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Secretary-General

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Secretary-General, Addressing Security Council on Gaza Situation, Says 'the Horror and Upheaval Is Beyond Imagination'

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's briefing to the Security Council meeting on the situation in Gaza, via video conference from Ramallah today:

Thank you for this honour of briefing you from Ramallah, and I deeply apologize for being late because of my continuing engagement in Israel. I have just arrived.

As you know, I am now well into my third day of an ongoing mission throughout the region. I want to thank the Security Council for its strong support for my efforts.

Ramallah is my fifth stop on a journey that has, so far, included Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt and Israel. I will continue on to Jordan and Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region if necessary.

I have had intensive and fruitful discussions with the leadership in all countries. I also had a very meaningful meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Qatar — and United States Secretary of State John Kerry — as well as Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Nabil ElArabi, in Cairo late last night. And I also had an opportunity of meeting the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, who was visiting in the region, and also I had the opportunity of having a telephone conversation with President [François] Hollande of France. We exchanged views and discussed the current situation in the region. I am very grateful to many countries who have been engaging in these diplomatic efforts to bring an end to this crisis.

I am sure you will understand at this highly sensitive moment you will not expect me to publicly reveal the details. Suffice it to say that it is my hope and belief that these talks will lead to results and an end to the fighting in the very near future.

Of course, there are many obstacles and complexities.

This is a mission of solidarity and peace. But, just as I landed in the region, I was greeted with the news of the terrible fighting in Shejaiya — reflecting the enormous human toll of the fighting and the scale of the challenges before us.

I have carried a three-part message at every turn of my visit. First, stop the fighting; second, start the dialogue; third, tackle the root causes.

A ceasefire is essential, but without addressing the deeper issues, we will never solve the problem, we will merely delay it for yet another time. The cycle will continue, except the bitterness and hatred will become that much more entrenched each time it comes around. Quite simply, if a people are left with despair and occupation, the problem won't disappear, it will only grow.

The most promising prospect of a ceasefire comes in the form of the initiative put forward by Egypt on the basis of the November 2012 understanding on a ceasefire. This effort has garnered the support of President Abbas and the League of Arab States.

Unfortunately, Hamas has yet to respond positively. I encourage all those with influence to urge constructive action. This is the most meaningful path to peace.

I have also discussed Israel's legitimate security concerns with Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu and Defense Minister [Moshe] Ya'alon,

and I am going to continue my meetings with President [Shimon] Peres, as well as other Ministers.

I once again strongly condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire launched by Hamas and Islamic Jihad from Gaza into Israel. I am also alarmed by Israel's heavy response and the corresponding high civilian death toll.

Since this Council was briefed on Sunday, the violence has reached even more alarming levels. Yet, again, too many civilians, including many children, are paying the price for this latest escalation.

I once again urge all parties to rally behind a collective international effort to end the fighting. There is no time to lose.

Immediately following this briefing, I will get the latest update from our United Nations team in Gaza. I want to stress how deeply proud I am of our many UN colleagues, with UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] in the lead, courageously assisting the people of Gaza under such difficult circumstances. They are providing crucial relief and shelter to civilians in imminent danger. The escalation of violence is now acutely affecting UNRWA's regular operations.

A total of 23 UNRWA installations are closed as a result of the conflict. A total of 77 UNRWA installations have been damaged since 1 June as a result of the conflict. The premises have been used to store weapons. This is unacceptable.

Today, about 100,000 people — more than 5 per cent of the population of Gaza — are seeking shelter with UNRWA. In the past, our premises in Southern Lebanon and Gaza have been hit with serious loss of life. I call on Israel to exercise particular care to avoid another unfortunate incident.

I urge all of you to respond to UNRWA's emergency flash appeal for \$115 million to address the most pressing humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza. We must do all we can to alleviate their suffering. I thank the many countries who have already offered generous humanitarian assistance to this flash appeal for UNRWA, including the \$47 million announced yesterday by United States Secretary of State John Kerry.

I also thank United Nations staff, including my Special Coordinator on the ground, Robert Serry, for their relentless efforts to negotiate much needed spaces to respond to humanitarian needs.

The international community, including this Council, as recently as Sunday evening, has issued numerous calls for an end to violence and for the protection of civilians.

We, as the international community, have to assume responsibility for what is the result of a collective failure to advance a political solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We cannot return to the status quo ante — a concern which Palestinians and Israelis both share.

Core elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) remain unimplemented. These include an end to weapons smuggling, the full opening of the crossings and bringing Gaza back under one legitimate Palestinian Government which accepts and adheres to the Palestine Liberation Organization commitments.

Sustainable peace and security will be achieved only through a negotiated political settlement. Only durable progress, including on socioeconomic and governance issues, can permanently stabilize Gaza.

It is imperative to address the issue of governance. Tens of thousands of employees hired after 2007 and working in Gaza are not getting paid, while over 60,000 employees continue to receive salaries from Ramallah without performing essential government functions in Gaza.

The United Nations remains prepared to help coordinate and consult with all concerned parties. This is the third time as Secretary-General that I have had to come on an emergency mission to the region to help end a crisis. That means the children of Gaza are now living through the third major assault in the last five years of their young lives.

The horror and upheaval is beyond imagination. The cycle of suffering must end. The parties must seize the opportunity to not only renew a ceasefire, but also support durable political, security, institutional and socioeconomic progress that stabilizes Gaza. The parties must also heed this Council's call to return to negotiations in order to find an end to this conflict through a viable two-State solution.

As I have repeatedly emphasized on my mission, Israelis, but also Palestinians, need to feel a sense of security. Palestinians, but also Israelis, need to see a horizon of hope. And all sides need to be assured that international humanitarian law counts — and that there will be justice for all. Let us do our part for all the people of this region.

Thank you, Mr. President. Lastly, Mr. President, I hope you will understand. I have a series of important meetings in Ramallah. Therefore, I will be able to sit until 6:50 p.m. here. I will be very much happy to listen as much as I can, and I really count on your continued support and leadership.

Thank you, Mr. President, and distinguished members of the Council.

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