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Sixty-ninth year

7232nd meeting

Thursday, 31 July 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Nuhungirehe (Rwanda)

<i>Members</i>	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Ms. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Lithuania	Ms. Mumokaitė
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Ms. Paik Ji-ah
	Russian Federation	Mr. Panin
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite I invite Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Ms. Amos, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Trinidad and Tobago.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Pierre Krahenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Krahenbühl, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Gaza City.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Ms. Valerie Amos.

Ms. Amos: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the situation in Gaza.

The current crisis in Gaza is taking place against a backdrop of decades of instability, poverty and vulnerability resulting from repeated outbreaks of hostilities and an ongoing blockade by land, air and sea. The blockade leaves only two crossings for limited pedestrian movement and one for the movement of goods. As a result, more than 80 per cent of Gaza's population of 1.8 million — more than half of them children under the age of 18 — relied on humanitarian aid before the outbreak of hostilities. Various restrictions apply to the use of land within the Gaza Strip, and 80 per cent of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible. Around 57 per cent of Gazans are estimated to be food-insecure, and unemployment remains high, at 43 per cent. The economy is moribund.

This volatile situation has been exacerbated by 24 days of conflict. More than 1,300 Palestinians have been killed and 6,000 injured. More than 80 per cent of those killed were civilians, including 251 children. Israel has faced rocket fire. Fifty-nine people have been killed, of whom three were civilians and 56 soldiers, with dozens more injured. Up to 440,000 people in the Gaza Strip are now displaced, amounting to almost 24 per cent of the population, and more than 240,000 are being hosted in schools belonging to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), while others are seeking refuge wherever they can — in Government buildings and hospital grounds or with families and friends. People flee to areas they believe are safe from attack, but those areas are becoming harder to find. Gaza is just 45 kilometres long and between 6 and 14 kilometres wide, and the Israeli military has advised that 44 per cent of Gaza is a buffer zone. With the blockade in place, most people are unable to leave Gaza even to get urgent medical attention.

So they come to United Nations facilities for protection when their homes and neighbourhoods come under fire — more than 240,000 people. But more than 103 of those facilities have come under attack, including an UNRWA school that was hosting more than 3,300 displaced people yesterday. Nineteen were killed and more than 100 injured. The United Nations has lost seven staff members, and other humanitarian workers have been killed since the outbreak of hostilities. The reality of Gaza today is that no place is safe.

The Secretary-General and other senior United Nations officials have condemned this and other attacks in the strongest possible terms. The parties to the conflict have an obligation — an absolute obligation — to protect civilians from direct or indiscriminate attacks. Under international law, United Nations operations, personnel and premises must remain inviolable, and parties to the conflict should protect humanitarian workers. There can be no justification for failing to do so.

The ongoing violence has led to the widespread destruction of homes, public services and infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip. More than 9,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged according to preliminary reports. More than 130 schools and other educational facilities have also sustained damage. Two of the three main United Nations compounds, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs office in Gaza, have also been damaged. Medical facilities have not been spared, with 24 damaged or destroyed and some hit multiple times. That includes Al-Aqsa Hospital, which was hit on 21 July, causing significant damage to its top two floors and killing four people. On 29 July, Shifa, the main hospital in Gaza, which is also sheltering thousands of displaced persons, was damaged as well. In addition to schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, Gaza's only power plant was struck on Tuesday and its fuel tanks destroyed. Parts of Gaza will remain without any electricity while others will receive it for only two hours a day. Under the best possible circumstances, repairs are expected to take months to complete. The immediate, medium- and longer-term impact on the functioning of water, sanitation and health-care facilities, as well as on food production, cannot be overstated. Water and sewage systems are also severely damaged, and I am deeply concerned about water systems' possible contamination. Hundreds of thousands of people are without access to regular water supplies, and the ongoing violence is preventing urgent repairs. If the current situation persists, the number of people without water will significantly increase.

