
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL OPENS SPECIAL SESSION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

23 July 2014

The Human Rights Council this morning opened a Special Session on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Special Session was called for by 22 Member States of the Council and 16 Observer States, said Ambassador Baudelaire Ndong Ella, the President of the Human Rights Council.

Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said since Israel had announced its military operation "Protective Edge" on 7 July, Gaza had been subjected to daily intensive bombardment from the air, land and sea, which had resulted in the deaths of more than 600 Palestinians, including at least 147 children and 74 women. As in the two previous crises in 2009 and 2012, it was innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip who suffered the most. Accountability was the first step towards ensuring that the cycle of human rights violations and impunity was brought to an end. A lasting peace could only begin with respect for human rights and human dignity on both sides, and ultimately, in the full realisation of the right to self-determination.

Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, stated that at least 18 medical facilities, including five UNRWA health clinics, had been hit by airstrikes and shelling since the beginning of the fighting. The seven-year blockade had destroyed Gaza's economy, with high unemployment rates and growing dependence on international assistance. The United Nations was feeding 67 per cent of the population. The international community and the parties to the conflict had to live up to their obligations.

Lance Bartholomeusz, Director of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, said that by yesterday evening, 22 July, approximately 118,000 Palestinians had sought refuge in 77 UNRWA schools. That was about 6 per cent of the population of Gaza and double the peak in UNRWA shelters during the 2008 to 2009 conflict. The conflict had not spared UNRWA premises.

Makarim Wibisono, Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, speaking on behalf of the Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, said in addition to at least 599 Palestinians killed, the destruction of numerous houses had left several thousand families homeless. At the same time, the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation could not justify the launching of thousands of rockets and mortars directed against Israeli civilians.

Speaking as a concerned country, Israel criticized the convening of the Special Session as misguided, ill-conceived and counter-productive to efforts being made to end hostilities. Hamas was committing war crimes when it fired rockets and missiles indiscriminately at Israeli towns. The Council could regain its moral authority by unequivocally condemning Hamas and rejecting outright the one-sided resolution.

Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, stated that the fundamental right to life of the Palestinians was severely endangered. Whole families were being killed, and journalists and medical teams were being targeted. A fact-finding mission should be established to look into human rights violations perpetrated by Israel, which should visit Gaza with the Special Procedures mandate holders.

In the general debate, speakers called for the immediate halt of Israeli operations against civilians and civilian targets in Gaza, as well as for the end of rocket launchings into Israel by Hamas and other armed groups. It was stressed that the parties had to exercise maximum restraint with the view of avoiding civilian casualties and suffering of the civilian population. International humanitarian and human rights law ought to be respected. Many speakers expressed belief that peace in the Middle East could not be reached through violence, but only through comprehensive negotiations, and supported the ongoing diplomatic efforts by the United Nations Secretary-General. A number of speakers supported the proposal to establish an independent commission of inquiry into breaches of human rights and international humanitarian law, with the view of avoiding impunity and ensuring accountability.

Speaking during this morning's debate were representatives of Egypt, on behalf of Arab Group, Pakistan, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Ethiopia, on behalf of African Group, Italy, on behalf of the European Union and other countries, Venezuela, Brazil, United States, Ireland, Indonesia, Russia, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Pakistan, Austria, Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Kuwait, Costa Rica, Philippines, Morocco, India, Mexico, Cuba, China, United Kingdom, Peru, South Africa, Germany, Japan, Chile, Republic of Korea, France, Viet Nam, Qatar, Turkey, and Egypt.

The Council will next meet this afternoon at 3 p.m. to hear the rest of the statements by States and non-governmental organizations, and then take action on the proposed draft resolution before closing the Special Session. This is the twenty-first special session of the Human Rights Council. Documentation relating to the Special Session is available on the [Human Rights Council webpage](#).

