



# Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

**8730**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Monday, 24 February 2020, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve . . . . . (Belgium)

*Members:*

China . . . . .	Mr. Wu Haitao
Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Germany . . . . .	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Djani
Niger . . . . .	Mr. Abarry
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Safronkov
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. Gonsalves
South Africa . . . . .	Mr. Matjila
Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Barkin
Viet Nam . . . . .	Mr. Dang

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-conference from Jerusalem.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

**Mr. Mladenov**: Two weeks ago I briefed the Security Council following the release of the United States "Peace to Prosperity" vision for Israelis and Palestinians (see S/PV.8717). Today I will provide a regular briefing on the situation on the ground. Let me begin, however, by addressing the developing situation in and around Gaza.

On 23 February, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) said it had fired at two Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) militants who were attempting to place an explosive device along the Gaza perimeter fence. The PIJ later stated that a member of its military wing had been killed in the incident, and Israeli officials confirmed that IDF had retrieved the body of one of the militants.

Since then more than 60 rockets have been fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants towards Israel. As of now the IDF is responding by conducting multiple airstrikes in the Strip. Five injuries have been reported inside Gaza. Yesterday, the IDF also struck what it said were PIJ targets in Syria, where two fatalities were also confirmed. The situation is escalating as we speak, with continuing projectiles being fired from Gaza and retaliatory Israeli airstrikes. The United Nations team on the ground is in touch with our Egyptian counterparts in an attempt to restore calm.

I take this opportunity to call for an immediate stop to the firing of rockets and mortars, which only risk dragging Gaza into another round of hostilities with no

end in sight. The indiscriminate launching of rockets against civilian population centres violates international law and must end.

Overall, during the reporting period more than 110 projectiles were fired from Gaza towards Israeli communities, injuring four people, including a woman and a child. More than 100 incendiary balloons were released towards Israel, many carrying explosive devices. In response, the IDF fired 102 missiles against Hamas and PIJ targets in Gaza, injuring seven Palestinians, including two children. In the same period, three Palestinians crossed from Gaza into Israel and threw an explosive device at security forces, who shot and killed them. On 31 January, a 14-year old Palestinian boy died from tear-gas-canister wounds he sustained during demonstrations held at the Gaza fence last year.

On 1 February, Israel restricted the entry of cement into Gaza, suspended some 500 crossing permits and reduced the permissible fishing area along Gaza's southern coast from 15 to 10 nautical miles. Those decisions came only one day after the easing of restrictions on certain goods into Gaza had been agreed. By 18 February some of the restrictions had been removed and agreement reached to reverse the suspensions and also to increase business permits to 7,000, the highest since 2007, and restore the fishing zone to 15 nautical miles.

Over the past two years I have briefed the Council on the continuing security, humanitarian and political crisis in Gaza and the United Nations response on the ground. We have worked hard to provide electricity, ease restrictions and allow development in the Strip while reducing the risk of a military escalation. Women increasingly bear the brunt of the dire humanitarian conditions in the Strip. They are required to support their families while men are unemployed; many live with extended family and struggle to earn an income.

Among our many humanitarian concerns, today I must highlight the ongoing health disaster in the Gaza Strip. According to local interlocutors, as of the end of January stock levels for 46 per cent of essential medicines had been completely depleted. Let me repeat that — 46 per cent of essential medicines had been completely depleted. On 18 February the IDF enabled a shipment of medicines worth some NIS 4 million, or \$1.2 million, to enter Gaza. That shipment will somewhat alleviate the dire situation; however, I take this opportunity to encourage the Palestinian Government to

work with the United Nations and to increase its efforts to help resolve Gaza's ongoing health crisis.

Turning to the West Bank, violence has also continued. During the reporting period, seven Palestinians, including one child, were killed by Israeli security forces, and another 206 were injured in various incidents. Sixteen Israeli security personnel and seven civilians were injured by Palestinians. On 5 February, a Palestinian teenager was killed by Israeli security forces after he reportedly threw a Molotov cocktail during clashes in Hebron. The following day, a Palestinian man was shot during clashes in Jenin, while in a separate incident a Palestinian Authority policeman died after reportedly being hit by a live bullet while he was inside a police station. The Israeli security forces have opened an investigation into the second incident.

On 6 February in Jerusalem, 12 Israeli off-duty soldiers were injured, including one critically, in a car-ramping attack by a Palestinian, who was later arrested. Another Palestinian succumbed to his wounds after having been shot on 7 February during protests in the village of Qaffin in the northern West Bank.

On 19 February, a 14-year-old Palestinian youth was killed by Palestinian security forces in Qabatiya, Jenin, during clashes with residents. I reiterate that violence against civilians, particularly against children, is unacceptable and must be condemned by all. Israeli security forces must also exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly necessary. All incidents must be thoroughly investigated.

Meanwhile, the situation around the holy sites in Jerusalem remained tense throughout the reporting period. Amid calls by religious and political leaders for Palestinians to pray en masse at the Muslim sites, there were limited clashes and arrests reported, including after Friday prayers. The Israeli police also issued orders temporarily restricting access to the site for several Palestinians, including a religious leader and former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and cited incitement and disturbance of the peace as the reasons for the suspension. The police also arrested a former Israeli Knesset member for ignoring police directives while visiting the site.