The United Nations and our partners on the ground are working to meet the growing humanitarian needs. UNRWA is delivering water and food to shelters in addition to its regular programmes. The World Food Programme is providing food to people in UNRWA shelters and others, as well as to patients and hospital staff. The World Health Organization is facilitating the transfer to hospitals of medical supplies, including fluids and surgical kits, and is coordinating requests from hospitals run by non-governmental organizations for medical equipment, fuel and other supplies. UNICEF is delivering paediatric drugs to hospitals and health facilities, providing psychological support for children and families and working to restore access to water and sanitation. But the relief effort is stretched. The ongoing fighting and insecurity are hampering our ability to move around and have made it difficult to maintain sustained delivery of assistance to people in need. Until a long-term ceasefire is agreed on, we need more humanitarian pauses to enable us to reach those in need. Pauses must be daily, predictable and long enough for humanitarian staff to be able to dispatch relief to those in need, rescue the injured, recover the dead and allow civilians some reprieve so that they can restock and resupply their homes.

It is urgent that the Government of Israel and Hamas and other militant groups comply with their international legal obligations, including international humanitarian and human rights law. Each party must be held accountable to international standards, not the standards of the other party. We have all witnessed in horror the desperation of children and civilians as they have come under attack with no safe place to go. Under international humanitarian law, the Government of Israel and Hamas and other militant groups must distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects, and between combatants and civilians. They must also avoid harming civilians or civilian objects, and protect them from the effects of military operations. As I have said to the Council before and in different circumstances, even war has rules.

Funding is also urgently required. The United Nations family has appealed for additional funds, and I ask Member States to respond quickly and generously to those appeals. We cannot provide adequate assistance without an urgent injection of funds.

The violence must stop and the root causes of the conflict must be addressed. The people of Gaza want to live in safety, security and dignity. The people of Israel want the same thing. I hope the international community can help them to achieve it.

The President: I thank Ms. Amos for her briefing. I now give the floor to Mr. Krahenbühl.

Mr. Krahenbühl: Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Security Council for the invitation and the honour to deliver a briefing from Gaza City today.

In this, the second of my visits to Gaza during the current crisis, I have spent the last two days assessing the situation on the ground, the extent of the human suffering, and the state of our operations, which continue in many parts of the Gaza Strip amidst terrible conditions resulting from the conflict that erupted on 8 July. I would like, first and foremost, to express my deepest admiration to staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) who are providing a humanitarian lifeline to the people of Gaza. It is under the truly outstanding leadership of our Director of Operations, Mr. Bob Turner, that UNRWA staff in Gaza — who number over 12,000 — are assisting its people at a time of their greatest need, and doing so at considerable risk in the prevailing context. Eight of my colleagues have now lost their lives since hostilities began. In acknowledging the sacrifice, I extend heartfelt condolences to their families. Let me not forget also to thank the rest of the United Nations family that is doing so much to address the humanitarian and political dimensions of the situation.

Since my arrival yesterday, I have borne witness to the tragic situation that has unfolded and been so graphically seen on television screens across the globe. I have seen extensive damage done to whole neighbourhoods and essential infrastructure. I have in particular seen this morning the catastrophic human cost of this war at the paediatric ward in the main hospital in Gaza, with broken bodies that are the real — and unacceptable — consequence of an armed conflict waged with excessive — and at times disproportionate — force in densely populated urban settings. Among the many children lying in the rooms and corridors was five-month-old Yussuf who has very barely and not yet definitively survived the shelling of the UNRWA school building yesterday in Jabalya.

Like many Council members, I have children of my own, and what I saw today — the terrible wounds — were devastating to me. I refer to young Yussuf because I have always refused the concept of anonymity in death and injury. Too often, reports from war zones refer to lists of numbers. The Palestinian children I saw today are not statistics. Behind every death and injury there is a story and a destiny to be respected.

Yesterday, an elementary girls' school in Jabalya serving as a designated emergency shelter for displaced people received artillery strikes, which we have assessed to have been fired by the Israeli military. The precise location and coordinates of the school were conveyed on 17 occasions to the Israeli military, including a notification that the school was sheltering

displaced persons. The displaced were instructed by the Israeli military to evacuate their homes and seek shelter in premises such as ours. I reiterate my condemnation of the attack in the strongest terms, reiterate also that it was a serious violation of international law, and call for accountability, including through the immediate launching of a transparent investigation by Israel and for it to share its findings. We are engaged in continuous dialogue with Israel on the matter. Speaking to many inhabitants of Gaza yesterday and today I have heard the same messages time and time again: "If we are not safe in an UNRWA school, we are not safe anywhere in Gaza", they say, and they add, "the world has failed us, has failed to protect". "The protection of civilians is an expression we do not want to hear anymore", many have commented.

