



Security Council

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**TOLL ON CIVILIANS 'APPALLING', PEACE PROCESS COORDINATOR WARNS SECURITY COUNCIL,
STRESSING HOPELESSNESS OVER ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT MUST END**

While the current respite in the "unprecedented" destruction and bloodshed in Gaza was welcome and humanitarian aid was primary, it was critical to end the conflict by reversing the loss of hope in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the United Nations Special Coordinator for that process told the Security Council this morning.

"The slide towards a state of permanent conflict and hopelessness must be halted at once," Robert Serry, who is also the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority, said at the regular monthly briefing on the situation to the 15-member body.

"The increasingly restive situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, together with the Gaza crisis, should be a bleak warning to all concerned what the future will bring if we do not reverse the current negative trend towards a one-State reality, which is now on the parties' doorstep," Mr. Serry said, urging accelerated efforts to get the parties back to the negotiating table.

He said that the toll of this third major escalation in six years was "appalling", with almost 2,000 Palestinians killed, of whom 459 were children and 239 were women, and some 10,000 Palestinians injured. Sixty-four Israeli soldiers, two Israeli civilians and one foreign national were killed, with a few dozen Israelis injured by rockets or shrapnel.

Noting that the latest deadline on Gaza ceasefire talks was quickly approaching, he said that it was not yet clear what kind of understanding would emerge. He stressed that a sustainable solution must include lifting the Israeli blockade on the area, but also must address the issues of governance, reconstruction and security in the context of the return of one legitimate Palestinian authority to Gaza.

He called on all in Gaza to rally behind the Government of National Consensus and to empower it to take charge and effect positive, transformative change. "Right now, Gaza urgently needs houses, hospitals and schools — not rockets, tunnels and conflict," he said, voicing an expectation that Hamas and all other factions would act responsibly in that regard and refrain from any actions that ran counter to the agenda.

He also underlined the importance of international monitoring arrangements in support of a durable ceasefire, trusting that the Council would consider taking any needed action in support of the arrangements.

Affirming that breaches of the inviolability of United Nations premises during the escalation were intolerable and showed the parties' disrespect for international law, he noted three direct hits on schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), damage to many others and dozens of related deaths, including those of 11 UNRWA staff. He also noted that on three occasions, rockets were found in UNRWA schools. He reiterated the Secretary-General's call for a thorough investigation into all those incidents.

In light of all such considerations, he underlined the importance of extending the current ceasefire, for which he thanked Egypt for its role and noted the personal engagement of the Secretary-General, particularly to allow for increased humanitarian aid and early recovery efforts, including restoration of water and electricity networks and provision of viable shelter to those whose homes had been destroyed.

Approximately 16,800 housing units in Gaza had been destroyed or severely damaged, he said. Estimating that the reconstruction needs were three times those that resulted from the 2009 escalation, he stressed the importance of the engagement of the donor community and supported today's announcement by Norway and Egypt to co-host a conference for that purpose once a durable ceasefire was in place.

Turning to violence in the West Bank, he said that, since 23 July, demonstrations against Israeli operations in Gaza had taken place almost daily, often resulting in clashes with Israeli security forces. A total of 17 Palestinians were killed, including two children, with some 1,400 injured. Settler attacks resulted in one Palestinian killed and 19 injured, while 12 settlers were injured by Palestinians and another Israeli died when a Palestinian attacked street traffic with an excavator vehicle.

Normally, he said, the monthly briefing would include the wider Middle East, but he noted that the Council had been considering developments in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in other recent meetings, particularly given the heightened threat posed by extremist groups.

The meeting began at 10:06 a.m. and ended at 10:18 a.m.

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