

**Secretary-General's remarks to the General Assembly  
on the situation in Gaza [as prepared for delivery]**

**New York, 6 August 2014**

I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this crucial session on the tragic situation in Gaza.

As we meet this morning, it seems that the long-overdue ceasefire is holding.

For the moment, the near constant firing of Hamas rockets and Israeli missiles and mortars has subsided. We expect the parties to fully respect the ceasefire.

I thank all who contributed to the agreement – including Egypt, the United States, Qatar, Turkey, the League of Arab States, the European Union and many other international actors. We have all been working day and night.

But, of course, we cannot rest as the suffering continues. This ceasefire has come at a price that is almost too much to bear.

The massive death and destruction in Gaza have shocked and shamed the world.

More than 1,800 Palestinians have been killed – the vast majority civilians, including hundreds of women and children. Three civilians in Israel were also killed as well as 64 Israeli soldiers. People on both sides have the right to life but also the right to a life free from fear.

Of course we understand the legitimate security right to defend Israeli citizens from the threat of rocket attacks by Hamas.

At the same time, the fighting has raised serious questions about respect for the principles of distinction and proportionality in international humanitarian law.

Perhaps nothing symbolized more the horror that was unleashed on the people of Gaza than the repeated shelling of UN facilities harbouring civilians who had been explicitly told to seek a safe haven there. These attacks were outrageous, unacceptable and unjustifiable.

Yes, we uncovered cases in which weapons were stored in a small number of abandoned buildings.

Yes, there were reports that Hamas rockets were fired from near UN premises.

Yet, let me be clear: Mere suspicion of militant activity does not justify jeopardizing the lives and safety of many thousands of innocent civilians.

International humanitarian law clearly requires protection by all parties of civilians and civilian facilities, including UN staff and UN premises.

Our UN flag must be respected and assure protection to those in need.

UN shelters must be safe zones, not combat zones. Those who violate this sacred trust must be subject to accountability and justice.

In the most recent case of shelling on a UN facility, the Israelis were informed of the coordinates 33 times.

Attacks against UN premises, along with other suspected breaches of international law, must be swiftly investigated.

Here, before the General Assembly, I want to convey a personal and direct message to the many UN colleagues serving the people of Gaza under these gruelling circumstances.

Thank you for your bravery. Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for saving lives. I join you in mourning our fallen colleagues – and pay them my highest tribute. Tomorrow, the UN flag will be flown at half-mast in their memory. We will carry on their work.

You will soon hear from UN senior officials about the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. I urge all Member States to respond swiftly and generously to the emergency appeals by UNRWA and OCHA to address these most pressing humanitarian needs.

The immediate task before us is meeting the dire and urgent humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza: providing care to the many wounded and traumatized, ensuring that people have food and water, housing the many homeless families, and repairing vital infrastructure.

We now face an enormous reconstruction task in the shattered rubble of Gaza where homes, schools and hospitals have been destroyed and damaged.

But we must do even more.

We must spare no effort to turn the current calm into a durable ceasefire that addresses the underlying issues of the conflict: ending rocket fire from Gaza, weapons smuggling, opening the crossings, lifting the blockade and bringing Gaza back under one Palestinian Government that accepts and adheres to the PLO commitments.

I urge the parties to heed the international community's call to return to negotiations in order to end the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, ultimately through a viable two-state solution.

The nightmare of the last four weeks has been a terrible reminder that only a negotiated political settlement can bring security and peace to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

I repeat: only a negotiated political settlement will bring sustainable peace and security to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Only through the exercise of moral and political leadership will both sides enjoy the better future that their people yearn for and deserve.

As Secretary-General, I have made repeated visits to the region, including to Gaza. I have seen the scourge of war etched in the faces of women and children.

In 2009, I stood before an UNRWA warehouse still smouldering from the aftermath of an Israeli attack. And yet the attacks happened again, and again.

Before my most recent trip, I had already travelled to the region twice before to help end hostilities in Gaza. And yet the attacks happened again – then and now.

The senseless cycle of suffering in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Israel, must end.

Do we have to continue like this: build, destroy, and build, and destroy? We will build again - but this must be the last time to rebuild. This must stop now. They must go back to the negotiating table. We must not repeat this, [from happening] periodically. Why [are] both parties putting all of the international community's citizens always at unease and concerned, looking helplessly at many people being killed?

The United Nations stands ready to make this the last time, and we have to do everything possible to help those in need and support the peace process. I count on the engagement of all of you – and I urge the parties to accept their responsibility for peace and for future generations of their people.

Thank you very much.

ENDS