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BRIEFING TO THE EXTRAORDINARY
SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON JERUSALEM

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[AS DELIVERED]

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

Jerusalem is one of the most complex and perhaps captivating cities in the world.

Of all the final status issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as identified in the Oslo Accords — refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with neighbours, and other issues of common interest – Jerusalem is perhaps the most emotionally charged and difficult subject.

For the Jewish people, it is and will always be the centre of their faith. For centuries, they have looked to it as a symbol of hope for their future.

It is also the centre of faith for Palestinians and, since the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, many have lived in fear of losing their livelihoods, or their connection to the city.

For both Israelis and Palestinians, Jerusalem is and will always remain an integral part of their national identity.

For billions of people around the world, it also serves as a symbol and a cornerstone of their Christian, Jewish or Muslim faith.

That is why it remains one of the most sensitive places in the world.

Throughout the past 70 years, there has been broad agreement among UN Member States about the particular status of Jerusalem, including through Security Council resolutions 252 (1968), 476 (1980) and 478 (1980) as well as General-Assembly resolution 181.

The United Nations has repeatedly declared that any unilateral decision that seeks to alter the character and status of Jerusalem or that may alter these long-standing principles could seriously undermine current peace efforts and may have repercussions across the region.

As stated by the Secretary-General the United Nations position is clear: Jerusalem is a final status issue for which a comprehensive, just and lasting solution must be achieved through

negotiations between the parties, and on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions and mutual agreements.

Mr President,

On December 6, United States President Donald Trump announced that the US recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel. In this recognition, he said that final status issues, including the boundaries of Israeli sovereignty, remain for the parties to determine. He made clear his commitment to advance peace between Israelis and Palestinians and called for the *status quo* at the Holy Sites to be respected. The announcement also signaled the start of preparations to move the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, while renewing a six-month waiver by which the Embassy remains in Tel Aviv.

Without doubt, this decision has been widely welcomed in Israel.

It has also caused much anger among Palestinians and anxiety across the Middle East and beyond.

Palestinian President Abbas condemned the move and stressed that through this decision, the United States has withdrawn from its role as a mediator in the process. He warned of the potential consequences for security and stability in the region and underlined the need for immediately work towards national reconciliation.

Hamas described the proclamation as an attack against the Palestinian people and called on the PLO to withdraw its recognition of Israel.

In Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked President Trump for the decision. He reaffirmed his commitment to maintaining the status quo at the holy sites; and President Rivlin said that Jerusalem is not an obstacle to peace for those who want peace.

Mr President,

I am particularly concerned about the potential risk of a violent escalation.

In anticipation of the U.S. decision, Palestinian factions, called for three days of rage to take place from 6 to 8 December. Some called for 8 December to be the start of a new uprising or intifada.

Since the decision, we have seen widespread demonstrations and clashes between Palestinian protestors and Israel Security Forces throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. According to OCHA, one Palestinian was killed and more than 140 have been injured. There have also been protests in Arab cities and villages within Israel, as well in cities around the region and the Muslim world, from Lebanon and Jordan to Malaysia and Bangladesh.

On 7 December, six rockets were reportedly fired from Gaza towards Israel. All but one landed short, without causing damage or injury. Israel Defense Forces responded by shelling a Hamas military installation in the Strip and bombing another from the air, causing damage but no injuries.

Mr. President,

We continue to follow developments on the ground closely.

We all understand the symbolic, religious and emotional charge that Jerusalem holds for people across the region and beyond. Nevertheless, I urge all political, religious and community leaders to refrain from provocative action and rhetoric that could lead to escalation; and I call on all to exercise restraint and engage in dialogue.

It is now more important than ever that we preserve the prospects for peace. It will be ordinary Israelis and Palestinians – their families, their children – who will ultimately have to live with the human costs and the suffering caused by further violence. They will look to their leaders to find the strength and the will to return to the negotiating table and achieve a just and comprehensive peace that addresses all final status issues, that ends the occupation of Palestinian territory that started in 1967 and that brings security and stability to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. President,

The United Nations remains strongly committed to supporting all efforts towards a negotiated two-state solution. This is the only way to achieve the legitimate national aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

This point has been clearly re-affirmed by Secretary-General Guterres and I stress again his words – there is no Plan B to the two-state solution.

Palestinian and Israeli leaders, but also the international community, have an important responsibility to advance peace efforts to this end. Only through constructive dialogue can we hope to achieve peace and I call on all parties to remain engaged.

Mr. President,

Today we stand at another critical moment in the long-running history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are yet to see if the prospects of peace can be preserved and advanced.

It is up to all of us in the international community, as much as it is up to Israeli and Palestinian leaders to urgently advance a just and lasting resolution to this conflict.

The Secretary-General has been clear that ending the occupation and realizing a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Palestine, is the only way that such a vision can be achieved.

I have warned many times in the past Mr. President, and I will do so again today: if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved on the basis of a two-state solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, and in a manner that meets the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples, it risks being engulfed into the vortex of religious radicalism throughout the Middle East.

There is a serious risk today that the parties may walk away from the negotiation table. That this will spark a chain of unilateral actions, which can only undermine the achievement of our shared goal.

It will be critical in the coming days that leaders demonstrate their wisdom and make all efforts to reduce the rhetoric, prevent incitement and rein in radical elements.

In its report in 2016, the Middle East Quartet called for steps to reverse negative trends that undermine the two-state solution so as to build the conditions necessary for successful final status negotiations. Today, that call remains as valid as ever.

I urge the international community to fulfil its historic responsibility to support the parties in achieving peace and a comprehensive agreement.

The Secretary-General and the United Nations are committed to supporting Palestinian and Israeli leaders to return to meaningful negotiations in order to achieve a lasting and just peace for both peoples. We remain deeply committed to working with the parties and with our international and regional partners to realise this objective.

Thank you.