

OFF-THE-CUFF**Secretary-General's remarks to press on the situation in the Middle East****[full transcript]****New York, 9 July 2014**

Good afternoon. I just wanted to provide a brief update on the troubling and volatile situation in the Middle East.

I have spent much of the day in active dialogue with regional and world leaders – including Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Palestinian President Abbas, Egyptian President Sisi, the King of Saudi Arabia, Emir of Qatar the United States Secretary of State Kerry and several others, including the Secretary – General of OIC [Organization of Islamic Conference] and League of Arab States.

I am alarmed by the new wave of violence that has engulfed Gaza, southern Israel and the West Bank – including East Jerusalem. This is one of the most critical tests the region has faced in recent years.

Gaza is on a knife-edge. The deteriorating situation is leading to a downward spiral which could quickly get beyond anyone's control.

The risk of violence expanding further still is real. Gaza, and the region as a whole, cannot afford another full-blown war.

Again, I firmly condemn the multiple rocket attacks launched from Gaza on Israel. Such attacks are unacceptable and must stop.

I also urged Prime Minister Netanyahu to exercise maximum restraint and to respect international obligations to protect civilians. I condemn the rising number of civilian lives lost in Gaza.

I commended President Abbas for courageously upholding his commitment to security coordination. This is essential to achieving stability on the ground. President Abbas remains the best partner for peace.

Regional leaders have a vital role to play and I urged President Sisi and others to help facilitate a return to the November 2012 ceasefire agreement.

I shared with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders my condolences and condemnation of the recent attacks on innocent civilians.

The killers must be brought to justice. I also encourage leaders on both sides to do their utmost to end all attacks – including provocations and attacks by Israeli settlers. Extremism in all its forms is fuelling the cycle of violence.

This is a time for justice, not for revenge. It is a time for statesmanship and wisdom.

In my outreach today, the leaders agreed on the urgency of the situation -- and the imperative to resume meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-State solution.

The international community must work with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to restore a political horizon to avert further escalation.

The United Nations is ready to rapidly respond to emerging humanitarian needs. We are working closely with Palestinian and Israeli authorities and other partners, including the Palestinian Red Crescent.

I also encourage the Government of Egypt to urgently open its crossing for humanitarian purposes to help alleviate the suffering.

I know emotions are running very high. I urge all sides to exercise maximum restraint. Calm must be restored as soon as possible.

The lives of countless innocent civilians and the peace process itself are in the balance.

I know you are eagerly awaiting the announcement of the appointment of a successor to Lakhdar Brahimi. Consultations are still continuing and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement very soon.

Thank you.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, thank you very much for this conference. On behalf of UNCA's Executive Committee, we thank you sir. I would like to remind you when we went hopping nine cities in the first Gaza/ Israeli war, when you tried your best to stop that and you succeed in many ways. At that time you had appealed to Israel to have a unilateral ceasefire from one side. And that really helped in stopping that war. Would you use your moral authority in this podium again to call upon Israel for a unilateral ceasefire and stop their excessive use of force in the present conflict?

SG: Thank you for reminding us of all this very serious and dramatic situations at that time. The reason why I'm urging the leaders in the region, particularly Palestinians and Israelis leaders, is that I do not -- nobody wants to see another full-blown crisis like we have experienced in 2008 and 2012. I have really strongly urged [this] to both sides. Prime Minister Netanyahu explained his difficulties, political difficulties and domestic, all difficulties, saying that he tried to take maximum restraint - even he stopped responding because when rockets are continuing to fly and attack Israelis, he had to respond -- that was his answer. And I also urged strongly President Abbas to continue the course of having, maintaining this security coordination with Israelis. And both sides should exercise maximum restraint. And I'm asking all the leaders in the region who may have influence on those two parties to do their utmost efforts to exercise their influence.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. You talked about the need to return to the ceasefire agreement and to negotiations. Can you tell us whether you got any positive response from Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to that appeal for those specific things: to return for a ceasefire or a return to negotiations?

