

24 October 2023, New York

Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council on the Middle East [as delivered]

Mr. President, with your permission, I will make a small introduction and then ask my colleagues to brief the Security Council on the situation on the ground.

Excellencies,

The situation in the Middle East is growing more dire by the hour.

The war in Gaza is raging and risks spiralling throughout the region.

Divisions are splintering societies. Tensions threaten to boil over.

At a crucial moment like this, it is vital to be clear on principles -- starting with the fundamental principle of respecting and protecting civilians.

I have condemned unequivocally the horrifying and unprecedented 7 October acts of terror by Hamas in Israel.

Nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians – or the launching of rockets against civilian targets.

All hostages must be treated humanely and released immediately and without conditions. I respectfully note the presence among us of members of their families.

Excellencies,

It is important to also recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum.

The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation.

They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing.

But the grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas. And those appalling attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

Excellencies,

Even war has rules.

We must demand that all parties uphold and respect their obligations under international humanitarian law; take constant care in the conduct of military operations to spare civilians; and respect and protect hospitals and respect the inviolability of UN facilities which today are sheltering more than 600,000 Palestinians.

The relentless bombardment of Gaza by Israeli forces, the level of civilian casualties, and the wholesale destruction of neighborhoods continue to mount and are deeply alarming.

I mourn and honour the dozens of UN colleagues working for UNRWA – sadly, at least 35 and counting – killed in the bombardment of Gaza over the last two weeks.

I owe to their families my condemnation of these and many other similar killings.

The protection of civilians is paramount in any armed conflict.

Protecting civilians can never mean using them as human shields.

Protecting civilians does not mean ordering more than one million people to evacuate to the south, where there is no shelter, no food, no water, no medicine and no fuel, and then continuing to bomb the south itself.

I am deeply concerned about the clear violations of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing in Gaza.

Let me be clear: No party to an armed conflict is above international humanitarian law.

Excellencies,

Thankfully, some humanitarian relief is finally getting into Gaza.

But it is a drop of aid in an ocean of need.

In addition, our UN fuel supplies in Gaza will run out in a matter of days. That would be another disaster.

Without fuel, aid cannot be delivered, hospitals will not have power, and drinking water cannot be purified or even pumped.

The people of Gaza need continuous aid delivery at a level that corresponds to the enormous needs. That aid must be delivered without restrictions.

I salute our UN colleagues and humanitarian partners in Gaza working under hazardous conditions and risking their lives to provide aid to those in need. They are an inspiration.

To ease epic suffering, make the delivery of aid easier and safer, and facilitate the release of hostages, I reiterate my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Excellencies,

Even in this moment of grave and immediate danger, we cannot lose sight of the only realistic foundation for a true peace and stability: a two-State solution.

Israelis must see their legitimate needs for security materialized, and Palestinians must see their legitimate aspirations for an independent State realized, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Finally, we must be clear on the principle of upholding human dignity.

Polarization and dehumanization are being fueled by a tsunami of disinformation.

We must stand up to the forces of antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and all forms of hate.

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Today is United Nations Day, marking 78 years since the UN Charter entered into force.

That Charter reflects our shared commitment to advance peace, sustainable development and human rights.

On this UN Day, at this critical hour, I appeal to all to pull back from the brink before the violence claims even more lives and spreads even farther.

Thank you very much.

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