
Off-the-Cuff**Secretary-General's press encounter with Prime Minister Hesham Mohamed Qandil of Egypt [unofficial transcript]****Cairo, Egypt, 20 November 2012**

SG: Prime Minister Hesham Mohamed Qandil, Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, Al Salam Alikom.

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for your hospitality and flexibility of receiving me and my delegation today. I believe that we are meeting [under] very difficult and trying circumstances, I am talking about the violence and conflict in Gaza.

I just concluded constructive meeting with Prime Minister Qandil and I very much appreciate my dialogue with Egyptian interlocutors. We discussed the worrying developments in the region, and Egypt's commendable efforts to broker an immediate cessation of violence in Gaza as a first step towards a more durable peace.

Before I began my discussions with the Prime Minister I conveyed my deepest condolences to President [Mohamed] Morsi through Prime Minister on the passing away of his sister yesterday. I also conveyed to the Government and people of Egypt my deepest condolences and sympathies for the tragic bus accident where more than 50 children were killed last Saturday.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the situation in Gaza is profoundly alarming. I am deeply saddened by the mounting loss of civilian lives. Violence is again dominating the scene, not progress towards the long overdue Palestinian State, as part of a two-state solution.

My message is clear: all sides must stop fire. Further escalation of the situation will only result in more tragedy, and puts the entire region at risk. That is why a ground operation must be avoided. That is why it is urgent to contain the present crisis. I fully support the efforts led by President Morsi and his senior officials of Egypt to achieve a ceasefire immediately. Time is of the essence.

My paramount immediate concern is for the safety and well being of all civilians.

I appeal to all those commanding, bearing and operating weapons to respect international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians at all times. This is an obligation, not an option. I appeal to both sides to uphold their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

I reiterate my call for an immediate cessation of indiscriminate rocket attacks by Palestinian militants targeting Israeli population centres.

This is unacceptable. I strongly condemn these actions. Israel has legitimate security concerns that must be respected in accordance with the relevant international laws.

But this does not make it right to conduct strikes that kill and injure civilians and damage civilian infrastructures in Gaza. I also condemn excessive and disproportionate use of force.

My message to Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, when we meet in Jerusalem, will be a call for an immediate ceasefire and for Israel to uphold its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

I travelled to the region under similar circumstances in early 2009. It is extremely painful for me to be back for the same reason, for the same situation, and to see that the parties are no closer to ending their hostilities, which will make neither Israelis nor Palestinians more secure.

I am deeply worried that efforts to facilitate renewed negotiations to achieve a two-state solution have failed to produce a breakthrough. Yet, the present crisis proves again that the status quo is unsustainable and that a negotiated two-state solution ending a prolonged occupation is more urgent than ever.

We must now all work together to restore calm and find urgently a path back towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Egypt has long been a leader in the region.

President Morsi brings to the office the legitimacy from elections, and the ability to reach all sides. I am particularly grateful to President Morsi for leading the mediation efforts. I know we can count on Egypt to play a responsible leadership role in the region.

Prime Minister Qandil and I also discussed the unacceptable situation in Syria. I welcome Egypt's efforts to help end violence there and achieve a political solution.

Further militarization in Syria will lead only to more suffering and destruction.

Joint UN-Arab League Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi is continuing his efforts to launch a process that can lead to a political solution that responds to the Syrian people's aspirations.

I also thank the Egyptian Government's very generous support for the activities of Mr. Brahimi and his team. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your Government's commitment to these efforts at this troubling time for the region.

Q: Mr. Ban Ki-moon, as you know Egypt made efforts during the last days. Do you think that it can reach a cease-fire or a truce between the two sides? Secondly you speak about the Israeli legitimacy to defend itself, and also the right of the Palestinians in their country. What is the right legitimacy if the United Nations cannot implement the international resolutions? Thank you.

SG: First of all, as I said in my remarks the Egyptian Government, particularly President Morsi, has been playing a crucially important role in mediating between the Palestinians and Israelis, to bring this violence to an immediate end, and I am here basically to give my strong political support to President Morsi's mediation efforts. I am told and it is my understanding that the parties seem to be (inaudible) to their negotiations. I sincerely hope that the two parties will immediately stop fighting and engage in a more comprehensive way of maintaining peace and stability.

Both Israel and Palestinian people have agreed to negotiate for a two-state solution, where both Israelis and Palestinian people can live side by side in peace and security. That is the vision they have agreed on and we have to support it and that is what the United Nations has to work very closely.

As far as Israel is concerned, as I said, we should respect the legitimate concerns of the Israeli people for their security, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860, and they clearly stated that they have the right to exist in peaceful conditions. They are a Member State of the United Nations. At the same time, the Palestinian people, their genuine aspiration to become a state has grown over time. Their aspiration should be realized as soon as possible through these negotiations, with the aim to realize the two state solution where those two peoples can live in peace and security.

Question: (in Arabic)

SG: I understand the frustrations shared by many people that this peace process has not been making any progress during the last many decades. The Palestinian people have been living under oppression and occupation. This abnormal situation should be resolved. That is why I have been urging the parties concerned to engage in genuine dialogue. As a member of the Quartet, I have been actively discussing this, also Envoys of the Quartet have been actively discussing this matter. I am also frustrated to see that these peace talks have been stalled, deadlocked. We have many guidelines and frameworks set by the Security Council, General Assembly, the Quartet and Arab Peace Initiative. All these should be genuinely and as quickly as possible [inaudible]. We have to learn lessons from all this ongoing violence between Palestinians and Israelis. It is more than urgent that we have to accelerate the peace process. That is going to be my message to the Israelis and to President Abbas when I meet him in Ramallah. Thank you.