SG: I have to very closely watch the situation, how it evolves. What I did today, spending the whole day working on the phones with them, is that they must exercise maximum restraint. What I did [say] to regional leaders like the King of Saudi [Arabia], the Emir of Qatar and President Sisi of Egypt particularly, and also Secretaries-General of regional organizations like the OIC and the League of Arab States, that they should urge the parties concerned to exercise the maximum restraint. And then for future course of actions, I'll have to see. I also discussed very in depth with [U.S. Secretary of State] Kerry what he is going to do and what the United Nations should do. And I'm still in the process of consulting with world leaders.

Q: In your conversations specifically with Sisi but also with Qatar, have any of them indicated that they are working on a process to reach a ceasefire?

SG: Yes, they did, they did. President Sisi, he told me that he had already even before -- even yesterday when this crisis erupted massively, he was trying to have all the sides to restraint. He said that he will continue to exercise his leadership. The same was assured by the Emir of Qatar; he also told me that he will do his best efforts.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, we thought you were all set to announce as you correctly said a little earlier who would be the successor of Brahimi? We were told that it would be today? Is there a problem with the choice you made? Is there a snag that prevents you from announcing? And is it true that you will be making such an announcement tomorrow instead?

SG: I told you that I'm going to make my announcement very soon but not today. You need to get all these consultations with the parties concerned. There are many, many actors in this process so we need to get all, everybody on board. So it's very close.

Q: Talal mentioned the events of 2009 -- then you went to the region to negotiate with the people on the ground. Will you consider that again if you think that could help?

SG: I told you that first I'll see how the situation will evolve. Let us see what is required to do, what is necessary to do, so that's what I discussed with the Secretary General [of the League of Arab States].

Q: On your responsibility to the UN Charter, did you ask members of Security Council for any urgent meeting about this situation in Palestine?

SG: That's a good question. I had requested... I met the President of the Security Council today and I had requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council. So maybe tomorrow -- the Security Council has to decide on my request. Maybe as soon as early tomorrow then I may be able to brief, to report to the Security Council and let the members discuss this matter.

Q: I wanted to know -- Mahmoud Abbas has said those who feared courts should refrain from committing crimes. This has been interpreted as basically a statement that they are closer than they were before, going to the International Criminal Court. And I wanted to know, what do you think is the place of accountability on both sides and what would you think of Palestine seeking to join the International Criminal Court?

SG: On many occasions, including this time - yesterday, I had condemned in the strongest possible terms and I have also asked that the perpetrators should be brought to justice. When it comes to accountability, when it comes to justice, the United Nations has been maintaining and will continue maintaining the same principled position -- that there should be a clear and firm principle of accountability and justice for any perpetrators of, of course, violation of human rights and humanitarian laws.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, thank you very much for giving me the question this time. You asked Egypt to open Rafah or its southern crossings, also I think, after eight years of sanctions and siege in Gaza, more borders should be opened to these people, otherwise they are cornered in a situation where they have no option but to fight for their survival. What is the message that you would like to see the Security Council, and members of the Security Council, telling the Israelis and the Egyptians regarding these people's daily sufferings?...

SG: As I said, the United Nations has already begun to mobilize the humanitarian assistance for those people affected. And, when it comes to the humanitarian situation in Gaza, I don't need to elaborate how difficult and dire the situation is in the Gaza area. I have been working during the last many, many years, consistently and persistently, talking with the Israeli authorities that they should lift all the restrictions and allow all the free

introduction of necessary goods and trade. I will continue to do that. While this conflict continues, it's only the people who will suffer on the ground that is what really saddens me. So, the UN will do all [that it] can.

Q: Thank you Mr. Secretary-General for this press conference and I hope you will resume your monthly press conference. As you said, the Security Council will soon meet, today or tomorrow. Will you be going to the Security Council with some new ideas?

SG: Let me see. My main purpose is that first I'll have to report about the situation and about what I have been doing, what I expect [from] the Security Council and from all the international community, particularly [what] the regional leaders should do to, first of all, stop this violence taking place and we should stem the further spread of this impact to the region and to the people. That is the basic purpose. And I cannot prejudge what the Security Council will do. We will, of course - very closely coordinated with what kind of future course of action or new ideas should be there. Thank you very much.