

## **THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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### **OPENING REMARKS TO SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION**

**16 May 2021**

**[as delivered]**

I thank the Chinese presidency for organizing this open meeting.

We meet today amid the most serious escalation in Gaza and Israel in years.

The current hostilities are utterly appalling. This latest round of violence only perpetuates the cycles of death, destruction and despair, and pushes farther to the horizon any hopes of coexistence and peace.

Fighting must stop. It must stop immediately. Rockets and mortars on one side and aerial and artillery bombardments on the other must stop. I appeal to all parties to heed this call.

The United Nations is actively engaging all sides towards an immediate ceasefire.

The hostilities have already caused unconscionable death, immense suffering and damage to vital infrastructure. I am appalled by the increasingly large numbers of Palestinian civilian casualties, including many women and children, from Israeli strikes in Gaza. I also deplore Israeli fatalities from rockets launched from Gaza.

I am also deeply concerned by violent clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians across the occupied West Bank, including east Jerusalem, where some Palestinian families are under threat of eviction.

In Israel, violence by vigilante-style groups and mobs has added a further horrendous dimension to an already deteriorating crisis. Leaders on all sides have a responsibility to curb inflammatory rhetoric and calm the rising tensions.

The fighting risks dragging Israelis and Palestinians into a spiral of violence with devastating consequences for both communities and for the entire region.

It has the potential to unleash an uncontrollable security and humanitarian crisis and to further foster extremism, not only in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, but in the region as a whole, potentially creating a new locus of dangerous instability.

The hostilities have forced thousands of Palestinians to leave their homes in Gaza and shelter in schools, mosques and other places with limited access to water, food, hygiene or health services. Hospitals are already overstretched due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Israeli civilians live in fear of rockets launched from Gaza.

I am appalled by the attack on a refugee camp in Gaza, in which 10 members of one family were killed. Humanitarian installations must be protected.

Journalists must be allowed to work free of fear and harassment. The destruction of media offices in Gaza is extremely concerning.

This senseless cycle of bloodshed, terror and destruction must stop immediately.

All parties must respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The status quo at the holy sites must be upheld and respected.

My Special Coordinator will brief you today on the latest developments on the ground and our efforts to de-escalate the situation.

Let me reiterate that the United Nations remains deeply committed to working with Israelis and Palestinians and with our international and regional partners, including the Middle East Quartet, to realize a lasting and just peace.

We are in contact with many relevant interlocutors and I again call on the parties to allow mediation efforts to intensify and succeed.

The only way forward is to return to negotiations with the goal of a two-States solution, with two States living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states, based on relevant UN resolutions, international law and prior agreements.

The longer this cycle of violence continues, the more challenging it will be to reach that ultimate goal.

Only a negotiated sustainable political solution will end, once and for all, these devastating cycles of violence and lead to a peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

I thank you.