Explanation of Vote by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield on a Russia Drafted UN Security Council Resolution on the Situation in the Middle East

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Thank you, Mr. President.

Just over a week ago, terror was unleashed on Israel by Hamas, whose stated purpose is to destroy Israel and kill Jews. This was the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust. And I want to say that again: This was the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust. It was an appalling human tragedy that has brought to the surface painful scars left by a millennia of antisemitism.

Hamas terrorists slaughtered more than a thousand civilians, including American citizens. Entire families, children, babies, and the elderly. And Hamas took innocent people hostage, including American citizens and the citizens of several members of this Council. The brutality of Hamas brings to mind the most heinous atrocities committed by ISIS. And Hamas’ actions have led to the dire humanitarian crisis facing the people of Gaza.

Civilians should not have to suffer for Hamas’ atrocities. And this Council – and the entire international community – has a responsibility to help address this humanitarian crisis, unequivocally condemn Hamas, and reaffirm Israel’s inherent right to self-defense under the UN Charter.

Unfortunately, Russia’s resolution presented today does not meet all of these responsibilities. Russia’s resolution, put forward without any consultations, makes no mention of Hamas – none. By failing to condemn Hamas, Russia is giving cover to a terrorist group that brutalizes innocent civilians. It is outrageous, it is hypocritical, and it is indefensible.

Colleagues, the United States could not support Russia’s resolution – which, in ignoring Hamas’ terrorism, dishonors victims. We agree that this Council should take action, but we have to get it right. And we’ll work intensively with all members on the Council to do so.

Colleagues, the vast majority of families in Gaza are suffering through no fault of their own. As I have said, Hamas set the humanitarian crisis in Gaza in motion. And we cannot allow this Council to unfairly shift the blame to Israel and excuse Hamas for its decades of cruelty. Period.

As we speak, Secretary Blinken and the White House are engaged in intensive discussions with the highest levels of the Israeli government and other countries in the region to secure the immediate and unconditional release of hostages and facilitate humanitarian access and relief. And we are actively engaged with other partners in the region, and the United Nations, to help meet the needs of people in Gaza.

It is critical that civilians have access to essential food, water, medicine, and shelter. Let me repeat: It is critical. We have called on countries in the region to allow and facilitate full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access in Gaza – in line with the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

The United States is proud to be the largest international humanitarian donor to the Palestinian people. And yesterday, the United States announced the appointment of Special Envoy David Satterfield, who will lead U.S. diplomatic efforts to promote the safety of civilians and urgently address this humanitarian crisis, in coordination with the United Nations and U.S. partners. We are doing all we can to help facilitate access to basic necessities – including food, water, and medicine.

Colleagues, as President Biden made clear, we are working with Israel to ensure that they have what they need to defend the Israeli people, rescue hostages, and take necessary action to hold terrorists accountable for these attacks.

The United States has reiterated to our Israeli partners the need to protect civilian life, consistent with international humanitarian law. Protection of civilians – and the protection of people who are trying to get to safety – must be a central focus for everyone involved. We will continue to urge our Israeli partners to work to minimize the risk of civilian casualties.

The bottom line is this: You cannot claim to stand with the Palestinians and their legitimate aspirations if you do not stand squarely against Hamas. Hamas does not stand for the Palestinian people’s rights to dignity and self-determination. The path of terror that Hamas is engaged on has not improved the life of a single person, nor done anything to advance peace and stability. On the contrary, all Hamas has ever brought to the Palestinian people, and the region, is misery, chaos, and destruction.

Colleagues, over the coming days, and weeks, and months, let us work together to prevent the conflict from spreading and addressing this humanitarian crisis. And let us work together to hold Hamas accountable for its terrorist acts against Israel and for standing in the way of the peace and stability that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve.

Thank you, Mr. President.