
Off-the-Cuff**Secretary-General's remarks at press encounter with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel
Jerusalem, Israel, 20 November 2012**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Prime Minister and Shalom ladies and gentlemen, Toda. Again I'd like to thank the Prime Minister for welcoming me to Israel at this time. I regrettably am back again in the region only nine months since my last visit, because violence in Israel and Gaza is again grabbing our attention, not progress towards a lasting peace and a two-state solution. The world is extremely concerned at the rising loss of human lives. Further escalation would be dangerous and tragic for Palestinians and Israelis, and would put the entire region at risk. I am here to appeal to all to halt fire and restore calm. Rockets have hit areas just outside of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as Israeli towns near Gaza, killing and injuring civilians. I myself visited Sderot and these cities and met many people and I was able to witness myself how these people were living in fear and terror. This is unacceptable, irresponsible and reckless. I strongly condemn these actions. Rocket attacks by Palestinian militants targeting Israel must cease immediately.

I know how difficult the situation is here, but Israel must exercise maximum restraint. I strongly caution against a ground operation, which will only result in further tragedy. I have also stressed that while Israeli rockets may be aimed at military targets inside Gaza, they kill and injure civilians and damage civilian infrastructures. The loss of civilian lives is unacceptable under any circumstances. The excessive use of force is unlawful and must be rejected. And I take note of your statement that these military operations were aimed against only military facilities. But still, in the course of military operations, the civilians are apt to be victimized, as we have seen.

My paramount immediate concern is for the safety and well-being of all civilians, in Israel and in Gaza. Innocent people, including children, are being killed and injured on both sides. I appeal to all those commanding, bearing and operating arms - weapons - to respect international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians at all times.

I was here under similar circumstances in early 2009. It is extremely painful for me to be back for the same reason. This new cycle of bloodshed will make neither Israelis nor Palestinians more secure. Nor will bloodshed open the door to negotiations that could achieve the two-state solution necessary to end such violence permanently.

Further escalation benefits no one. I and all my staff, including Special Coordinator Robert Serry, will spare no effort to put an end to violence and provide humanitarian assistance to those in need.

Over the past week, Mr. Prime Minister, I have spoken with many international leaders and regional leaders by telephone and in person. I have come here directly from Cairo where I met with Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby and Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Mohamed Qandil earlier today. Egypt is a leader in the region and I was encouraged that the Egyptian authorities are using their contacts on all sides to seek an immediate ceasefire.

I have also met Foreign Minister Liberman and Defence Minister Barak this afternoon since arriving in Jerusalem. I will be meeting President Peres after our meeting with you this evening and Palestinian President Abbas tomorrow morning.

I am here to offer my help and good offices to end the violence and find a path back towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The world is watching and waiting. We have not a moment to lose.

Again, I thank Mr. Prime Minister. I count on your strong leadership in working together with the United Nations for peace and stability and human rights in this region. Thank you.