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SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 2334 (2016)

22 March 2022

Madam President,

Members of the Security Council,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I will devote this briefing to presenting his 21st report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 10 December to 18 March.

Madam President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem” and to “fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard.” No such steps were taken.

On 5 January, Israeli authorities published tenders for some 300 settlement housing units in the Talpiyot East neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

On 10 and 24 January, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced plans to build some 800 and 400 housing units respectively in the East Jerusalem settlement of Gilo.

On 17 January, the same Committee advanced a plan for some 1,200 housing units next to Ramat Rachel in the southern Jerusalem area, a significant number of which are intended for construction in East Jerusalem.

On 1 February, following an official land survey, Israel’s Attorney-General published a legal opinion allowing authorities to declare land in the outpost of Evyatar as “state land” and authorizing accelerated planning procedures for the establishment of a settlement there.

On 28 February, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a plan for some 700 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Pisgat Ze’ev.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, 216 structures were demolished or seized by Israeli authorities or demolished by their owners to avoid costly Israeli demolition fees. These actions

displaced 299 people, including 138 children and 76 women. A total of 37 structures demolished or seized were donor-funded.

In an effort to reduce tensions, Israeli authorities reportedly decided to freeze most demolitions in East Jerusalem before and during the month of Ramadan.

Tensions were high in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in the run-up to 19 January, when Israeli forces evicted a Palestinian family and demolished their home. Twelve Palestinians were displaced including two children and three women, with several arrests reported. Israeli authorities stated that the demolition was undertaken to build a special needs school to serve Palestinian children.

Tensions mounted further in February over the potential eviction by Israeli authorities of a Palestinian family scheduled for March. Following weeks of numerous violent altercations, protests, and property damage in the neighborhood, the atmosphere calmed somewhat after a 22 February decision by an Israeli Magistrates Court to suspend the eviction, pending consideration of an appeal submitted by the family. In developments that further reduced tensions, Israel's Supreme Court ruled on 1 March that four other families in the neighborhood would not be evicted and would be recognized as "protected tenants," paying a nominal rent, until a determination is made on their claims to ownership. On 3 March, the families held a press conference noting the importance of the Supreme Court's decision and vowing to continue pressing their claims for ownership of their homes.

Madam President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls for "immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction." Unfortunately, daily violence continued.

Overall, 24 Palestinians, including four children, were killed by Israeli security forces (ISF) during demonstrations, clashes, security operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, and other incidents. 2966 Palestinians, including five women and 537 children, were injured. Of these, 2283 injuries were due to tear gas inhalation, while 50 were injured by live ammunition. In addition, Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated 144 attacks against Palestinians resulting in 47 injuries and/or damage to Palestinian property.

One Israeli civilian was killed by Palestinians, and 100 Israelis, including five women and one child, were injured by Palestinians in clashes, rock and Molotov cocktail throwing, attacks and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated 277 attacks against Israeli civilians resulting in injuries and/or damage to Israeli property.

On 5 January, a vehicle under the supervision of the Israeli police hit and severely injured a 70-year-old Palestinian man in Umm al-Kheir, south of Hebron. The man later died. Israeli police officers present at the location did not intervene to provide medical assistance to the victim. Police

reported that the driver had sustained head injuries from stones thrown at him by other Palestinians present in the area.

On 12 January, an 80-year-old Palestinian-American man died in the context of an ISF operation near Ramallah where the victim was reportedly handcuffed, blindfolded and assaulted by ISF. Following an internal investigation, on 31 January, the Israel Defense Forces removed two officers from their positions and reprimanded a third. A criminal investigation is ongoing.

On 8 February, ISF shot and killed three Palestinians in a car in Nablus, in Area A. The Fatah-affiliated Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed the men as members. According to Israeli authorities, the three were members of a cell that had carried out attacks on Israeli forces, were planning additional attacks, and tried to shoot at ISF during the incident.

On 22 February, a 13-year-old boy died after being shot by ISF in al-Khader area, near Bethlehem. There are conflicting reports about whether the boy was throwing stones or a Molotov cocktail when he was shot.

On several occasions, Palestinians were shot and killed by ISF, reportedly in the context of attempted attacks, including on 21 December near the Mevo Dotan settlement, southwest of Jenin; on 22 December near al-Amari Refugee Camp; on 31 December near Salfit; and on 17 January near Hebron. Palestinians were also killed during exchanges of fire or clashes with ISF on 13 December in Nablus; on 6 January at the Balata Refugee Camp; on 1 March in Jenin and Bethlehem; and on 15 March in Qalandiya.

