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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
REPORTING ON UNSCR 2334 (2016)**

27 June 2023

Madam President,

Members of the Security Council,

I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the twenty-sixth report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016). The Secretary-General's written report that you have already received covers the period between 14 March and 14 June 2023.

Let me start by saying that the two weeks since the submission of the report have been terrible. Since the submission of the written report, we have seen an alarming spike in violence across the northern and central occupied West Bank, leading to numerous Palestinian and Israeli casualties. Military operations – including airstrikes in the West Bank – clashes, attacks and extremely high levels of settler-related violence have continued and intensified dramatically, alongside the use of more sophisticated weapons by Palestinians, including advanced improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and rockets launched towards Israel.

Unless decisive steps are taken now to rein in the violence, there is a significant risk that events could deteriorate further.

The mounting violence is taking place against the backdrop of deeply worrying settlement-related developments that alter the already fragile dynamics on the ground, as well as a worrying deterioration in relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In that regard, I welcome today's calls between Presidents Isaac Herzog and Mahmoud Abbas, and between Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and PLO Secretary-General Hussein al-Sheikh on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, in which, according to Israeli statements released to the media, Israel officials denounced recent settler attacks in the West Bank and recommitted to holding perpetrators accountable.

Madam President,

On 19 June, an Israeli military operation in the Jenin Refugee Camp, in Area A of the occupied West Bank, led to heavy armed exchanges. An Israeli security force (ISF) vehicle was struck by a Palestinian improvised explosive device, injuring eight ISF personnel; Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the IDF, military helicopters carried out airstrikes – the first in the West Bank since the second intifada – to facilitate the extraction of military personnel and disabled vehicles. Over the course of the day, seven Palestinians were killed by ISF, including two children, and 90 injured.

On 20 June, two Palestinians shot and killed four Israeli civilians, including two children, and injured four others at a gas station near Eli settlement, north of Ramallah. One of the perpetrators was shot and killed by an Israeli civilian at the scene, while the other was later killed by Israeli

forces near Tubas. Hamas claimed the assailants as members and said the attack was a “natural response” to the ISF operation in Jenin.

From the night of 20 June through 25 June, Israeli settlers perpetrated 28 violent attacks against Palestinian villages across the northern and central occupied West Bank. In total, one Palestinian was killed and 54 others were injured – 37 by ISF and 16 by settlers and one undetermined – while four settlers or other Israeli civilians and one ISF personnel were injured by Palestinians. The attacks followed a similar pattern, with large numbers of settlers, many armed, in some cases in the presence of ISF, setting fire to dozens of houses and vehicles, as well as fields owned by Palestinians, followed by confrontations, in many cases leading to casualties. In some instances, ISF fired live and rubber-coated metal bullets at Palestinians.

On 20 June, in al-Lubban ash-Sharqiya, settler arson also targeted a gas station and three Palestinians, including a child, were injured.

On 21 June, over 300 Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian village of Turmus'ayyeh, northwest of Ramallah. In the ensuing confrontations, one Palestinian was shot and killed by ISF, and eight others were injured by live ammunition.

The settler rampage continued that evening in Urif, south of Nablus, with hundreds of Israeli settlers again attacking Palestinians, their property and other structures, including a school and a mosque.

Over the following days, settlers attacked villages situated between Nablus and Ramallah, including Jalud, Sinjil, Deir Dibwan, Umm Safa, al-Mugayyir and, again, Turmus'ayyeh.

To date, Israeli police have said that 11 Israelis have been detained, including two off-duty IDF personnel, in relation to the various attacks.

Amid these developments, on the night of 21 June, armed Palestinians fired towards al-Jalamah checkpoint, north of Jenin. An Israeli drone subsequently launched a missile at their vehicle, killing three Palestinians, one a child. The IDF said that the three were responsible for a number of shooting attacks in the West Bank. Two were later claimed as members by Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the third by Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

On 26 June, Palestinians from the so-called al-Ayyash Brigades attempted to launch two rockets from the Jenin area towards Israel. Both fell short in the occupied Palestinian Territory, with no damage or injuries reported.

Madam President,

Reactions by officials to the various incidents have varied, with some rejecting the violence and condemning vigilantism; others making deeply alarming, inflammatory statements.

On 24 June, the IDF Chief of Staff, the head of the Israeli Security Agency and the Israeli Police Commissioner issued a joint statement condemning the settler attacks, which they called “nationalist terrorism,” and vowing to take steps to combat them. These steps include increasing the presence of forces, stepping up arrests and widening the use of administrative detention against individuals participating in such attacks.

