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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

I brief you today as the security situation in the occupied West Bank is caught in a downward spiral.

Too many people, overwhelmingly Palestinians, have been killed and injured in daily violence. Mounting hopelessness, anger and tension have once again erupted into a deadly cycle of violence that is increasingly difficult to contain.

Decades of violence and its toll on both Israelis and Palestinians, as well as a prolonged absence of meaningful negotiations and a failure to resolve the key issues fueling the conflict have created fertile ground for this dynamic.

In recent weeks, I have had discussions with Palestinian officials and factions across the West Bank and in Gaza, and a range of Israeli officials and members of the international community to address this volatile situation. My message has been clear. The immediate priority is to work to calm the situation and reverse the negative trends on the ground. This will require determined actions by both parties, supported by the international community.

However, this cannot be a goal itself. Efforts are also urgently needed to empower and strengthen the Palestinian Authority and build towards a return to a political process. A failure to implement strategies to address both the symptoms and the root causes of violent escalation will only worsen an already explosive situation.

Mr. President,

Let me describe for the Council the current dynamic in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

In total, 32 Palestinians, including six children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, and other incidents, and 311 Palestinians, including one woman and eight children, were injured. Israeli settlers or other civilians perpetrated 106 attacks against Palestinians resulting in 63 injuries and/or damage to Palestinian property.

In all, two Israeli security forces personnel were killed, and 25 Israeli civilians, including five women and three children, and 13 Israeli security forces personnel were injured by Palestinians in shooting and ramming attacks, clashes, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, and other incidents. In total, Palestinians perpetrated some 115 attacks against Israeli civilians, 100 of which were stone-throwing incidents, resulting in injuries and/or damage to Israeli property.

In the reporting period, we saw a spike in fatal violence across the occupied West Bank. So far, 2022 is on course to be the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since OCHA began systematically tracking Palestinian fatalities in 2005.

Violence was particularly intense in Jenin and Nablus Governorates, in the northern part of West Bank. In Jenin, ten Palestinians, including two children, were killed by ISF, while in Nablus, eight Palestinians were killed by ISF. Most of these fatalities occurred during military operations to arrest what Israeli authorities said were Palestinians suspected of involvement in attacks or planned attacks against Israelis, and during related armed clashes.

In one such incident, Israeli security forces killed five Palestinians during an operation in Jenin Refugee Camp on 28 September, which involved an exchange of fire with armed Palestinians. Among those killed was a bystander and a 12-year-old boy.

Amid a spate of Palestinian shooting attacks against Israelis in the occupied West Bank, Palestinians shot and killed two Israeli soldiers: on 8 October at a checkpoint outside Shu'fat Refugee Camp, near Jerusalem; and on 11 October in a drive-by shooting near Nablus. Al-Aqsa Martyrs brigade claimed the 8 October attacker as a member; and the Lions' Den Brigades, a newly formed group of armed Palestinians based in Nablus, claimed responsibility for the attack on the twelfth.

Amid search operations for the perpetrators, Israeli authorities imposed strict movement restrictions. Entry to the Shu'fat Refugee Camp was severely restricted for six days; while in Nablus, strict restrictions were in place from 11 until yesterday, 27 October, impacting basic service delivery and economic activity.

Demonstrations and protests spread from Shu'fat to East Jerusalem and led to clashes between Palestinians and ISF. Tensions persisted when, on 13 October, a right-wing Israeli Member of the Knesset led a group through Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, at one point brandishing a weapon and making violent threats.

In Nablus' Old City on 25 October, ISF shot and killed five Palestinians during a military operation. Israeli authorities said that they were targeting an explosives workshop belonging to the Lions' Den and that a senior member of the group was among those killed. Thousands of Palestinians subsequently demonstrated in Nablus, with protests spreading across the occupied West Bank.

Amid the heightened tensions, Palestinians conducted general strikes and five days of civil disobedience campaigns across the West Bank, with further clashes between Palestinians and ISF.

Mister President,

Settler-related violence and provocations has also increased during the reporting period, contributing to the dynamic of escalating violence in the occupied West Bank.

Throughout the reporting period, settlers held numerous demonstrations across the West Bank, with protesters on multiple occasions blocking main roads, throwing stones and impeding movement for Palestinian residents.