Opening Statements

BAUDELAIRE NDONG ELLA, [President of the Human Rights Council](#), said that today's Special Session of the Human Rights Council had been called for by 22 Member States of the Council and 16 Observer States. The Member States were Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Cuba, Gabon, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Maldives, Morocco, Namibia, Pakistan, Peru, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Viet Nam. The Observer States were Afghanistan, Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Ecuador, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Qatar, Senegal, State of Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen.

NAVI PILLAY, [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), said since Israel announced its military operation "Protective Edge" on 7 July, Gaza had been subjected to daily intensive bombardment from the air, land and sea, employing well over 2,100 air strikes alone. The hostilities had resulted in the deaths of more than 600 Palestinians, including at least 147 children and 74 women. As in the two previous crises in 2009 and 2012, it was innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip, including children, women, the elderly and persons with disabilities, who suffered the most. According to preliminary United Nations figures, around 74 per cent of those killed so far were civilians, and thousands more had been injured. Hundreds of homes and other civilian buildings, such as schools, had been destroyed or severely damaged in Gaza, and more than 140,000 Palestinians had been displaced. Two Israeli civilians had also lost their lives and between 17 and 32 others had been reported injured as a result of rockets and other projectiles fired from Gaza, and 27 Israeli soldiers had been killed during military operations in Gaza. The indiscriminate firing by Hamas and other armed groups of more than 2,900 rockets and mortars from Gaza continued to endanger the lives of civilians in Israel, and Ms. Pillay once again condemned such indiscriminate attacks. It was unacceptable to locate military assets in densely populated areas or to launch attacks from such areas. However, international law was clear - the actions of one party did not absolve the other party of the need to respect its obligations under international law.

Civilians must not be targeted, the High Commissioner emphasized, saying it was imperative that Israel, Hamas and all Palestinian armed groups strictly abide by international humanitarian and human rights laws. Not abiding by these principles may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The disregard for international humanitarian law and for the right to life was shockingly evident for all to see in the apparent targeting on 16 July of seven children playing on a Gaza beach. All seven were hit. Four of them, - aged between 9 and 11, from the same Bakr family - were killed. These children were clearly civilians taking no part in hostilities. The following day, three more children were killed and two others wounded, reportedly by a drone missile, in the Al-Sabra area of Gaza city while they were playing on the roof of their home as their parents prepared the daily Ramadan *iftar* meal. These are only a few of the cases in which a total of 147 children have been killed in Gaza over the past 16 days. They had a right to life just like children in any other country. Their killings raise concerns about respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack. Israeli children, and their parents and other civilians, also had a right to live without the constant fear that a rocket fired from Gaza may land on their houses or their schools, killing or injuring them. Ms. Pillay called for each of those incidents to be properly and independently investigated. She also warned that the current situation in Gaza overshadowed the backdrop of heightened tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and expressed concern about a significant rise in incitement to violence against Palestinians, including through social media. Only those responsible for criminal acts could legitimately be punished, she said, individuals should not be subject to collective penalties.

Israel held obligations as an Occupying Power, and both Palestinians and Israelis deserved better than a life of chronic insecurity and recurring escalation in hostilities, said Ms. Pillay, hoping that the parties would respond positively to the visit of the Secretary-General to the region and his call for an immediate ceasefire. Accountability was the first step towards ensuring that the cycle of human rights violations and impunity was brought to an end. A lasting peace could only begin with respect for human rights and human dignity on both sides, and ultimately, in the full realisation of the right to self-determination. All the dead and maimed civilians should weigh heavily on all consciences, said Ms. Pillay, as all efforts to protect them had been abject failures. More powerful entities, such as the Security Council, and individual States with serious leverage over the parties to this dreadful and interminable conflict, must do far more than they had done so far to bring the conflict to an end once and for all.

