
Secretary-General's press encounter at Sapir College Gaza, 2 February 2012

SG: I am very pleased to visit Sapir College. I am very moved by what I have seen. The security circumstances where many students and citizens of this municipality are undergoing every day.

It was important to me to come here as part of my fourth visit to Israel.

Thank you, Professor Schuster and Professor Weinblatt for welcoming me to this college.

Three years ago I visited Sderot, and I wanted to see the situation in southern Israel again. I know that fear and missile attacks from Gaza continue to disrupt daily life for hundreds of thousands of people around here, in this region.

I just witnessed the dramatic conditions in which students study at the Sha'ar he Negev school and at Sapir Academic College. The students told me what it feels like to live under the constant threat. They talked about the incident last April that killed a sixteen-year-old boy – but which could have killed many more. I met a dozen students, among whom there were at least three students who fortunately were saved because they had left the bus earlier. And I met the bus driver who was saved but who was wounded again.

Even though I am here for just a short glimpse, the severe impact is clear. People have had to reinforce schools like this, hospitals and bus stops. They have to think constantly about where the nearest shelter is.

This is what you must do for your safety. But let us be clear: it is not how anyone, anywhere, should have to live.

Nothing justifies the indiscriminate firing of rockets and mortars into Israel. It is completely unacceptable to target and terrorize citizens on a near-daily basis. It must stop. Any such attack must be condemned.

Just before coming here, I visited Gaza. Gaza's civilians are also suffering. They are vulnerable to militant activity and military operations by Israel.

The population in Gaza is also economically impoverished. UN projects seek to mitigate the impact of Israel's closure regime. I hope more such projects will be approved.

On both sides, I heard from men, women and children who are tired of hostilities and who long to live free from fear.

I met students in Gazan schools, and I met students here. I think they are all beautiful and young – same children who want to have big dreams realized. I think we have a responsibility to help them realize their dreams.

I reiterate here today my call for an end to violence and to militant activity. Both sides must respect international humanitarian law and human rights.

I have come to the region at this time to encourage the parties to continue the discussions they have started in Jordan in January of this year. Both sides should act constructively, refrain from provocations and take steps that will build confidence.

I will continue to do my utmost to ensure that Israelis and Palestinians can lead normal lives in peace and security.

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