With no meaningful bilateral negotiations on the horizon, developments on the ground continued to undermine prospects for a two-State solution. Israeli authorities demolished or seized 28 Palestinian-owned structures, and 11 others were demolished by their

owners following the receipt of demolition orders, which displaced some 47 people, including 12 women and 19 children. Of the structures demolished, 18 were in East Jerusalem. Most of them were targeted due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

During the reporting period, the Jerusalem Magistrate Court ordered the eviction of two Palestinian families from their homes in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, pursuant to a lawsuit brought by an Israeli settler-related organization. Some 80 other families in the area could be affected by similar eviction proceedings.

On 5 February, Israeli authorities demolished two structures at the settlement outpost Ma'ale Shlomo, near the Kokhav HaShahar settlement, and clashed with dozens of settlers who protested the move, leading to three arrests. On 20 February, the Prime Minister announced that he had approved the construction of some 3,000 housing units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos, as well as some 1,000 units in Beit Safafa for its Palestinian residents. He further declared that he would also allow the commencement of the planning process for 2,200 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa. Those projects, if implemented, would consolidate a ring of settlements cutting between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, significantly constraining the possibility of a future contiguous Palestinian State. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace.

Meanwhile, the threat of annexation remains. Israeli and United States officials have said that such a step would be advanced only after a joint committee completes a process of producing detailed maps of relevant areas of the occupied West Bank. On 15 February, the United States confirmed the formation of the joint committee. The Secretary-General has consistently spoken out against unilateral steps and plans for annexation. Such steps, including the possible annexation of territory in the West Bank or similar moves, would have a devastating impact on the prospect for a two-State solution. They would close the door to negotiations, have negative repercussions across the region and severely undermine opportunities for normalization and regional peace.

I also take this opportunity to remind the Council that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

continues to face major financial challenges. Without further financial support, critical services in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, will be suspended as of late April. That would result in serious humanitarian repercussions, particularly for some of the most acutely vulnerable communities, among them female-headed households below the poverty line. I urge Member States to continue supporting UNRWA's core programmes in order ensure that the Agency remains operational beyond April.

Turning briefly to intra-Palestinian developments, I regret to note that the prospects of reconciliation and elections remain stalled. Renewing the legitimacy of Palestinian national institutions by holding legislative and presidential elections, which have not taken place since 2006, is indeed critical. Palestinians must be allowed to exercise their democratic right to vote and elect their leaders and representatives. While the United Nations continues to support the Egyptian-led Palestinian reconciliation efforts, the Palestinian national movement continues to be weakened by the lack of progress on unity. It is time for leaders to engage positively with Egypt, reverse this negative trajectory and take concrete steps to end division.

Turning to the region, in Lebanon, Prime Minister Hassan Diab formed a Government on 21 January, which subsequently secured the required vote of confidence from Parliament on 11 February. The new Government's stated priority is to address the socioeconomic situation. Popular protests, however, continue throughout the country.

In the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations, a serious incident occurred on 10 February in which about 15 individuals blocked a UNIFIL patrol in Baraachit, sector west. The individuals seized items, including one portable radio and one Global Positioning System device, from inside a patrol vehicle. One peacekeeper sustained minor injuries. Attacks on peacekeepers are unacceptable. UNIFIL has requested a prompt investigation into the incident, the return of UNIFIL's property and the prosecution of the perpetrators by the Lebanese authorities.

Turning to the Golan, recent developments involving the breach of the ceasefire line and military activities in the area of separation have shown the continued volatility of the situation in that area. On 6 February, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) observed missiles fired from the Alpha side

towards the Bravo side, as well as anti-aircraft fire launched from positions on the Bravo side. UNDOF also observed drones flying from the Alpha side across the ceasefire line with one drone being shot down on the Bravo side. On two occasions, 13 and 23 February, UNDOF personnel observed aircraft from the Alpha side crossing the ceasefire line and firing over the area of separation, as well as anti-aircraft fire launched from the Bravo side. On all occasions, the Israeli Defense Forces carried out strikes on targets in Syria, and not on the Syrian armed forces. UNDOF engaged both parties in order to prevent an escalation of tensions and reminded them of their obligation to respect the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

As negative trends on the ground continue, I would like to reiterate what I said before the Council earlier this month. Today it is not enough to reaffirm the internationally agreed parameters on how the conflict can be resolved. It is time to find our way back to the mutually agreed mediation framework that ensures that meaningful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations can resume. While there may be different interpretations and proposals on how to achieve a two-State solution, that remains our shared objective. As stated by the Secretary-General, the United Nations position on the two-State solution is defined by resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The past 48 hours have once again showed us how fragile the situation in Gaza is. Its population suffers under Hamas' rule and Israeli closures, while militant activity forces Israeli communities to live in constant fear of the next rocket attack. No amount of humanitarian or economic support on its own will neither resolve the situation in Gaza nor the broader conflict. Gaza ultimately requires a political solution.

In the absence of progress towards resolving all final-status issues, our preventive diplomacy efforts continue to play an integral role in helping to ensure that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not escalate further and get pulled into the latest regional escalation. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis as they pursue a peaceful future.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

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

*The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.*