Tensions were particularly high around Nablus, where settlers impeded main routes for Palestinian residents and, on several occasions, groups of Israeli settlers entered the Palestinian town of

Huwwara, south of Nablus, damaging Palestinian property and prompting clashes with residents, in some cases in the presence of Israeli Security Forces.

On 4 October, three Palestinians, including two children, were injured after Israeli settlers attacked a school with rocks and sticks. On 14 October, 15 Palestinians were injured, including two with live ammunition, in clashes with Israeli settlers and the ISF.

On 20 October, two ISF were injured after they were attacked by a group of settlers south of Huwwara, prompting condemnation from senior Israeli officials.

During the reporting period, IDF announced that it had opened investigations into two separate cases where soldiers were documented violently assaulting Palestinians or shooting towards Palestinian homes.

Mr. President,

I am alarmed by the intensity of violence in the occupied West Bank, including the high number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces, numerous armed attacks by Palestinians against Israelis, including killings, and settler violence.

I reiterate that perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

I am appalled that children continue to be the victims of violence. Children must never be the targets of violence or put in harm's way.

Mr. President,

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 38 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and three in East Jerusalem, displacing 81 Palestinians. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 3 October, with regard to the status of Khan al-Ahmar, the High Court of Justice granted the State of Israel a postponement until February 2023 for its response to a petition that seeks to compel Israeli authorities to evacuate the Bedouin village in Area C.

I call on Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians and to approve additional plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

Mr. President,

Despite the overall deterioration of the situation, there were some positive developments during the reporting period.

On 13 October, following an inter-factional dialogue hosted by the Government of Algeria, 14 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, signed the Algeria Declaration. In the declaration, the factions agreed, *inter alia*, to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and to hold elections for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian National

Council. I echo the Secretary-General in welcoming the agreement and underscore the importance of Palestinian reconciliation for a viable, independent Palestinian State.

Mr. President,

Turning to the Gaza Strip, Israel increased by some 1,300 the issuance of permits for Palestinians from Gaza to work or conduct business in Israel, bringing the total number to over 16,000.

The reporting period saw the highest volume of imports from Egypt via Salah ad-Din gate since it began operations in February 2018, largely due to Egyptian-funded reconstruction projects with over 5,000 trucks entering Gaza in the period.

Exports from Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing to Israel increased by 26 per cent compared to the previous period. Notably, the transport of fish to the West Bank resumed.

Meanwhile, imports to Gaza through Kerem Shalom decreased slightly, with a daily average of 192 trucks compared to 223 trucks last month.

Delays in the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Gaza Central Desalination Project have resulted from delays in Israeli approvals of entry for materials under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. Ensuring the timely approval for the entry of such materials is essential to moving important development projects forward and sustaining vital donor support for these projects.

In the West Bank, on 20 October, Israeli authorities began implementing a pilot phase of new regulations governing the entry of certain foreign passport holders into the West Bank. The new regulations were issued in the context of a petition submitted to the High Court of Justice and are far more detailed and specific than those used in the past.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian response across the OPT continues to face chronic funding gaps. As of October, only 57 per cent of the requirements of the Humanitarian Response Plan had been met, as Palestinians across the OPT face additional economic pressures and the risk of food insecurity due to cost of living increases.

Mr. President,

Turning to the region, in the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally maintained despite several violations of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement of Forces by both parties, including the Israel Defense Forces firing across the ceasefire line into the area of separation and Syrian armed forces maintaining presence in the area of separation. I remind the parties of the need to abide by the terms of the Agreement and prevent risks of escalation.

I welcome the 27 October signing by the Governments of Lebanon and Israel of an agreement that settles their maritime boundary dispute, mediated by the United States. This is an important and encouraging development and I hope it will promote increased stability in the region.

I underscore the importance of Lebanon's forming a new government and electing a new president pursuant to the country's constitutional framework.

Mr. President,

At the end, let me turn back to where I started, concrete steps by all sides are urgently needed to address the situation on the ground. I call on the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to recognize what is at stake and to take the necessary steps to restore calm.

Let me repeat such efforts need full support from the international community.

However, unless the core political issues are addressed, the deep-rooted mistrust and hostility will continue to grow. I see clearly the mounting frustration and anger of Palestinians in the face of decades of Israeli occupation.

The Palestinian Authority urgently needs the economic support and political space to fully exercise its authority, including security, in areas under its control.

The United Nations remains actively engaged with all relevant parties and is committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict by ending the occupation and realizing a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

Thank you.