



Security Council briefing on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, 24 May 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt
Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you President. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and Mrs Hary [*Mrs Tania Hary, Executive Director of Gisha NGO*] for her insightful remarks and recommendations.

At the outset, in the wake of recent hostilities, we commend the Egyptian authorities for brokering a ceasefire and returning the situation to relative calm. These events have once more highlighted how precarious and unsustainable the situation in the Gaza Strip remains.

Gaza is home to some of the highest levels of humanitarian needs in the world, with 80 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian aid; a situation exacerbated by Israel's continued blockade. We stress the obligation to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza.

As a signatory to the political declaration on the use of *Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas*, it was particularly distressing to watch, yet again, renewed bombing and devastation in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world. In this latest round of fighting, homes have been damaged and destroyed, and there are reports of partial damage to several hospitals and healthcare facilities.



For Malta, the protection of civilians in conflict, including children and women, and the respect of international humanitarian law is paramount. Regrettably, it is too often disregarded in the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Malta strongly condemns all acts which result in the killing of civilians on both sides.

We strongly condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire towards Israel, and all acts of terrorism and incitements to terrorism, which continue to threaten civilians and result in further tragic loss of life.

While we reiterate that Israel has the right to self-defence, the principles of necessity and proportionality must also be respected. We are concerned that the frequent, systematic, and violent raids by Israeli forces in the West Bank, continue to endanger civilians, including children.

President

Echoing this Council's 20 February Presidential Statement, Malta reiterates its strong opposition towards unilateral measures that impede peace. These include the further expansion of Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace, the retroactive legalisation of settlement outposts, demolition of Palestinian homes, and the further displacement of Palestinian civilians. Reports detailing exploratory attempts



to substantially increase the number of settlers in the West Bank are also deeply concerning.

We unreservedly condemn the demolitions of EU-funded projects, including the recent demolition of the EU-funded school in Jubbet Adh Dhib. This unilateral act denied 81 Palestinian children their inherent right to education.

We are also alarmed at the provocative Israeli flag march witnessed last week in Jerusalem, which saw thousands of settlers marching through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City and hundreds storming the Al Aqsa Mosque, under the protection of heavy security. These acts, coupled with the inflammatory hate speech, push tensions closer to a breaking point.

Such measures deny the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and fracture any prospects of a contiguous Palestinian state, entrenching a one-State reality that runs contrary to Security Council resolution 2334.

We are also deeply concerned at the dire financial situation of UNRWA and appeal for the sustained and predictable funding of their indispensable services, without which there will be dire humanitarian consequences.

President

Inter-Palestinian reconciliation is crucial if we are to move closer to a two-State solution. Malta urges Palestinian factions to deliver on commitments made in the 2022 Algiers Declaration, including the holding of democratic



and inclusive elections. The rights of women, including their full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership, must be central to these processes and discussions.

Malta underscores the critical need for all parties to engage in good faith dialogue. We encourage parties to continue discussions following-up on agreements made in Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh, and to establish confidence building measures and constructive implementation of the commitments made, including the need to cease conflict drivers and ensure the fiscal stability of the Palestinian economy. This is necessary to lay the groundwork for a much-needed peace plan.

Malta remains committed to the realisation of the two-State Solution, in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognised borders, consistent with international law and relevant UN resolutions.

I thank you.