KYUNG-WHA KANG, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that since 7 July, over 599 Palestinians had been killed in the Gaza Strip and another 3,504 had been injured following the launch of the Israeli military operation "Protective Edge". In Gaza, over 73 per cent of the killed were civilians, one third of whom were children. Houses had been bombed with people in them, burying entire families under the rubble. Half of the population of the Gaza neighbourhood of Shuja'iya had fled their homes amidst heavy Israeli military bombardment over the previous weekend. At least 18 medical facilities, including five UNRWA health clinics, had been hit by airstrikes and shelling since the beginning of the fighting. The seven-year blockade had destroyed Gaza's economy, with high unemployment rates and growing dependence on international assistance. The United Nations was feeding 67 per cent of the population. The already poor infrastructure had been severely affected by the current round of conflict. It was necessary to emphasize that the crisis in Gaza had the potential to ignite further violence. Humanitarian agencies had to be given safe and unimpeded access to those in need, for which pauses in fighting were needed, while attacks on medical facilities and staff ought to stop. The international community and the parties to the conflict had to live up to their obligations.

LANCE BARTHOLOMEUSZ, Acting Director of Legal Affairs, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said UNRWA was deeply alarmed and affected by the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and the devastating human and physical toll it was taking on civilians, including Palestine refugees. Far too many lives were being lost and the traumas resulting from the military operations would mark the population for years to come. Among ordinary Palestinians there was a profound crisis of confidence in the ability of international law and international mechanisms to protect civilians, and to prevent and address violations of international law. Because of military operations, and because over 40 per cent of Gaza's territory was affected by Israel evacuation warnings or declarations of "no-go zones", thousands of people continued to flee to shelters run by UNRWA and by partners. By yesterday evening, 22 July, approximately 118,000 Palestinians had sought refuge in 77 UNRWA schools. That was about 6 per cent of the population of Gaza and double the peak in UNRWA shelters during the 2008 to 2009 conflict.

The conflict had not spared UNRWA premises, 77 of which had been damaged by air raids and other fire, which was totally unacceptable. All parties to the conflict must respect at all times the neutrality and inviolability of UNRWA's premises. The situation of the population of Gaza and of Palestine Refugees in Gaza had become completely unsustainable. Israel's illegal blockade had deepened poverty levels and Gaza's aquifer would be entirely contaminated in the next three to four years making the Strip essentially unliveable. Today, these indicators paled in comparison to the intensity of the bombardments, fighting and the immediate fears for security and survival. While fully recognising that UNRWA's specific role was a humanitarian one, it asked all actors concerned how long would it take before it was recognised that only a political situation would end the cycle of violence for the lives of tens of thousands which were today at grave and imminent risk.

MAKARIM WIBISONO, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, speaking on behalf of the Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, expressed dismay at the deaths, injuries, displacement and devastation resulting from the ongoing hostilities. Since the beginning of the hostilities, courageous human rights defenders and organizations, working often at great risk to their safety, had been documenting and exposing some of the numerous violations. In addition to at least 599 Palestinians killed, the destruction of numerous houses had left several thousand families homeless. Israel's bombings had caused further damage to essential life-support infrastructures. The latest military confrontation came on top of the long-standing illegal blockade imposed on Gaza, which had resulted in distressing levels of poverty. At the same time, the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation could not justify the launching of thousands of rockets and mortars directed against Israeli civilians. Israel was urged to allow unimpeded access to humanitarian food, water, and medical and other vital assistance to all civilians and affected areas, and to end the illegal blockade. Egypt should ease the restrictions at the Rafah crossing and allow the entry of essential humanitarian assistance, while the international community ought to do all it could to foster an effective peace process.

