Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in the Middle East

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AS DELIVERED

Mr. Mladenov, thank you for your briefing. As always, while addressing the political process, you never lose sight of the well-being of the Palestinian and Israeli people. I’d also like to thank our second briefer, Adele Raemer. Far too often, we talk about this issue without truly understanding the human impact of the violence that emanates from Gaza.

In this season of lights, it is important for this Council to take stock those things that we see clearly, and those things we fail to see. And what I must note, yet again, is how this Council seems either unwilling or unable to see the reality that Israelis live in constant fear of attack. In place of recognizing this reality, the Council tolerates an endless string of condemnations of Israel. But I will not stand for this. I have said, and I’m gonna say again today, that Israel has no better friend than Kelly Craft. It will not surprise anyone in this chamber to hear me say that the Trump Administration strongly opposes Resolution 2334. It is one-sided. It is unfairly critical of Israel. And had I been the Ambassador at the time of the vote on the resolution, I would have vetoed it. We would not normally dignify this resolution with further discussion of its contents. However, given the comments we have heard this morning about rocket attacks that threaten innocent people, it would be of some benefit to explore one element of this resolution.

Resolution 2334 is unambiguous in one important respect: It condemns all acts of violence – including acts of terror, provocation, and incitement. Lest we dismiss rocket fire as something other than an act of violence, we should recall that millions of Israelis live under the threat of attack each and every day. A little more than a month ago, Adele was one of many Israelis trapped in bomb shelters in her home as more than 150 rockets launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad rained down around them. During these kinds of attacks, Israelis can’t leave their homes. So they don’t. During these kinds of attacks, it is impossible to go about a normal life. So they don’t. It hardly needs saying – and yet I feel that I must – that unguided rocket fire impacts both Israelis and Palestinians. In Gaza, Palestinian women were also forced to take shelter, as rockets – fired by terrorists from crowded civilian neighborhoods – flew overhead. This constant threat of attack is the painful reality of daily life for hundreds of thousands of people – for Israelis and Palestinians. It is the continued threat of such violence to so many that precludes the possibility of lasting peace.

Moreover, these acts of violence are clearly condemned by Resolution 2334. So I must ask: Will this Council also condemn them? Will this Council even take them seriously? While Israel’s poor treatment in the UN venues is now so commonplace as to become unremarkable, what truly is remarkable is the resilience of the people of Israel. Because despite living among the echoes of rocket fire, the people of Israel promote and defend freedom. They build universities, they win Nobel prizes, and conduct innovative research. Israel is a gleaming light for the world. Is it to be condemned? No. It is to be emulated. It is this spirit of determination, of resilience in the face of threat, that keeps alive the hope for a peaceful solution – a solution that promotes and protects the security of Palestinians and Israelis alike. But this is a solution that will only be forged when the two parties can return to the negotiating table. And for that to happen, this Council, and the parties in question, must take more seriously the threat of violence from Gaza – especially from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Thus, colleagues, I say to you when our tasks ahead are difficult and the political world is dark, let us be the ones to bring the candles to illuminate the way.

Thank you.