The previous day, an Israeli Minister and Cabinet member visited an illegal settlement outpost and called on settlers to “run to the hilltops” and establish additional outposts, illegal also under Israeli law. He also called for a widespread military campaign in the West Bank, urging ISF to “blow up buildings [and] assassinate terrorists. Not one, or two, but dozens, hundreds, or if needed, thousands.” The Minister’s call to establish unauthorized outposts was later repudiated by Prime Minister Netanyahu at a Cabinet meeting, where he said that “calls to grab land illegally and actions of grabbing land illegally, are unacceptable” and that Israeli authorities would act to stop them while promoting settlement expansion in approved locations.

Meanwhile, Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, celebrated the 20 June attack against Israeli civilians as an “act of heroism” and called for additional attacks.

Madam President,

Several concerning developments took place during the reporting period related to Israeli settlement expansion.

On 18 June, the Israeli Government approved significant amendments to Israeli settlement planning procedures that could expedite advancement of Israeli settlements plans. The amendments remove, *inter alia*, the requirement for the Minister of Defense to approve interim settlement planning stages, and to delegate the Minister’s authority in this regard to the Additional Minister in the Ministry of Defense-- currently Bezalel Smotrich.

In response to this decision, the Secretary-General of the PLO’s Executive Committee Hussein al-Sheikh announced in a Tweet that the Palestinian Authority would not participate in a long-awaited meeting of the Joint Economic Committee scheduled for 19 June. The meeting had been anticipated as an important opportunity for the parties to discuss urgent steps to improve their economic relationship and deliver on existing commitments.

Similarly, plans for a Ministerial meeting of the Negev Forum later this summer hosted by Morocco were also postponed.

On 26 June, the Israeli Civil Administration’s Higher Planning Committee reportedly advanced plans for over 5,500 housing units in Israeli settlements in Area C. Some 750 units near Eli were added to the agenda after the 20 June attack there and following an announcement by the Prime Minister’s Office that Israel’s “answer to terrorism is to strike at it forcefully and build up our country.” Plans advanced reportedly include the retroactive regularization, under Israeli law, of three outposts adjacent to Eli.

Madam President,

Regarding other significant developments, on 16 June, UNRWA announced that it had “resumed its service delivery to Palestine Refugees in the West Bank, after nearly four months of disruption due to a work dispute with the West Bank Staff Union and a strike.” UNRWA operations in the West Bank, including 42 health clinics and 90 schools for more than 40,000 children, have since fully resumed.

Madam President,

I will now turn to several observations regarding the implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

I remain gravely concerned by the escalating spiral of violence we are witnessing in the occupied West Bank. I condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, which exacerbate mistrust and undermine a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The violence must stop and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

I am particularly alarmed by the extreme levels of settler violence, including large numbers of settlers, many armed, systematically attacking Palestinian villages, terrorizing communities, sometimes in the proximity of Israeli security forces. Israel, as the occupying Power, has an obligation to protect Palestinians and their property in the occupied Palestinian territory and to ensure prompt, independent, impartial, and transparent investigations into all acts of violence.

I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint, apply proportional use of force and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life, and conduct thorough, independent, impartial, and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

Children in particular must never be the target of violence, used or put in harm's way.

I strongly condemn inciteful, provocative statements from officials on both sides that further enflame the volatile situation on the ground.

Madam President,

I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that fuels violence and is impeding access by Palestinians to their land and resources, reshaping the geography of the occupied West Bank and threatening the viability of a future Palestinian State. I note with alarm the recent Israeli Government decision which may expedite expansion in Area C.

Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law. I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

I call upon the Israeli Government to end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and prevent the possible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law.

I urge Israel to approve plans that would enable Palestinian communities in Area C and East Jerusalem to build legally and address their development needs.

In closing, I underscore that the speed and intensity of the security deterioration we have witnessed on the ground are extremely dangerous. The unfolding events seriously challenge broader stability and undermine the Palestinian Authority.

While the ceasefire following the Gaza escalation in May has held, there is a constant risk that events in the West Bank could spill over to Gaza.

Likewise, the Palestinian Authority's fiscal and institutional challenges, exacerbated by funding shortages – including for UN agencies – that impact the delivery of crucial basic services remain concerning and may further aggravate the deterioration on the ground. Let there be no doubt, neither the PA nor the UN will be able to provide humanitarian assistance without donors urgently stepping up financial support.

In recent days and weeks, the UN has remained in close contact with all parties to help restore a relative calm and change the current disastrous trajectory.

We must urgently act collectively to stop the violence. At the same time, it is crucial to bring the parties back onto a path that addresses the political issues driving the current dynamics, so that a process to resolve the core issues can begin.

The deepening occupation, settlement expansion, the high levels of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, and, critically, the absence of a political horizon are rapidly eroding hope among Palestinians and Israelis, and particularly among youth, that a resolution of the conflict is achievable.

I urge all leaders to put on the brakes and rethink the options.

The choice is clear: either continue along the downward spiral of violence and provocations leading to a political vacuum; or turn towards constructive dialogue linked to concrete actions that can create hope and a political horizon.

The UN remains committed to assisting these efforts, and to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation through the achievement of a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

Thank you.