Statements by the Concerned Countries

EVIATAR MANOR, Permanent Representative of Israel, speaking as a concerned country, criticized the convening of the Special Session as misguided, ill-conceived and counter-productive to efforts being made to end the hostilities. With 2,000 rockets raining on Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beer Sheva from above and murderous terrorist squads tunnelling into Israeli villages from below, what could life-seeking Israelis do but go out and defend themselves? Hamas began firing rockets on towns and villages immediately after it had abducted and killed three Israeli teenagers, and in the weeks that followed Israel restrained itself. But after 300 rockets a day were indiscriminately fired at Israeli civilians, Israel had no choice but to respond. Every country had the duty to defend itself and that principle was enshrined in international law, and any other country in the world would have done the same. Hamas was committing war crimes when it fired rockets and missiles indiscriminately at Israeli towns and villages, when it built tunnels from Gaza into Israel to attack villages and abduct and murder Israelis, and by firing 2,000 rockets - which were 2,000 war crimes. Israel would destroy Hamas's military infrastructure, but Gaza civilians were not Israel's enemies. In line with international law requirements, Israel's military targeted only Hamas military targets. Israel deeply regretted any civilian losses caused by its operations and had already started investigations. Mr. Manor concluded that the Council could regain its moral authority by unequivocally condemning Hamas and rejecting outright the one-sided resolution. The Council could not stop Israel exercising its right to self-defence.

RIAD MALKI, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, said that the Palestinian people had been suffering since 1948. For more than two weeks now, Palestinian civilians had been exposed to bombings, maritime and air strikes, as well as the ground invasion. The fundamental right to life of the Palestinians was severely endangered; Palestinian children playing on the beach had been killed by the occupying force. Whole families were being killed, and journalists and medical teams were being targeted. Since the beginning of the attacks, more than 630 Palestinian civilians had been killed. The infrastructure had been destroyed, including water supplies, roads and communication networks. The occupying force was targeting medical centres in Gaza, as well as Muslim and Christian places of worship. What Israel was doing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions; Israel was massively punishing 1.8 million citizens in Gaza. Israel had to be held accountable for its crimes; its impunity thus far had encouraged Israel to repeat its actions. How many martyrs had to die before Israel put an end to its actions? The international community had to shoulder its responsibilities and the Council had to act now so that Israel halted its operations immediately. A fact-finding mission should be established to look into human rights violations perpetrated by Israel, which should visit Gaza with the Special Procedures mandate holders. It was high time to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land.

General Debate

Egypt, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, expressed alarm over the brutal attack launched by the occupying power over the last month. Israel had besieged Gaza with sophisticated weapons, targeting homes and health institutions, causing large numbers of casualties, injuries and displacement. The Arab Group and others had requested this Special Session to make the international community aware of its responsibilities in light of the grave and wide-ranging human rights violations against the people of Gaza. The draft resolution called for an independent Commission of Inquiry into those violations.

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, said the aggression with impunity taking place in Gaza was the continuation of systematic and gross human rights violations by the occupying power Israel, and its heinous crimes needed to be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators held accountable through the establishment of a commission of inquiry. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation also called for the

resumption of the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Iran, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, condemned in the strongest terms the widespread systematic and gross violations by Israel of basic principles of international law. The Non-Aligned Movement was deeply disappointed by the failure of the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities to bring an end to the unlawful Israeli aggression. An international commission of inquiry to investigate all violations with a view to ending impunity was necessary.

Ethiopia, speaking on behalf of the African Group, deplored the recent conflict in the Gaza Strip and surrounding areas, and all forms of attacks on civilians and public infrastructure. Israel was called upon to end all forms of attacks against civilians and to end the illegal blockade against Palestinians. Attacks from Palestine against Israel should also cease. The international community should deploy additional measures to safeguard the well-being of the people of Palestine and support their struggle for self-determination.

Italy, speaking on behalf of the European Union and other countries, condemned the loss of hundreds of civilian lives and called for an immediate cessation of the hostilities in Gaza. They welcomed and supported the efforts by regional partners, in particular Egypt. They strongly condemned the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel by Hamas, and, while recognizing Israel's right to defend itself, also underlined that Israel's military operation must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law.

