaced people sheltering in those locations.

On 10 September, three IDF airstrikes on IDP tents in Al Mawasi in Khan Younis killed at least 19 people and injured at least 60 others. The next day, two IDF airstrikes hit al Jaouni school sheltering IDPs in Nuseirat, killing at least 18 people, including children, women, and six UNRWA staff. UNRWA said it was the deadliest incident in the Agency's history. The IDF stated the target in each strike was a Hamas command and control center.

On 13 July, according to Gaza MoH, at least 91 Palestinians were killed, and over 300 injured, in an IDF airstrike on Al Mawasi, which, according to the Israeli Government, killed the commander of Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades, Mohammed Deif. On 10 August, an IDF airstrike on the Al-Tab'een school in Gaza City sheltering approximately 6,000 IDPs, killed at least 93 Palestinians and wounded dozens of others according to Gaza MoH. The IDF said 31 militants were killed in this attack.

On 27 August, despite being clearly marked, a WFP team was struck by gunfire as it was moving towards an IDF checkpoint, sustaining 10 bullet shots. On 9 September, the IDF shot at a UN convoy supporting polio vaccinations for children in northern Gaza, caused heavy damage to UN vehicles and held the convoy at gunpoint for eight hours, threatening to arrest 12 UN staff.

In the reporting period, at least 27 UN personnel were killed in Gaza, bringing the total number of UN staff killed since 7 October to 224.

Meanwhile, violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued at alarming levels.

One hundred and sixty Palestinians, including four women and 28 children, were killed during ISF airstrikes, search-and-arrest operations, armed exchanges, demonstrations and other incidents. One Palestinian was killed by Israeli settlers. A total of 849 Palestinians were injured, including 147 by tear gas inhalation and 370 by live ammunition. A total of 86 Palestinians, including nine children and three women, were killed by airstrikes. In August, Israeli airstrikes in the occupied West Bank killed at least one Palestinian every day, on average. Since 7 October, 185 Palestinians, including 33 children, have been killed in airstrikes in the West Bank.

According to Israeli sources, 14 Israelis, including two women and nine security forces personnel, were killed and another 67 were injured by Palestinians in shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks and other incidents.

ISF carried out 1,673 search-and-arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, resulting in 1,295 Palestinians detained, including at least 57 children. Israel currently holds at least 3,323 Palestinians in administrative detention. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict expressed her deep concern about recently published reports by the United Nations describing a dramatic deterioration in conditions of detention for Palestinian men, women and children under Israeli custody, since the 7 October attacks. These reports of sexual violence and other inhumane and degrading treatment could amount to sexualized torture, perpetrated against Palestinian men and women. In July, Israeli military police arrested several Israeli reserve soldiers suspected of the serious sexual abuse of a Palestinian detainee.

In the occupied West Bank, most Palestinians were killed in the context of ISF operations in Area A, including during exchanges of fire with armed Palestinians. These situations are characterized by the increased use of airstrikes, IEDs, and destruction to both private property and civilian infrastructure.

From 5 to 6 August, the IDF conducted a major operation in Jenin, killing at least six Palestinians in two airstrikes and one with live ammunition, and injuring another seven in armed clashes. From 28 August to 6 September, the IDF conducted its largest operation in the occupied West Bank since 2002, stating that it was targeting Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad members and infrastructure in Jenin, Tulkarem and Tubas. The Palestinian Ministry of Health said 36 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded during the operation, including eight children. The IDF bulldozed water, sewage, electricity and communications lines, and approximately 70 percent of the road network in Jenin city, citing the IED threat to its soldiers. One IDF soldier was shot and killed during the operation.

High levels of settler-related violence continued. On 16 August, scores of armed settlers attacked the Palestinian village of Jit in Qalqilya, shooting and killing one Palestinian man, injuring nine others, and setting fire to Palestinian-owned houses, vehicles, and agricultural land. Israel launched an investigation into the incident. A number of senior Israeli officials condemned the attack. On 26 August, dozens of armed Israeli settlers attacked Wadi Rahal village in Bethlehem, during which a Palestinian man was killed.

