Senior UN official loses her post after tweet condemning PIJ rocket fire at Israel

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The UN has removed the head of one of its offices serving the Palestinians after she posted a tweet in which she condemned Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s “indiscriminate rocket fire” during the recent Gaza conflict, a UN spokesperson has confirmed to The Times of Israel.

The revelation came days after Sarah Muscroft tweeted her support for the ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian terror group after three days of fighting.

Muscroft, who headed the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said: “Relieved to see a ceasefire agreed ending hostilities impacting both Palestinians and Israeli civilians. Such indiscriminate rocket fire of Islamic Jihad provoking Israeli retaliation is condemned. The safety of all civilians is paramount — the ceasefire must be upheld.”

Muscroft, who had been based in East Jerusalem, came under massive criticism from pro-Palestinian activists who said she was blaming Palestinians for the latest round of violence and was failing to hold Israel responsible.

The latest Gaza conflict began with several Israeli airstrikes against Islamic Jihad targets in response to what the army said was a concrete terror threat from a PIJ cell to fire anti-tank missiles across the border at Israeli troops or civilians. The strikes were followed by the firing of nearly 1000 rockets by PIJ as well as roughly 170 Israeli counterstrikes.

Muscroft later deleted the post and tweeted an apology the next day, saying that “one of my previous tweets was ill-informed and I have deleted it. I sincerely apologize for my poor judgment. All civilians — everywhere — must be able to live in peace.”

The uproar did not subside though, and Muscroft went on to close her Twitter account entirely.

Emails to the senior UN official on Friday received an automatic reply saying Muscroft was “on annual leave.”

But on Saturday, an OCHA spokesman in Geneva told The Times of Israel that Muscroft “will be assigned to a new role.” It was not clear whether she would remain in East Jerusalem.

“OCHA has been present in the occupied Palestinian territory for the past 20 years, working to help meet humanitarian needs, guided by the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity,” Jens Laerke said.

“Over two million people in the occupied Palestinian territory need assistance — they remain our only focus and priority.”

The OCHA has in the past been highly critical of Israeli policies in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The incident was somewhat reminiscent of Palestinian uproar after last year’s Gaza conflict, when the then-head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency’s mission in Gaza agreed during an interview with an Israeli news channel that IDF airstrikes in Gaza were precise.

Asked by Channel 12 if he agreed with the statement, Matthias Schmale responded, “I’m not a military expert but I would not dispute that. I also have the impression that there is a huge sophistication in the way the Israeli military struck over the last 11 days.”

He clarified that the Israeli strikes were still more “vicious” than those during the 2014 war and that “there was an unacceptable and unbearable loss of life on the civilian side.”

Still, the interview sparked immediate backlash and Schmale issued an apology within hours.

However, he was later recalled from his post and relocated to Jerusalem along with his deputy in a move that was seen as necessary to ensure his safety.