Venezuela condemned the blatant violation of human rights and international humanitarian law by Israel's political and military elite. Israel was seeking to exterminate the Palestinian people and to deprive them permanently of their historical legacy. Israel's actions constituted a war crime and a crime against humanity. State terrorism had become a daily practice of the occupying power. Venezuela demanded that the brutal blockade against the Palestinian people be lifted immediately and that humanitarian aid be allowed in.

Brazil strongly condemned the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, as well as the firing of rockets and mortars from Gaza into Israel, and the placement of weapons in vacant schools. Israel could not neglect its responsibilities under international humanitarian law, namely to protect the Palestinian civilian population. The illegal Israeli occupation was the main cause of human rights violations in Palestine. An independent international commission of inquiry was needed.

United States was working intensively with others to ensure a return to the November 2012 ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The United States demanded that Hamas immediately cease its rocket attacks against Israel, and supported Israel's right to self-defense. At the same time it was concerned about the rising numbers of civilian casualties in Gaza. The United States was committed to the existence of Israel as a Jewish and a democratic State, and the creation of an independent Palestinian State.

Ireland said it was appalled by the upsurge of violence in Gaza and especially the very high and unacceptable level of civilian casualties. It was clear that neither side was paying adequate regard to the cost of their actions on innocent civilians. It commended those working to bring about a ceasefire, especially Egypt. Ireland accepted Israel's right to defend its people but said that right did not negate the rights of others. Ireland supported the conduct of an appropriate investigation into breaches of international law.

Indonesia was distressed by the gravity of the suffering of the Palestinian people and strongly condemned Israel's indiscriminate and disproportionate military campaign against them. Israel may have the might but that did not necessarily make them right. Ignorance and lack of accountability for violations of international law would only reinforce the culture of impunity and lead to the recurrence of violence. Indonesia was also deeply disturbed that basic necessities were very hard to obtain, if not impossible.

Russia was deeply disturbed about the worsening situation in the Gaza Strip, especially the suffering of innocent citizens, such as women and children. More than 600 Palestinians had been killed since the onset of fighting. At the same time, Russia was concerned about the shelling of Israeli civilian targets by fighters of Hamas and other groups. The existing situation was another proof of the futility of the status quo, while any solution had to be worked out together with Arab States.

Algeria strongly condemned the immoral aggression by Israel against the unarmed and besieged Palestinian people before the eyes of the entire world. The scale of the systemic destruction of infrastructure and places of worship was shocking. The latest stage of Israel's crime was taking place in front of the entire international community – how could the massacre and murder of the innocent be justifiable in the name of self-defence? Algeria hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

United Arab Emirates condemned the flagrant violations of the rights of the Palestinian people by Israel, and its massacre in Gaza. It demanded that the occupying power immediately end its aggression and be held accountable for all loss of life, and that all parties support Egypt's initiative for a ceasefire. The United Arab Emirates, in partnership with UNWRA, was providing urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza, and called on the international community to also provide support.

Argentina expressed deep concern over the deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which had killed hundreds of civilians including a significant number of children in what constituted a major tragedy which was moving the international community. The right to life and the right to physical integrity of people was being violated. The Council, together with the Security Council and the Secretary-General, must send a clear message that the hostilities and human rights violations must end.

Pakistan supported a just, peaceful and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue through the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders. Israel's brazen refusal to accept an equitable solution had been the root cause of the continuing spiral of violence and bloodshed in the region. The disproportionate collective punishment meted out to the Palestinian people amounted to genocide. Pakistan called for an immediate establishment of an independent commission of inquiry.

Austria had repeatedly condemned the indiscriminate attacks by Hamas on civilian targets in Israel, but the Israeli military operations continued to inflict an unacceptable toll on Palestinian civilians. Civilians had to be protected, while medical workers and facilities had to be spared so that they could carry on their work. A continuous influx of humanitarian supplies to Gaza had to be ensured. The parties to the conflict were called upon to abide by all norms of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Saudi Arabia said the Council was meeting as the Security Council failed to make a decision to rescue the Palestinian people in Gaza from attacks by the Israeli army. While it appreciated the courageous efforts of the High Commissioner, Israel continued to violate the human rights of the Palestinian people in actions that constituted war crimes. Saudi Arabia stood strongly with the Palestinian people and supported the Egyptian initiative to reach a ceasefire.