On 28 February, clashes erupted at Damascus Gate in Jerusalem's Old City, where hundreds of Palestinians had gathered to celebrate the Islamic holiday of al-Israa wa al-Miraj. Reportedly, 37 Palestinians were injured, including a six-month-old infant and an 11-year-old girl with a disability, who was reportedly hospitalized after being struck in the head by a sound grenade. Twenty Palestinians were arrested, mostly children between ages 14 and 17. Israeli police stated that Palestinians had "chanted incitement and threw stones and bottles at police on the scene."

On 6 March, a 15-year-old Palestinian was shot by ISF in Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, reportedly after throwing a Molotov cocktail at Israeli soldiers. The boy later succumbed to his wounds.

On 6 March, a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli police officer in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City, wounding him, and was subsequently shot dead by ISF.

On 7 March, a Palestinian stabbed and injured two Israeli police officers near the entrance of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem's Old City, before being shot dead by ISF. Video of the incident shows a police officer shooting the man while he was on the ground after having been already shot. Hamas later claimed the man as a member.

On 15 March, ISF shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian boy in the Balata Refugee Camp during clashes that developed following an arrest operation.

Settler-related violence remained significant across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. On several occasions, ISF and Israeli settlers clashed, including in the context of demolitions of unauthorized structures in outposts which are also illegal under Israeli law.

Beita village, near Nablus, remained a flashpoint for clashes, amid ongoing Palestinian demonstrations against the nearby Evyatar settlement outpost. During clashes on 10 December, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by ISF. On 4 February, 47 Palestinians were injured, including four by live ammunition; another 36 were injured on 18 February, including a ten-year old boy shot in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet.

Areas in and around Burqa village, also near Nablus, saw serious confrontations. On 16 December of a 25-year-old Israeli man was shot and killed by Palestinians near the evacuated settlement of Homesh. On 19 December, Israeli security forces arrested six Palestinians in Silat al Harthiya, near Jenin, on suspicion of involvement in the attack; three were later charged. That same day, hundreds of settlers attempted to enter Homesh and set up illegal structures, clashing with ISF and breaking through their barricades. Later, on 1 March, eight Israelis were arrested in connection with these events. From 23 to 25 December, repeated raids by Israeli settlers on Burqa led to clashes between Palestinians and ISF in which at least 160 Palestinians were injured, including 14 by live ammunition. On 13 February, a 16-year-old Palestinian was shot and killed by ISF in Silat al-Harithiya near Jenin amid clashes that erupted after Israeli forces entered the village to demolish the family home of one of the suspected perpetrators of the December shooting.

On 21 January, adjacent to Burin village near Nablus, Israeli settlers injured five Israeli activists involved in a tree planting activity with local Palestinians. On 7 February, three Israeli settlers from Givat Ronen were arrested and demolition orders were issued on structures in the settlement.

On 24 January, Israeli settlers drove a convoy through Huwwara, near Nablus, throwing stones at Palestinians and their property. Three Palestinians, including a 17-year-old, were injured. On 16 February, Israel announced the arrest of 17 Israelis in connection with this incident.

On 25 February, an Israeli civilian shot and injured two Palestinian men following a car accident near Hizma checkpoint.

On 2 and 3 March, two Israeli civilians were stabbed and injured in Hizma town, near Jerusalem. ISF subsequently arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out one of the attacks.

In Gaza, Palestinian militants launched two rockets and one instance of launching incendiary balloons towards Israel. No injuries or fires were reported. In response, Israeli forces carried out three air strikes on what they said were military targets in the Strip, resulting in no injuries.

On 29 December, a Palestinian opened fire towards the Gaza perimeter fence, injuring an Israeli civilian. In retaliation, Israeli forces fired several tank shells at what they said were Hamas observation posts in Gaza. Four Palestinians were injured, including a 16-year-old boy.

On 1 January, Israel Defense Forces said that two rockets fired from Gaza had landed off the coast of Israel. In response, Israeli forces conducted air strikes against what they said were militant facilities in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

Madam President,

Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) calls for the parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Some Palestinian and Israeli officials continued to engage in such activity during the reporting period.

In a highly provocative move in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem at the height of tensions over a potential eviction, a far-right member of the Israeli Knesset set up a makeshift office in the neighborhood. Several Members of Knesset visited the neighborhood, expressing support for him, while others encouraged his inflammatory actions. In separate statements, the same Member of Knesset also expressed hope that Palestinian hunger strikers would die and that any Palestinian who throws a stone “get a bullet in the head.”

