Remarks by Acting Permanent Representative of the U.S. to the U.N. at a U.N. Security Council Briefing on the Situation in the Middle East

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Thank you Mr. President and welcome to New York, it’s good to have you with us in the Council this morning. And Special Coordinator Mladenov, thank you for your briefing and we too thank you for your tireless efforts.

Mr. President, I want to start out by expressing our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Rina Shnerb, who was brutally murdered in an IED attack while hiking in the West Bank with her family. Our thoughts and prayers are also with her father and brother who were seriously wounded in the attack.

This attack occurred just weeks after the murder of IDF Corporal Dvir Sorek. Attacks such as these undermine attempts to find a solution to this conflict and to build trust between the parties. The perpetrators of these brutal murders must be brought to justice.

Mr. President, I also want to highlight Hamas’ praise for these attacks, which is deeply disturbing. Speaking about the death of Rina Shnerb, a Hamas leader said, “I bless this operation and greet the hands of those who executed it.” How can this be tolerated? And how can so many here at the United Nations refuse to condemn an organization Hamas, whose leaders make such statements?

This month, we also continued to see rocket attacks launched from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and other terrorist factions, as well as armed infiltration attempts. This represents an alarming escalation, and we condemn these attacks. It is beyond time for Hamas to put the interests of the people of Gaza first – by rejecting violence, instead of seeking to extract concessions through attacks and threats.

In that vein, I recently met with the family of Hadar Goldin, whose body is being held by Hamas as a bargaining chip along with the body of Oren Shaul. As we tragically recall, Hadar was killed during a ceasefire at the end of the 2014 Gaza conflict, and it has been almost exactly five years exactly since his family began their struggle to have Hadar’s remains returned.

As the Special Coordinator noted, the return on these remains is an issue of serious humanitarian concern and we urgently call for their return, which is long overdue, to take place now. We also cannot forget Avaraham Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed, who continue to be imprisoned by Hamas. Their families must recover their loved ones, and these are the acts of a brutal terrorist organization whose actions should and must be condemned.

To close Mr. President, I note that for years, this body has come together to discuss this contentious topic, but we have seen little success in making progress toward a solution that creates a lasting, secure, and prosperous future for both Israelis and Palestinians. The United States remains committed to pursuing a comprehensive peace through direct negotiations. We encourage all of you to keep an open mind regarding U.S. efforts to remain constructively engaged with our team as we move forward.

I thank you.