Maldives said the Council should have taken more timely action on this issue. The atrocities committed by Israel violated every international law, including humanitarian law. It called on Israel to start protecting human life and dignity and immediately withdraw from the Gaza Strip. Israel claimed its actions were in self-defence – what danger did the four young boys playing on the Gaza beach pose to Israel? Time and again the world had continued to fail to take action over Palestine.

Kuwait said tens of thousands of unarmed civilians had had to flee their homes and Israel's killing machines. Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip was disproportionate and it impacted electricity, drinking water supplies and other basic services necessary for survival. Kuwait announced urgent assistance amounting to \$10 million, and called for more urgent humanitarian aid for Gaza. The Council must live up to its responsibility to protect the rights of the Palestinian people against the might of the occupying power.

Costa Rica, as an unarmed, peace-loving country, categorically condemned ongoing attacks against the civilian population, and called for dialogue and reconciliation. Costa Rica strongly called upon all parties to agree to a ceasefire. Costa Rica had condemned both Palestinian militant attacks on Israeli targets, but also the disproportionate use of military force by the Israeli forces in Gaza. Only the commitment of all parties dedicated to peace could bring about a lasting solution.

Philippines was gravely concerned that the escalation of violence, through disproportionate military operations by Israeli armed forces, as well as rockets attacks by Palestinian armed groups, constituted serious breaches of human rights norms. The Philippines called on the concerned parties to allow unfettered delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially food and medicine. The Philippines reaffirmed its support to the implementation of a two-State solution.

Morocco said that the Israeli operation had led to hundreds of deaths and significant material damage, and was strongly condemned by Morocco. The attack on Gaza was part of a series of organized attacks aimed at stopping any progress toward a just settlement of the Palestinian conflict. Israel had crossed moral red lines, as nothing could justify attacks on women and children or bombing ambulances. The Council ought to establish an independent fact-finding commission in order to ensure accountability for crimes committed.

India expressed deep concern at the steep escalation of violence in Gaza, and supported all efforts for an immediate ceasefire. It was also concerned by the violence by non-State actors in the region which were obstacles to the peace process. The solution to the Palestine issue was a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine within recognized borders side-by-side and at peace with Israel, and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Mexico condemned the launching of rockets from Gaza to Israel and the use of violence in the Gaza Strip. Mexico was particularly concerned by reports of attacks against hospitals and civilian homes in Gaza, which were contrary to international law. Mexico said it would vote in favour of the draft resolution although it disagreed with the relevance of creating a fact-finding mission because it was unlikely to create the conditions required for the resumption of vital direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

Cuba said the human right to life – the most important of human rights – was once again blatantly being violated in the occupied Palestinian territories by the military forces of Israel. The new practice of warning inhabitants to leave their homes before a bomb destroyed them was a farce and a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. The genocide against the Palestinian people must end and those responsible must be made to answer for their crimes.

China viewed with deep pain and concern the ongoing Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians, which had caused a huge civilian death toll. China called upon all parties to respect human rights and international humanitarian law. It was most important to have a ceasefire at this moment, and halt the ground offensive and the launch of rockets. China urged all parties concerned to return to the negotiating table; a special envoy from China was in the region at the moment, engaged in intensive shuttle diplomacy.

United Kingdom condemned the appalling attacks being carried out by Hamas and other militant attacks, and supported Israel's right to take action to defend itself, but its use of force had to be proportionate. Both sides had to do their utmost to de-escalate the situation and alleviate the suffering. The British Government had increased its funding as the humanitarian situation worsened. The urgent priority was to bring the violence to an end, and in that

regard the new Foreign Secretary was currently in the region.