In the wake of the killing of three Palestinians by ISF in Nablus, Fatah social media pages encouraged Palestinians to increase “confrontation” with Israel. Hamas also called for increased clashes with Israeli forces throughout the occupied West Bank. Some PA officials denied the Jewish connection to the region and to the Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

Madam President,

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated calls by the Middle East Quartet for “affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperiling the two-State solution.” The reporting period witnessed some progress on civil and economic steps, with instances of high-level official engagement.

On 27 December, the State of Qatar announced that it had signed an agreement with the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Electricity Distribution Corporation to advance construction of a natural gas pipeline from Israel to Gaza. The pipeline aims to increase electricity generation at the Gaza Power Plant.

In Gaza, during the reporting period, the Israeli authorities authorized issuing permits to some 12,000 Palestinian merchants and traders. In January, the daily movement of workers, traders, and businesspeople through the Erez crossing was the highest since the tightening of the Israeli closures of Gaza in 2007.

In February, technical-level trilateral meetings on the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) between the PA, the Government of Israel and the UN resumed, with steps identified to improve the mechanism. In a welcome development, white cement, long deemed a dual-use material, began entering Gaza without any special monitoring.

There was a marked increase in the movement of goods out of Gaza in recent months, peaking in January with over 900 truckloads passing through the Kerem Shalom crossing to the West Bank, Israel and other countries. This is the highest monthly figure recorded since 2007, and it comes close to the rates that had existed prior to it, as well as significantly above pre-May 2021 rates.

The UN continues to highlight to the Israeli Government priority items to enter Gaza, largely for UN health, water and sanitation, and other projects – some requested over a year ago. Significant delays in approvals, including dual-use materials under the GRM, impact all aspects of UN operations in Gaza, the economy and the lives of ordinary people in Gaza.

With funding from Qatar, the gradual reconstruction of housing units totally destroyed during the May 2021 escalation – to date, some 115 households – has begun. Meanwhile, UNRWA has completed the repair of nearly 7,000 housing units and is currently working with 700 families whose homes were totally demolished.

On 28 December, UNRWA announced the start of a cash assistance allocation of USD 8.2 million to families whose homes were damaged during the May 2021 escalation.

In the occupied West Bank, some actions by the Israeli authorities have contributed to some reduction in tensions.

On 11 December, the Palestinian Central Election Commission (CEC) conducted the first phase of local council elections in several hundred small communities in the West Bank, with over 66 per cent of eligible voters participating.

On 12 January and 17 February, the CEC concluded voter registration and candidate nomination periods for the second phase of local council elections scheduled for 26 March. However, on 17 January, the Palestinian Cabinet postponed local council elections in Gaza.

From 6 to 9 February, the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) met for the first time since 2018, electing a new leadership for the Palestinian National Council and new members for vacant positions in the PLO Executive Committee. In its final statement, the PCC called for a halt to security coordination and the suspension of the recognition of Israel until it recognizes the Palestinian State based on the June 1967 lines and halts settlement activity, reiterating decisions from the previous PCC meeting.

Madam President,

In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council called upon all States “to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.” No such steps were taken during the reporting period.

Resolution 2334 (2016) also called upon “all parties to continue, *inter alia*, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations.”

On 14 January, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the latest political developments and the situation on the ground.

On 19 February, the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan met in Munich and expressed their commitment to support all efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace “on the basis of the Two-State Solution, in accordance with international law, relevant UN resolutions and agreed parameters.”

On 9 March, the Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian Foreign Ministers met on the margins of the ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States in Cairo to discuss efforts to launch negotiations aimed at reaching a comprehensive and just settlement of the conflict.

Madam President,

In closing, allow me to share the Secretary-General’s observations concerning implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

1. I remain deeply concerned by the continued settlement advancement by Israel in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Settlement expansion continues to fuel violence in the OPT, further entrenching the occupation, undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independent statehood, and eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous and viable Palestinian State. Some 670,000 Israeli citizens currently reside in over 130 illegal settlements and over 100 outposts in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I am particularly concerned about the increasing settlement advancements in and around East Jerusalem. Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law and are a serious impediment to peace. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity immediately.
2. The continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects remains deeply concerning. Demolitions affect not only residential structures but also those related to income generation and the provision of essential services. I call upon the Government of Israel to end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and the forcible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law.
3. I remain particularly concerned by the potential eviction of several Palestinian families from homes they have lived in for decades in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods of occupied East Jerusalem. Many legal cases, initiated by settler organizations, invoke an

Israeli law by which Israelis - but not Palestinians - may claim lands they owned prior to 1948. I note Israeli court rulings during the reporting period which have postponed or suspended such evictions, contributing to a reduction in tensions on the ground. As demonstrated in recent weeks, forced evictions, especially in such politically sensitive areas, can trigger dangerous tensions and violence. Demolitions and evictions entail numerous human rights violations and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer.