I also call on all parties to respect the sanctity of United Nations premises and exercise the highest precaution in the conduct of military operations that affect civilians in the region. That the attack on the shelter in Jabalya came only six days after a strike on the designated UNRWA emergency shelter in Beit Hanoun and caused multiple injuries and fatalities to internally displaced persons (IDPs) taking refuge there makes the call all the more urgent.

There is another challenge in our field of operations to which I want to draw attention. On three occasions we have found in empty UNRWA facilities rockets belonging to armed groups in Gaza. We immediately alerted all relevant parties to their existence and we strongly condemned placement of weapons in our schools. UNRWA is now working with United Nations partners to improve procedures to address such violations in a manner that does not compromise the safety of staff or civilians, including UNRWA beneficiaries. It should also be said that such discoveries do not in any way justify attacks on UNRWA facilities and in particular those sheltering IDPs. UNRWA takes robust measures to closely monitor all its facilities to which it has access in an effort to prevent misuse by combatants and other parties.

Allow me to turn to the most difficult challenge facing UNRWA in Gaza today. We are currently hosting over 220,000 internally displaced people, a number that has grown every day of the conflict and at an accelerated pace in the last week. That is four times higher than the peak number of displaced people during the conflict in 2008 and 2009. I am not referring here

to the tens of thousands of displaced in Gaza that have found temporary shelter with host families, only to those who are registered in UNRWA schools.

We are doing everything possible to provide the displaced with items to meet their minimum needs — food, mattresses and blankets — but we are now into the fourth week of mass displacement in facilities unequipped to shelter large numbers for such a duration. Conditions are increasingly dire in the shelters. There is no water for hygiene, very few showers, and latrines are totally inadequate. Outbreak of disease is beginning, with skin infections and scabies, inter alia. There are thousands of pregnant women in our schools, deliveries are precarious, and we are sheltering newborn infants in these appalling conditions. Our ability to mitigate the situation is of course heavily restricted by ongoing hostilities.

We are gravely concerned about the situation. We are also gravely concerned about any possible additional displacement that will drive up the numbers in our shelters. With as many as 2,500 displaced persons residing in schools and an average of 80 people to a classroom, we have exceeded the tolerable limit we can accommodate. It is therefore with alarm that I have received accounts of new instructions from the Israeli military to Palestinians to evacuate the Zeitoun area of Gaza City and areas in the vicinity of Khan Younis.

In view of the foregoing facts and of the shelling affecting UNRWA schools on six occasions, I believe that the population is at a precipice and I appeal to the international community to take the steps necessary to address this extreme situation. Should further large scale displacements indeed occur, the occupying Power, under international humanitarian law, will have to assume direct responsibility for assisting these people.

The new reality being created before our eyes in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel is not sustainable under any circumstances. The humanitarian and political costs grow by the day with each death and injury, with the continuing destruction of infrastructure vital to the life of the Palestinian people in Gaza, and with the continuing violations of international law. As I have stated on previous visits to Gaza, the rocket firing on Israeli cities and endangering Israeli civilians is unacceptable and must cease.

We all aspire to seeing a Middle East in which its peoples share common interests, a stake in each others' well-being, and a commitment — as the Secretary-General recently said — to peace, justice and security for all in the region. That cannot happen under the conditions of military occupation and those caused by the pitiless conflict now unfolding. It is past the time for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to be agreed by the parties as called for by the Council in its recent statement ([S/PRST/2014/13](#)).

Allow me also to add my voice to those calling for the redress of the underlying conditions that fuel the conflict and the violence that repeats itself in full view of the world. In other words, a ceasefire, while immediately required to save lives, is not enough. It is not conceivable to simply return to the situation existing before the conflict. Notwithstanding Israel's legitimate security concerns, the illegal blockade of Gaza must be lifted. This small territory is home to 1.8 million people, who face the prospect of its becoming unlivable in a matter of only a few years unless urgent steps are taken by the international community to enable the development of Gaza and ensure security for all in the region.

UNRWA, faithful to its mandate, will remain steadfast in its commitment and operations, whether during this terrible emergency or in the recovery phase once the fighting has ceased. But much more is required to ensure lasting peace and stability in the region.

The President: I thank Mr. Krahenbilhl for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.