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**UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS
EMERGENCY BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

18 October 2023

Mr. President, members of the Council,

The Secretary-General and I have briefed this Council extensively in private over the last days on details of the horrific and unprecedented events that have been unfolding, relaying our utter condemnation, shock and regret. I will not repeat my briefings here today, noting that I will report on the situation next week during my regular monthly briefing. My colleague Martin [Griffiths] will brief you on the humanitarian situation.

Today I want to update you on where we are and on my efforts over the last days to find a way to bring to an end the hostilities and spare lives of civilians.

I have to be very honest here now and say that this is one of the most difficult moments facing the Israeli and Palestinian people in the past 75 years. The massacre and despicable acts of violence and terror perpetrated by Hamas against Israelis on 7 October are seared into our collective memories, whole families killed, women and children, abducted to the Strip and held up until this day. There is no justification or excuse for such acts and I condemn them unequivocally.

We are facing a devastating and clearly difficult challenge for the region and for the international community. It comes at a moment when the global institutions we need to respond to such a crisis are already overstretched.

We are in a war and wars are filled with horrific scenes of violence and tragedy.

Last night, I watched in horror and in real time, as I am sure all of you did, as reports of mass casualties emerged from what should be a protected site, shielded from danger, a place of healing. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed – patients and those seeking shelter – when the al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City was struck by lethal fire. The circumstances of this catastrophe and responsibility still needs to be clarified and we will need a fact-based, full and broad investigation, but the result of all this is very clear Mr. President. It is a terrible tragedy for all those who were involved.

Mr. President,

I fear that we are at the brink of a deep and dangerous abyss that could change the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, if not of the Middle East as a whole.

After more than a century of conflict and over half-a-century of occupation, we, the international community, have failed, collectively, to bring the parties to a just, sustainable political resolution. The longstanding fissures run deep and extend well beyond the confines of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The events of the past 11 days have served to re-ignite grievances and re-animate alliances across the region.

Based on my meetings and the dynamics I have observed on the ground, I will say the following: The risk of an expansion of this conflict is real, very very real, and extremely dangerous.

Mr. President,

Since the outbreak of the current hostilities, it has been my absolute priority to work to diminish this existential threat. With the Secretary-General, I have been in constant communication with the broadest range of interlocutors – with the parties, with regional and international actors who have agency or influence. I continue to do so.

Today, I speak with you from Doha, where the authorities have assured me of their continued commitment to the Palestinian people and their humanitarian needs and the urgency to prevent any further loss of civilian lives.

Meetings and ongoing discussions with leaders in Egypt have focused not only on the question of facilitating access through Rafah Crossing of humanitarian assistance, but also on our shared concerns and efforts to rein in further regional hostilities. I will return to Cairo tomorrow to join the Secretary-General to continue these political discussions. In this regard, we welcome President el-Sisi's swift call for a Summit of world leaders to continue these discussions.

I also had similar discussions with leaders in Lebanon and in Jordan, as well as on repeated phone calls with the P5 and other key regional and international partners who are seized of and actively engaged on addressing this conflict. We are all seeking a common understanding and approach at this critical time.

I welcome the visits of world leaders, such as German Chancellor Scholz, UK Foreign Minister Cleverly and, today, the visit by U.S. President Biden.

With the parties on the ground in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ramallah, my message has remained steadfast, that we must not let the dynamic of the current conflict take our eyes off what I will call, the day after. The day after we need to start working on now, immediately.

We all know the way forward.

These days, I can tell you, diplomacy is very hard, but here is what we need to do. We need the time and space to achieve two urgent objectives: Hamas' immediate, unconditional release of all hostages; secondly, and fast, unrestricted access of humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza.

The third thing must be collective efforts to end the hostilities and prevent any further expansion of the conflict in the region. Regarding the West Bank and Lebanon there should be no miscalculation, no provocation and no step that closes the door to our current efforts.

The step beyond must be down the path towards a political solution.

Ultimately, the only way to bring an end to the bloodletting and prevent any recurrence is to pave a way towards a long-term political solution, in line with UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

As I have stated many times in this Council, a patchwork of *ad hoc* and temporary fixes, and perpetual management of conflict without addressing underlying issues is not sustainable. That has been proven over the last 11 days. What we are seeing on the ground now, all too tragically proves this to be true.

What we must do now is to work together as one to achieve these objectives.