Peru had expressed on several opportunities its deep concern over the situation in the Middle East, especially over the indiscriminate use of force by Israel against Gaza. Any act, practice or method of terrorism had to be condemned at the same time. The civilian population had to be ensured medical attention, and humanitarian corridors ought to be secured. The civilian population was gravely suffering and did not have access to essential services, and it was high time for the international community to act now.

South Africa said the Special Session was taking place at a critical juncture as the world witnessed the siege of the Gaza Strip and the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli Defence Forces, which must immediately cease the collective punishment of the Palestinians. South Africa equally condemned the firing of rockets by Hamas into Israel which put the lives of innocent civilians at risk.

Germany strongly condemned the continued firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and was appalled by attempts by Hamas and other militants to use civilians of Gaza as human shields. Israel had the right to defend its population against those criminal and unjustifiable attacks, but in doing so it must act proportionately and ensure the protection of civilians at all times.

Japan said despite efforts by the international community for a ceasefire it regretted that Palestinian militants did not accept the proposals, and urged all parties to refrain from excessive use of force to prevent civilian casualties. Following a humanitarian pause achieved through the mediation efforts of the United Nations on 17 July, it was essential that all parties continued cooperating with each other to realize unfettered humanitarian access in the affected area.

Chile expressed its dismay at the use of force by Israel against densely populated areas in Gaza, as well as the launch of rockets by Hamas against Israeli civilian targets. Free access for humanitarian aid had to be secured to the suffering population. The blockade of Gaza had already resulted in adverse effects on the population for years. Chile welcomed the good offices of the Secretary-General and Egypt in trying to end the crisis.

Republic of Korea was gravely concerned about the heavy casualties of innocent civilians of Palestine, who were forced to endure such unbearable suffering. The situation in the Gaza Strip had already been dire even before the onslaught of the current fighting. The Republic of Korea was also deeply concerned that various international efforts for a ceasefire had yet to produce an outcome. All parties were asked to exercise maximum restraint.

France stated that the current balance was appalling, with more than 630 dead and more than 100,000 displaced Palestinians. It was not acceptable that a country be threatened by a rocket barrage, nor for a civilian population to be exposed to the harsh military response leading to numerous casualties. While Israel's security had to be completely guaranteed, it was important for the Palestinian Authority to re-establish its control over the Gaza Strip, with the view of reunifying the Palestinian Territories.

Viet Nam said the deaths of innocent civilians, especially women and children, in the occupied Palestinian territories was unacceptable. Viet Nam shared the international community's deep concern, as expressed in the statement of the United Nations Secretary-General on 20 July. A ceasefire, not the continuation of violence, would help re-open peace talks and promote a safe and secure environment for the enjoyment of human rights by the peoples in the region.

Qatar condemned in the strongest terms the killing of unarmed civilians by the occupying power Israel and the collective punishment of the Palestinians, which were crimes of war and crimes against humanity. Gaza was an open-air prison and the civilians had nowhere to flee. Qatar especially referred to the terrible massacre of the Shejaiya neighbourhood. It called for the blockade on Gaza to be lifted.

Turkey said the Council should have reacted to the crisis much earlier. By continuing its massacres and other inhumane acts of collective punishment, Israel was only planting seeds of hatred in the region. Israel's unacceptable attacks, with the tacit approval of the self-imposed human rights champions, had had devastating consequences not only for the innocent Palestinian civilians but also for human rights and humanitarian law developed over the last 150 years.

Egypt condemned the recent Israeli attacks killing hundreds of Palestinians and injuring thousands. Israel, as the occupying power, should ensure that no excessive force was used and that the well-being of the Palestinians was guaranteed. The Egyptian initiative should be supported as a way of ending the suffering of the Palestinian people. Egypt had opened the Rafah border crossing from the early days of the Israeli intervention.

For use of the information media; not an official record