4. I am deeply troubled by the continued loss of life and serious injuries, including children, in the OPT and the overall deterioration of the security situation, including an apparent increase in shooting attacks during the reporting period.
5. The possible excessive use of force by Israeli security forces continues to raise serious concerns, particularly the use of live ammunition. Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be injured and killed. Children should never be the target of violence or put in harm's way. I urge Israeli authorities to conduct thorough, prompt, effective, and transparent investigations into these killings and injuries.
6. I remain deeply concerned by the levels of settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel, as the occupying Power, has an obligation to protect the Palestinian population there against all acts or threats of violence and ensure, as far as possible, public order and life. I am also deeply concerned by attacks by Palestinians against Israeli civilians. I underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.
7. I am particularly alarmed by the high number of arrests by ISF of Palestinians, including of children, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem. I am concerned that the arrests, in particular of children, may represent a disproportionate response to the offences allegedly committed. Under international law, the arrest and detention of children should be used only as last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.
8. I urge all sides to refrain from actions that could further escalate the situation across the OPT and call on all political, religious and community leaders to help reduce tensions, particularly in Jerusalem.
9. I am deeply concerned that at a highly sensitive moment on the ground, officials on both sides continue to stoke tensions and take actions that have the potential to provoke more deadly violence. Acts of terror, violence and incitement must be clearly and unequivocally condemned by all. Officials on all sides have a responsibility to avoid any actions that may escalate tensions.
10. Palestinians continue to suffer in Gaza, under Hamas rule and under continued Israeli closures. I welcome the parties' recent engagement on easing access – including for

workers from Gaza and the West Bank into the Israeli labor market. I am encouraged by the growing volume of goods exiting Gaza, which clearly surpasses previous years. Nevertheless, more significant steps are needed to see durable economic benefits. I hope the resumption of technical-level trilateral meetings on the GRM will facilitate reconstruction and much-needed development projects, leading to reduced aid dependency.

11. The fiscal condition of the Palestinian Authority remains precarious. Revenues are not keeping pace with expenditures, leading to accumulated debt; and investment in important sectors – including health, education and infrastructure – are insufficient. To address the root causes of the recurring fiscal crisis, PA internal reforms and improvements in the economic relationship between Israel and the PA are needed, alongside donor support. To this end, I welcome the current work of the IMF mission to support the PA’s important work on fiscal stability and reform.
12. The UN is grateful to all donors who continue to support UNRWA's crucial work. I am concerned as UNRWA will already face critical cashflow challenges in the coming three months. Any reduction or disruption of services has the potential to trigger significant humanitarian, political and security consequences, impacting the broader region. As Muslims in the region start the Holy month of Ramadan, I appeal to all donors to advance as much as possible, disbursement of confirmed pledges. Preserving UNRWA services is a joint responsibility of all Member States."
13. As we endeavor to support the critical needs of Palestinians across the OPT, it is also vital that we continue working towards advancing intra-Palestinian unity as it is central to advancing a two-State solution. The UN stands firm in its support of Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts. The holding of general elections in the OPT would be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine.

Madam President,

In closing, let me add that we have regrettably seen little progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 since its adoption in December 2016. On the contrary, the absence of a meaningful peace process to end the Israeli occupation and resolve the conflict is fueling a dangerous deterioration that is destabilizing the situation across the OPT.

In just a week, as Ramadan begins, thousands of Muslims will come to pray at the Muslim Holy Sites in Jerusalem, with the Jewish and Christian faithful following soon after to mark Pesach and Easter in April. This should be a time of peaceful reflection, prayer and celebration for all religions. Provocations must be avoided. Leaders on all sides have a critical role to play in ensuring calm.

We must keep in sight, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, the vision of an end to the occupation and of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State– living side-by-side

in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States.

I remain actively engaged in advancing these efforts with my counterparts in the Middle East Quartet, key regional partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Thank you.