



Secretary-General

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'It Is Not Far over the Precipice' When Empathy, Mutual Understanding Disappears between Israelis, Palestinians, Secretary-General Says on International Day

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in New York today. One year ago, the General Assembly declared 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. At the time, United States-facilitated negotiations on final status issues between Israelis and Palestinians had resumed. The international community had re-engaged to support these efforts. Hope was visible.

Yet, here we are — having passed through a sombre, sad and sorry year for Palestinians, Israelis and all who seek peace.

Over the course of 50 brutal days this summer, the world witnessed another ruthless war in Gaza. It was the third such conflict in six years.

What came of it? Nearly 2,200 Palestinians and 70 Israelis dead; the homes of over 100,000 Palestinians in Gaza destroyed or made unliveable; Gaza's critical infrastructure lies in ruins; tens of thousands of Palestinians remain displaced; and the people on both sides are nowhere nearer to lasting security.

I travelled to the region twice in recent months. First, to help end the fighting, and second to see the aftermath and support the massive reconstruction efforts.

I repeat here what I said in Gaza: I condemn the Hamas rocket attacks that indiscriminately targeted Israeli civilians. They have brought nothing but suffering to all sides.

I repeat here what I said in Israel: The scale of the destruction by the Israeli military has left deep questions about respect for the principles of distinction and proportionality, and generated wide calls for accountability.

More — much more — must be done to protect civilians. More — much more — must be done to abide by international human rights and humanitarian law.

Long-term stability depends on addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. That means lifting the closure on Gaza, ending the half-century occupation of Palestinian land and addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

On this day of solidarity, our hearts turn to the many Palestine refugees who were disproportionately affected by the war in Gaza. The ongoing conflict in Syria also affects Palestine refugees, who have been in the country for decades.

UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] is a lifeline for millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. I urge all donors to continue their strong support to UNRWA and for the reconstruction of Gaza.

I am pleased that the temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism has begun its operations. Material for urgent home repairs is the immediate priority. The United Nations is facilitating the mechanism's implementation. Success depends on a conducive environment and the cooperation of all parties.

It is also critical that donors immediately honour and disburse pledges made at the 12 October Cairo Conference on Palestine. Funding is desperately needed for vital infrastructure and addressing Gaza's acute electricity and water needs.

I am deeply troubled by the situation in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Incitement and provocative acts related to the holy sites are fanning the flames of conflict far beyond the holy city. I once again strongly condemn the reprehensible attacks we have seen against worshippers and other innocent civilians. Extremists on both sides are dictating the agenda.

I call on all parties to stand up to those forces, exercise restraint and respect the status quo governing these holy sites. I welcome the repeated assurances given by the Government of Israel to the international community.

I also have repeatedly denounced Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem. International law is clear: settlement activity is illegal. It runs counter to the pursuit of the two-State solution. I urge the Israeli Government to reverse these activities.

An end of the conflict will not be achieved through confrontation and violence. It will only come through a negotiated and just political solution, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions.

We, as the international community, must assume responsibility for what is a collective failure to advance a political solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, as we see around the world, Governments and parliaments are taking action. That momentum will grow.

We cannot paper over the differences and the difficulties that we face today. The Israeli and Palestinian people face a shared fate on shared land. There is no erasing the other. Yet, I fear deeply that with each passing day the people of the region are losing any sense of connection — any sense of empathy — any sense of mutual understanding of our common humanity and common future.

When that goes, it is not far over the precipice. The mindless cycle of destruction must end. The virtuous circle of peace must begin. On this International Day of Solidarity, I call on the parties to step back from the brink and find the path of peace before hope and time run out.

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