
Off-the-Cuff**Secretary-General's remarks at press encounter with President Shimon Peres of Israel
Jerusalem, Israel, 20 November 2012**

SG: Ladies and gentlemen, Good evening.

Thank you, Mr. President for welcoming me to Israel at this time.

Mr. President, you have been a man of peace all your life, I count on your wisdom to help restore calm and seek the peace for which we all long. That is the only way to bring lasting security to all.

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.

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 once again appeal to all those commanding, bearing and operating weapons to respect international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians at all times.

Over the past week, I have spoken with many international and regional leaders by telephone and in person. That is why I am here.

I came 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 Prime Minister Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Liberman and Defence Minister Barak of Israel since arriving in Jerusalem just a couple of hours ago. I will be meeting Palestinian President Abbas and also Egyptian President Morsi tomorrow.

Regrettably, I am back 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 concerned, gravely 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 immediately.

Rockets have hit areas just outside of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as Israeli towns near Gaza, killing and injuring civilians. 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, but Israel must exercise maximum restraint. I have strongly cautioned Israel's leaders [against] launching a ground operation, which will only result in further tragedy. I have also stressed again that while Israeli rockets may be aimed at military targets inside Gaza, they kill and injure civilians and damage civilian infrastructure. The loss of civilian lives is unacceptable under any circumstances. The excessive use of force is unlawful and must be rejected.

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. Now is the time for diplomacy. Now is the time for both sides to reach an immediate ceasefire.

Mr. President, I count on your leadership and wisdom to maintain peace and stability in this region. Peace and stability has global implications and again I count on your leadership.

Thank you very much.