Violence against Israelis by Palestinians also continued at high levels. On 11 August, an Israeli man was killed in a shooting attack in the Jordan Valley, for which Hamas claimed responsibility. On 18 August, a Palestinian killed a guard in the Israeli settlement of Kedumim. The following day, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed to have conducted what appeared to be an attempted suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, which led to the death of the attacker and injury to one civilian.

Madam President,

The Security Council, in its resolution 2334 (2016), called upon both parties to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Unfortunately, such acts continued.

A joint statement from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad threatened a return to the use of suicide bombings, a call echoed in a speech by a senior Hamas official, while Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades published a graphic leaflet showing an explosive belt and a bombed Israeli bus.

In a video posted on social media, an Israeli minister said "Palestinian prisoners must be killed. Shot in the head" while urging the passing of the bill by the Knesset allowing capital punishment for terrorist offences. Another minister said of Palestinians in Gaza, "Nobody will let us cause two million civilians to die of hunger, even though it might be justified and moral until our hostages are returned."

Two Israeli ministers made visits to the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, with one of the ministers calling the site "Israeli sovereign territory" while speaking of policies to change the status quo. Israel's Office of the Prime Minister stated that there was no change to the status quo.

Madam President,

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for "affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperiling the two-State solution."

The catastrophic public health conditions in Gaza continued to deteriorate as access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities continued to shrink. Severe shortages of fuel and medical

supplies continued to limit the functionality of remaining hospitals and healthcare centres, particularly in northern Gaza. Education continued to suffer, with Gaza's 600,000 children having missed an entire year of school and evacuation orders forcing over 30 temporary education spaces to close. Despite these setbacks, UNRWA expanded learning activities. In August, the Palestinian Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of polio in 25 years. A polio vaccination campaign was launched on 31 August by WHO and UNICEF, with support from other agencies, including UNRWA, which has thus far vaccinated 70 per cent of some 650,000 children under 10.

Following the Israeli military ground operation into Rafah and the subsequent closure of the Rafah crossing in May, humanitarian organizations faced many obstacles that impeded their ability to regularly pick up supplies entering through the Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom Crossing. These included continued hostilities, impassable roads and deteriorating civil order.

On 6 August, the Israeli Minister of Finance said Israel will confiscate 26 million USD of Palestinian clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and transfer it to "the families of terror victims". The next day, Israel terminated a customs clearing mechanism with Norway that reportedly holds nearly 220 million USD of Palestinian clearance revenues in escrow and demanded the funds be returned to Israel. Israel described this as a response to Norway's recognition of the State of Palestine in May.

In Israel, some 120,000 Israelis, including 50,000 children, have been displaced from their homes in the south and north of Israel in the context of hostilities.

Madam President,

In resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council also called upon all States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967." No new steps are known to have been taken in the period.

In its Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 the International Court of Justice, expressed the view that Member States "are under an obligation ... to distinguish in their dealings with Israel between the territory of the State of Israel and the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967".

Resolution 2334 (2016) also called upon "all parties to continue, inter alia, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process."

Intense negotiations between international mediators and the parties continued in Doha and Cairo to formulate a deal for a ceasefire and the release of the hostages in Gaza.

On 27 June, Canada announced that it was imposing new sanctions on "seven individuals and five entities for their role in facilitating, supporting or financially contributing to acts of violence by Israeli extremist settlers against Palestinian civilians and their property." The U.S. and the European Union also announced another round of sanctions and restrictive measures against settlers and entities. On 13 July, Argentina designated Hamas a terrorist organization and ordered a freeze on its financial assets.

From 21-23 July fourteen Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, attended reconciliation talks in Beijing where they signed a declaration reiterating their commitment to form a national unity government and implement previous agreements.

Madam President,

In closing, allow me to share the Secretary-General's observations on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016).

