

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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REMARKS TO SECURITY COUNCIL
QUARTERLY OPEN DEBATE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE
PALESTINIAN QUESTION

New York, 29 April 2025

[all-English]

Mr. President, Excellencies,

I thank the French presidency for convening this ministerial-level meeting on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The region is undergoing fundamental shifts, marked by violence and volatility but also opportunity and potential.

In Lebanon, the ceasefire and territorial integrity must be respected and all commitments implemented.

In Syria, we must keep working to support the country's path towards a political transition that is inclusive of all segments of the Syrian population – one that ensures accountability, fosters national healing, and lays the foundation for Syria's long-term recovery and further integration into the international community.

This includes the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan -- which remains precarious with significant violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, with the continued presence of the Israel Defense Forces into the area of separation and their several strikes targeting locations across the ceasefire line.

Across the Middle East, people demand and deserve a better future, not endless conflict and suffering.

We must collectively work to ensure that this turbulent and transitional period meets those aspirations -- and delivers justice, dignity, rights, security and lasting peace.

It starts by recognizing two fundamental facts:

First, that the region is at a hinge-point in history.

And, second, that truly sustainable Middle East peace hinges on one central question.

On a core issue that this Security Council has affirmed and re-affirmed decade after decade, year after year: a two-state solution, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

Mr. President,

Today, the promise of a two-State solution is at risk of dwindling to the point of disappearance.

The political commitment to this long-standing goal is farther than it has ever been.

As a result, the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security have been undermined – and the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinians have been denied – while they endure Israel's continued presence that the International Court of Justice has found unlawful.

And since the horrific 7 October terror attacks by Hamas, it has gotten worse on every front.

First, the unrelenting conflict and devastation in Gaza – including the utterly inhumane conditions of life imposed on its people who are repeatedly coming under attack, confined to smaller and smaller spaces, and deprived of lifesaving relief.

In line with international law, the Security Council has rejected any attempt at demographic or territorial change in the Gaza Strip, including any actions that reduce its territory.

Gaza is -- and must remain -- an integral part of a future Palestinian state.

Second, in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli military operations and the use of heavy weaponry in residential areas, forcible displacement, demolitions, movement restrictions, and settlement expansion are dramatically altering demographic and geographic realities.

Palestinians are being contained and coerced. Contained in areas that are subject to increasing military operations and where the Palestinian Authority is under growing pressure – and coerced out of areas where settlements are expanding.

Third, settler violence continues at alarmingly high levels in a climate of impunity, with entire Palestinian communities facing repeated assaults and destruction, sometimes abetted by Israeli soldiers.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis in both Israel and the occupied West Bank also continue.

Mr. President,

The world cannot afford to watch the two-State solution disappear.

Political leaders face clear choices -- the choice to be silent, the choice to acquiesce, or the choice to act.

Mr. President,

In Gaza, there is no end in sight to the killing and misery.

The ceasefire had brought a glimmer of hope – the long-sought release of hostages and delivery of lifesaving humanitarian relief.

But those embers of opportunity were cruelly extinguished with the shattering of the ceasefire on 18 March.

Since then, almost 2,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza by Israeli strikes and military operations – including women, children, journalists, and humanitarians.

Hamas also continues to fire rockets towards Israel indiscriminately – while the hostages continue to be held in appalling conditions.

The humanitarian situation throughout the Gaza Strip has gone from bad ... to worse ... to beyond imagination.

For nearly two full months, Israel has blocked food, fuel, medicine and commercial supplies, depriving more than two million people of lifesaving relief.

All while the world watches.

I am alarmed by statements by Israeli government officials about the use of humanitarian aid as a tool for military pressure.

Aid is non-negotiable.

Israel must protect civilians and must agree to relief schemes and facilitate them.

I salute the women and men of the United Nations and all other humanitarian workers – especially our Palestinian colleagues -- who continue to work under fire and in incomprehensibly difficult conditions.

And I mourn all of the women and men of the United Nations who were killed – including some with their families.

The entry of assistance must be restored immediately -- the safety of UN personnel and humanitarian partners must be guaranteed – and UN agencies must be allowed to work in full respect of humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. There must be no hindrance in humanitarian aid – including through the vital work of UNRWA.

We need the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

And we need a permanent ceasefire.

It's time to stop the repeated displacement of the Gaza population – along with any question of forced displacement outside of Gaza.

And the trampling of international law must end.

I call on Member States to use their leverage to ensure that international law is respected and impunity does not prevail.

This includes for the 19 March incident for which Israel has now acknowledged responsibility in firing on a UN guesthouse, killing one colleague and injuring six others ... the 23 March killing of paramedics and other rescue workers in Rafah ... as well as many other cases.

There must be accountability across the board.

Mr. President,

Advisory proceedings are ongoing at the International Court of Justice on the obligations of Israel, as an occupying Power and a Member of the United Nations, in relation to the presence and activities of the United Nations in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

In February, the United Nations Legal Counsel submitted a written statement to the Court – and yesterday, she made an oral statement before the Court – both of which on my behalf.

The statement to the Court includes points that I have made on a number of occasions.

Specifically, that all parties to conflict must comply with all their obligations under international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

That Israel, as an occupying Power, is under an obligation to ensure food and medical supplies of the population.

That Israel has an obligation to agree to and facilitate relief schemes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

That humanitarian, medical and United Nations personnel must be respected and protected.

And I emphasize the obligation under international law to respect the privileges and immunities of the United Nations and its personnel, including the absolute inviolability of United Nations premises, property and assets – and the immunity from legal process of the United Nations.

Such immunity applies to all UN entities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – including UNRWA – a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly.

I call on Member States to fully support all of these efforts.

Mr. President,

In this period of turmoil and transition for the region, Member States must spell out how they will realize the commitment and promise of a two-State solution.

This is not a time for ritualistically expressing support, ticking a box, and moving on.

We are past the stage of ticking boxes – the clock is ticking.

The two-State solution is near a point of no return.

The international community has a responsibility to prevent perpetual occupation and violence.

My call to Member States is clear and urgent:

Take irreversible action towards implementing a two-State solution.

Do not let extremists on any side undermine what remains of the peace process.

The High-Level Conference in June, co-chaired by France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is an important opportunity to revitalize international support.

I encourage Member States to go beyond affirmations, and to think creatively about the concrete steps they will take to support a viable two-State solution before it is too late.

At the same time, the Palestinian Authority needs stepped-up and sustained support – politically and financially. This is crucial to ensure the continued viability of Palestinian institutions, consolidate ongoing reforms, and enable the PA to resume its full responsibilities in Gaza.

Mr. President,

At this hinge point of history for the people of the Middle East – and on this issue on which so much hinges – leaders must stand and deliver.

Show the political courage and exercise the political will to make good on this central question for peace for Palestinians, Israelis, the region and humanity.

Thank you.