
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**OPENING STATEMENT AT PRESS CONFERENCE
WITH ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER TZIPI LIVNI
15 January 2009**

I am very pleased to be here in Israel and to meet Foreign Minister Livni again.

I come at a very difficult time for Israel. I come with heavy heart. I come on a mission of peace.

I am well aware that rockets have been fired at Israeli civilians for years from Gaza. I have always condemned these rockets as acts of terrorism. They have no justification and they must cease.

But I must also be concerned at the suffering of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Many people have died and are still dying.

Civilian suffering has reached an unbearable point.

That is why I have urged an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire.

This is what Security Council resolution 1860 calls for.

The rockets must stop. And Israel's offensive must end.

All violence must cease, and the bloodshed and suffering among the civilian populations must be halted.

Clearly a return to the status quo ante can be no option. If a ceasefire is to be sustainable, we need arrangements to ensure a halt to the resupply of weapons to Gaza militants, the reopening of the crossings, the release of Corporal Shalit, and that Gaza is reunited with the West Bank under one legitimate Palestinian authority.

I also discussed with the Foreign Minister the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The people of Gaza are facing a dire humanitarian crisis. This is a fact.

We are working closely with the Israeli authorities to alleviate the crisis as much as possible.

I am truly proud of the UN staff braving difficult and dangerous circumstances to help those in need.

I believe from my talks in Egypt that the elements are in place for this violence to end now.

The time has come for the violence to stop and for us to change fundamentally the dynamics in Gaza, and to pursue again the peace talks for a two State solution, which is the only road to lasting security for Israel.

We don't have any more time to lose. We must end civilian suffering now.

I count on the wise leadership of the Israeli Government.

I want to thank FM Livni again for welcoming me to Israel and I look forward to the remainder of my visit.

Thank you very much.

Q: Secretary-General. How frustrated are you that Israel is not listening to your calls for a ceasefire?

SG: As Secretary-General of the United Nations I have a responsibility to ensure the implementation of Security Council Resolution [1860], which is binding. Israel is one of the responsible members of the United Nations, thus also has the responsibility to fully comply, fully implement any resolution taken by the Security Council. I have urged the Foreign Minister, and I am going to urge the President and Prime Minister to fully abide by this Security Council resolution. Before I came to Israel, I had an informal meeting with all 15 members of the Security Council. They have entrusted me on this mission to bring this fighting to an end, immediately, in accordance with Resolution 1860. I sincerely hope that the Israeli Government now heeds this call of the Security Council, the wishes of the international community, that fighting must stop, that we do not see any further sacrifices and killings of civilian populations, and we see no more destruction of infrastructure and properties. We have to now look at the reconstruction of Gaza City. As soon as a ceasefire is attained - I hope so - then as I said, I intend to dispatch a humanitarian needs assessment team to Gaza and on this, the Foreign Minister has agreed to facilitate the physical assistance on this.

Q: Mr. Secretary, on your mission to Egypt [inaudible] what point are we at? When will the fighting stop? What is your impression?

SG: In my meetings with the leaders of Egypt and Jordan and also Israel, my observation is that they have some elements now in place which may enable the ceasefire to come reasonably soon. I hope so. But that depends on the political will of the Israeli Government. You must have seen the report that Hamas has proposed a ceasefire. I am not fully aware of the terms and conditions.

What I would like to urge again is that we can discuss terms and conditions later. My demand is just to stop fighting now - immediately - cease fire immediately. You can discuss this matter to make the ceasefire durable and sustainable, which can be respected fully by the parties concerned. If you take more time then more people will have to be killed. That is an unacceptable situation. We are almost 20 days since this fighting began. The number of casualties has reached an unbearable point. There is a strong wish and expectation and call from the international community that this fighting must stop and establish a durable, sustainable ceasefire so the Gazan citizen population can live in peace and security.

At the same time, the Israeli people have a legitimate right to live without fear. It is again unacceptable that almost one million Israeli people should live day and night with such a fear coming from indiscriminate rocket firing by from Hamas militants. This must also stop immediately and permanently.

Now, on Hamas taking human shields or any installations and facilities - that is unacceptable. This is against international humanitarian law. It is against humanity. This cannot be accepted. And this must be stopped.