1. I once again strongly condemn the horrific attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israel on 7 October 2023, their continued holding of hostages in Gaza and the recent deliberate killing of six hostages whose bodies showed signs of severe mistreatment. There is no justification for the deliberate killing, maiming, torture and abduction of civilians and the use of sexual violence. Hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. And, for as long as they are held, they must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross. I condemn the continued indiscriminate attacks, including the firing of rockets toward Israeli population centres, and the use of human shields, which are prohibited by international humanitarian law, and must cease.
2. I again unequivocally condemn the widespread killing and injury of civilians in Gaza, including women and children, and the deprivation of essentials to survive. Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. I am concerned over what may amount to serious violations of international humanitarian law, including possible noncompliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. I mourn the UN staff killed in Gaza and strongly condemn the killing of all health and humanitarian personnel. These incidents must stop immediately and be thoroughly and independently investigated.
3. The level of suffering witnessed in Gaza is unprecedented in my mandate as Secretary-General of the United Nations. To address the colossal humanitarian needs and improve the intolerable conditions of civilians, Israel must fully open all crossings into Gaza and facilitate the immediate, safe, and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip in accordance with its obligations under international humanitarian law.
4. I reiterate my call for an immediate ceasefire to end human suffering and urge all sides to redouble efforts to reach a deal that will bring about an immediate ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. I continue to engage all stakeholders towards these objectives. A deal is crucial to saving lives, releasing all the hostages, reducing regional tensions and enabling the UN, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, to accelerate efforts to address the pressing needs of Gaza's population. I welcome the efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States, to reach a deal.
5. I strongly condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror. The escalation of violence in the occupied West Bank and Israel is highly alarming. Palestine refugee camps are sustaining significant infrastructure damage during ISF operations throughout the occupied West Bank. I urge security forces to exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life. I call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. All those injured must have access to medical care, and humanitarian workers must be able to reach everyone in need. I also recall that Israel, as the Occupying Power, has a responsibility to ensure that the civilian

population is protected against all acts of violence and call on Israel to ensure thorough, independent and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

6. I am deeply concerned about the large number of Palestinians, including children, detained by Israeli security forces and the increase in the number of Palestinians held in administrative detention by Israel since 7 October 2023. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment during arrest and detention, including sexual violence, are also deeply concerning.
7. I condemn the attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, including in the proximity and with the complicity of Israeli Security Forces. The attack on Jit was illustrative of the increasingly coordinated, and deadly nature of these attacks. Attacks by Palestinians against Israelis must also cease immediately. I condemn Hamas's attempted attack in Tel Aviv and I am alarmed by its call for a return to the use of suicide bombings. All necessary steps must be taken to hold perpetrators accountable.
8. I reiterate the utmost need to uphold the status quo at the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, taking into account the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the Holy Sites.
9. I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israeli policies and practices are systematically altering the land in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, creating dangerous dynamics and an existential threat to the two-State solution. Settlement expansion, settler violence and recent Israeli administrative steps and large-scale state land declarations in the occupied West Bank are fundamentally changing the landscape and deepening the occupation. I reiterate that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. In this respect, I note the recent findings by the International Court of Justice mentioned above in its Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024.
10. The demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures may entail numerous human rights violations and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer. I note the conclusion of the International Court of Justice in this regard. I urge the Government of Israel to end this practice, in line with its obligations under international law. Palestinians must be allowed to build legally and address their development needs.
11. I am alarmed by the multiple instances in which officials have engaged in dangerous provocations, incitement and inflammatory language, which must be rejected by all.
12. I express my deepest appreciation to UNRWA and to all the UN agencies and personnel and humanitarian aid workers, who remain committed to their work across the OPT despite the significant security risks. I am deeply concerned by efforts to undermine their lifesaving work. The inviolability of UN premises must be respected at all times by all.
13. To meet the challenges ahead, we must establish political and security frameworks that can address the humanitarian catastrophe, start early recovery, rebuild Gaza, and lay the

groundwork for a political process to end the occupation and establish a two-State solution. These frameworks must facilitate a legitimate Palestinian government that can re-unify Gaza and the occupied West Bank politically, economically and administratively while reversing the steadily deteriorating dynamics in the occupied West Bank. Palestinian unity is an essential building block to a just and lasting peace. Israeli measures that undermine the PA must be urgently addressed. The Government of Palestine will require significant support from the international community to advance these objectives.

14. Finally, any lasting progress cannot be divorced from the ongoing Israeli occupation and unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Progress towards peace must address and fully realize the fundamental and legitimate right of Palestinians to self-determination and sovereignty over the entirety of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It must also address Israel's legitimate security concerns. We must collectively take steps towards establishing a political framework that outlines tangible, irreversible steps towards ending the occupation and establishing a two-State solution – Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side-by-side in peace and security, on the basis of United Nations resolutions, previous agreements, and international law, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. The United Nations will continue to support all efforts towards that goal.

Thank you.