Goal of Resolving Israeli-Palestinian Question Clear, but 20 Years of Failed Talks Led to ‘Slow and Painful Withering of Hope’, Security Council Told in Briefing

August 19, 2015

http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12014.doc.htm

United Nations

SC/12014

7506th Meeting (AM)

The recurrent violent incidents and radicalization in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, threatened to further destabilize an already tense environment for Israel and Palestine, a United Nations senior political affairs official told the Security Council today, urging both sides to work together to reduce tensions and prevent extremist attacks.

“We can no longer accept this reality,” said Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman in his regular monthly briefing to the 15-nation body, stressing that time had come to reverse “the perilous tide” and restore the hope that was in danger of being stifled by those promoting their hate-driven agendas.

The latest violent incidents included a 31 July arson attack in the West Bank village of Duma, apparently committed by extremist Jewish settlers, he said. The fire killed an 18-month-old boy, and his father died of wounds five days later.  His mother and 4-year-old brother continued to fight for their lives.

While urging the Israeli Government to bring the perpetrators to justice, Mr. Feltman denounced calls for revenge attacks by Hamas and Islamic Jihad.  “At a moment of heightened emotions and anger, such incitement can only serve to bring about more tragedy.”  He underscored that the July incident occurred in the context of a chronic lack of adequate law enforcement in the West Bank and that such violence was made possible due to the environment created by Israel’s decades-long policy of illegal settlement activities.

In the reporting period, he noted, Israeli security forces had conducted 188 search-and-arrest operations, detaining 292 Palestinians.  Six Palestinians were shot and killed by Israeli security forces.  A total of 203 Palestinians had been injured during the period, including 40 children and seven women.  Twelve members of the Israeli security forces were wounded, with no fatalities reported.  Any use of force by Israeli security personnel in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must be consistent with international human rights law, he said.

This month, Israel demolished 86 residential and other structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, displacing 177 Palestinians, of which 89 were children, Mr. Feltman said, urging Israel to halt such practices.

Recent changes in Israeli law and policy affecting the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, risked compounding the already precarious human rights situation, he said.  The decision to extend the use of prolonged administrative detention was particularly concerning, as such a practice, whether used against Palestinians or Israelis, was incompatible with international human rights standards.  All administrative detainees should be promptly charged or released.

Although the goal regarding the Palestine-Israel question was clear, more than 20 years of failed negotiations had bred mistrust, and, worse, the slow and painful withering of hope, he said.  In such a contentious environment, restoring confidence, before a return to realistic talks, was a must.  A comprehensive approach was needed on three levels — on the ground, in the region, and with the international community — to alter fundamentally the current negative dynamics and begin to shape a clear and positive pathway towards peace.  For Israel, that should reflect significant policy shifts to enable the growth of Palestine’s sovereignty, economy and security.  For Palestinians, unity was critical — the legitimate Palestinian Authority must represent all of Palestine and all Palestinians.

The coming days would mark the one-year anniversary of the end of last year’s devastating Gaza conflict — from which the Palestinians there had yet to recover, he said.

Continued closures, lack of electricity and water and slow pace of Palestinian reconciliation in Gaza continued to feed discontent, he said.  Since its launch in June, however, the residential stream of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism had allowed 630 families to purchase construction materials, with a total of 2,250 families processed.  This was welcome but insufficient, he stressed, urging donor countries to fulfil their pledges.  Welcoming also Egypt’s recent opening of the Rafah crossing for several days, he noted that the Secretary-General had encouraged Egyptian authorities to allow more regular openings, taking into account security concerns.

Gaza security incidents, he reported, included 24 Palestinian rockets fired at Israel and seven tested in the sea.  In response, Israel had conducted four air strikes, with one striking a Hamas training site, injuring four.  Conveying relief that schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) would open in time and thanking donors, he stressed that a sustainable solution must still be found to address the Agency’s long-term funding needs.

Briefly addressing the situation in Syria, he said that the 300 casualties from the recent air raids on Douma represented yet another war crime for which those responsible must be held accountable.  He reiterated the call for an end to the hostilities and a political solution in line with the framework promoted by the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy.

On Lebanon, he called again on leaders to act urgently and responsibly to fill the presidential vacuum without further delay.  The situation along the Blue Line and in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained calm, despite Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, he added.