

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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REMARKS AT PRESS ENCOUNTER
28 July 2014

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. Eid Mubarak.

I am about to brief the Security Council on the vital role of regional organizations to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Before I do, I just wanted to update you on the current situation in the Middle East.

Let me begin by reinforcing last night's call of the Security Council, calling for an immediate, unconditional humanitarian ceasefire.

As you know, I issued a statement yesterday calling for a 24 hour extension of the humanitarian ceasefire and I did the same early this morning.

As the world marks Eid al-Fitr, it is time for an immediate, unconditional humanitarian ceasefire. In the name of humanity, the violence must stop.

As you know, I have just returned from the region.

Over the course of six days, I held extensive consultations with leaders in the region, in eight countries, as well as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry who has been working tirelessly and valiantly to end the fighting.

Since my return during the weekend, I have continued with a number of calls to world leaders, including Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu of Israel this morning. I had a long talk with him, again urging him to stop this violence and agree and honour the international community's joint, common efforts and call for an urgent humanitarian unconditional ceasefire.

Gaza is in a critical condition.

Israeli missiles have pummelled Gaza.

Hamas rockets have randomly struck Israel.

No country would accept the threat of rockets from above and tunnels from below.

At the same time, all occupying powers have an international legal obligation to protect civilians.

I was deeply disappointed that dangerous hostilities resumed on Sunday – but since Sunday evening a relative and very fragile calm on the ground has been established.

The temporary weekend pause in fighting brought a brief respite to war-weary civilians. It also revealed how much the massive Israeli assault has devastated the lives of the people of Gaza.

We saw scenes of indiscriminate destruction.

Some described it as a "man-made hurricane" - whole neighbourhoods reduced to debris, rubble; blocks of flattened apartment buildings; scores of bodies still buried under mountains of twisted wreckage.

The death toll keeps climbing. The fighting has claimed well over 1,000 Palestinian lives - most of them civilians, hundreds of them children.

Hamas rocket fire has claimed the lives of three Israeli civilians.

At least 16 Palestinian civilian deaths and more than 200 injuries came as a result of an appalling assault on a UN school in Beit Hanoun.

We were sheltering families – women and children – who had sought refuge from the fighting.

Ongoing hostilities have prevented establishing conclusive responsibility. It is imperative to do so and to have accountability for this outrageous crime.

Indeed, there must be accountability and justice for crimes committed by all sides.

On Friday, I spoke with some of our UNRWA staff to thank them for their heroic work. One of our colleagues told me, "There is no safe place in Gaza."

The people of Gaza have nowhere to run. They are trapped and besieged on a speck of land. Every area is a civilian area.

Every home, every school, every refuge has become a target.

The casualty and damage figures also raise serious questions about proportionality.

Today, more than 173,000 Gazans are seeking protection in UNRWA facilities. That means about 10 per-cent of the entire population is sheltering under the UN flag.

I repeat yet again my call on Israel and all parties to do vastly more to ensure the safety of these UN sites and the security of the people who have sought sanctuary there.

Israelis and Palestinians have a responsibility to stop the fighting now - to start the dialogue now - and to address the root causes that will finally break the endless cycle of senseless suffering.

That means securing peace through mutual respect, an end to the economic strangulation of Gaza and the nearly half century of occupation.

More suffering and siege conditions in Gaza will only hurt innocent civilians, further isolate Israel, empower extremists on all sides, and leave our world far less safe.

That is why I will continue to work with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and other regional and global leaders to deliver the peace that the Israeli and Palestinian people so desperately need and so fully deserve.

Thank you.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, why is it that with all these efforts there hasn't been a longer term ceasefire? What is the obstacle?

SG: It is a matter of their political will. They have to show their humanity as leaders – both Israelis and Palestinians. And particularly when they continue to fight -- it is only the people, only the civilians – helpless civilians - who are suffering and being killed. That is why I have been urging, first and foremost: stop the fighting. Then, sit down together and address all the root causes. Put all the causes, the underlying issues on the table. That has been my three continuing messages, very simple and continuing messages and I am repeating them again. We cannot continue to see many people continue to be killed this way. Why these leaders are making their people to be killed by others is not responsible -- morally wrong.

Q: You have reached out to Prime Minister Netanyahu several times as you have indicated, asking him to cease the violence immediately, Hamas is the other party to the conflict. When you were in Qatar, was there any effort made to get you to meet with the Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal and to try to persuade him also to engage in an immediate ceasefire, and if not, could you tell us why not? Thank you.

SG: I have been talking mainly to the Israeli Prime Minister and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and our communication with Hamas has been [an] indirect one, through the help of Qatar and the Turkish Government. I have been continuously speaking with the Amir of Qatar and the Foreign Minister, as well as Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey and the Foreign Minister. Even yesterday, I have been speaking with the Turkish leadership. Whatever the means of communication may be, it is important, imperative, that both sides must stop and they should listen to the calls and appeals from all the people around the world. By this time, the whole world's people are deeply concerned about what is going on and what they are seeing every day – the people being killed. This is an issue of humanity. They should have, first of all, a compassionate leadership. As a leader, they should first take care of the lives of their own people.

Q: Some have expressed criticism at last night's, this morning's Presidential Statement, as the Security Council fiddling while Rome burns. Given the urgency you are expressing here to put an end to hostilities and the expression of disappointment from the Palestinian Representative last night, calling for a resolution, why Sir, have you not called for a resolution?

SG: Well, I should not have any comment on what Security Council members have decided. Of course, everybody hoped and expected that the Security Council would take a resolution which is legally and politically binding. But they have agreed to have a Presidential Statement instead of a resolution. That is their decision. But I believe, still, if the parties have political will, whether it is a Presidential Statement or a resolution, I think they can stop this violence. It is not a matter of the format, the format of this resolution. Even before, even before the Security Council has taken such action, many world leaders, including myself as Secretary-General of the United Nations, have been appealing and urging the parties to stop the violence. That should have a moral voice -- and a moral voice that should have been heeded by all the parties. When Secretary [of State] John Kerry, Foreign Minister [Sameh Hassan] Shokry of Egypt, and the League of Arab States Secretary-General [Nabil] ElAraby and myself – [we] four made a joint common appeal on Friday evening. Then, I think this should have been immediately respected. I was encouraged when I issued the twelve-hour extendable ceasefire, and it was immediately respected. Then the fighting began, continued. And I issued already two statements, yesterday and today. I hope together with the Security Council Presidential Statement, I hope the parties will really honour and respect the

international community's joint efforts. Thank you very much.

Q: About UNRWA, and the admission of Israel that in fact a shell by Israel – or shells - hit an UNRWA school, does that from your point of view square the responsibility, despite the explanations of Israel that [inaudible] not killed not dead? Why is it taking so long for you to have this investigation concluded, although your people in UNRWA in Gaza are telling [inaudible] point of view what has happened, and particularly because the Palestinians say it is your responsibility as the United Nations to provide Palestinians with international protection. Can you address both points please?

SG: I understand your concern. That is my also deepest concern, that we have not been able to have a conclusive investigation yet, because of the continuing situation. Yesterday during the twelve hour lull and pause, we were able to see firsthand the situation, but this investigation continues to [need to] have a conclusive result on what has really happened, who really did... I have been urging those perpetrators who have committed this attack, should be brought to justice. You will remember that in 2009 the UNRWA office was again shelled by, at the time, Israeli tanks. I went there myself. This time, because of the continuing violence and situation, I was able only to speak with our staff via video, and I expressed my strong solidarity and this investigation will continue as soon as possible. Again, thank you very much.



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