

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO THE PRESS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

New York, 9 October 2023, 12:30 p.m.

I have just concluded an extraordinary meeting of senior UN leaders to discuss the unprecedented developments in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Let me begin by repeating my utter condemnation of the abhorrent attacks by Hamas and others against Israeli towns and villages in the Gaza periphery, which have left over 800 Israelis dead and more than 2,500 injured.

Sadly, these numbers are expected to rise as the attacks are ongoing and many remain unaccounted for.

In addition, over one hundred, possibly more, Israelis – civilians and military – have been reported captured by armed groups, including women, children and the elderly.

Some are being held hostage inside Israel and many others have been taken inside the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have launched thousands of indiscriminate rockets that have reached central Israel, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

I recognize the legitimate grievances of the Palestinian people. But nothing can justify these acts of terror and the killing, maiming and abduction of civilians.

I reiterate my call to immediately cease these attacks and release all hostages.

In the face of these unprecedented attacks, Israeli airstrikes have pounded Gaza.

I am deeply alarmed by reports of over 500 Palestinians -- including women and children -- killed in Gaza and over 3,000 injured.

Unfortunately, these numbers are rising by the minute as Israeli operations continue.

While I recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns, I also remind Israel that military operations must be conducted in strict accordance with international humanitarian law.

Civilians must be respected and protected at all times.

Civilian infrastructure must never be a target.

We already have reports of Israeli missiles striking health facilities inside Gaza as well as multi-storied residential towers and a mosque.

Two UNRWA schools sheltering displaced families in Gaza were also hit.

Some 137,000 people are currently sheltering in UNRWA facilities – with the number increasing as heavy shelling and airstrikes continue.

I am deeply distressed by today's announcement that Israel will initiate a complete siege of the Gaza Strip, nothing allowed in – no electricity, food, or fuel.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza was extremely dire before these hostilities; now it will only deteriorate exponentially.

Medical equipment, food, fuel and other humanitarian supplies are desperately needed, along with access for humanitarian personnel.

Relief and entry of essential supplies into Gaza must be facilitated – and the UN will continue efforts to provide aid to respond to these needs.

I urge all sides and the relevant parties to allow United Nations access to deliver urgent humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians trapped and helpless in the Gaza Strip.

I appeal to the international community to mobilize immediate humanitarian support for this effort.

The UN Special Coordinator and I are engaging with leaders in the region to express our concern, our outrage, and to advance efforts to avoid any spillover to the wider Middle East.

Even in these worst of times – and perhaps especially in the most trying moments – it is vital to look to the long-term horizon and avoid irreversible action that would embolden extremists and doom any prospects for lasting peace.

This most recent violence does not come in a vacuum. The reality is that it grows out of a long-standing conflict, with a 56-year long occupation and no political end in sight.

It's time to end this vicious circle of bloodshed, hatred and polarization.

Israel must see its legitimate needs for security materialized – and Palestinians must see a clear perspective for the establishment of their own state realized.

Only a negotiated peace that fulfills the legitimate national aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis, together with their security alike – the long-held vision of a two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements – can bring long-term stability to the people of this land and the wider Middle East region.

Thank you.