



Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, 24 October 2023

Malta Statement delivered by The Hon Ian Borg
Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta

Thank you, Mr President. I also thank the Secretary-General, and today's briefers.

The situation in the Middle East has been precariously fragile and unsustainable for too long. Discussions in this Chamber often focussed on the violent escalations, unilateral measures, injustice, socio-economic inequality, human rights violations, dangerous rhetoric, hate speech, and other warning signs. It was evident this volatile situation was pushing the conflict to a precarious edge.

Our worst fears were realised on 7 October, when Hamas committed a despicable and deplorable terror attack against Israel, which we have condemned without reservation. The situation has now already resulted in the deaths of thousands, and affected thousands more.

Malta acknowledges Israel's right to self-defence, and its duty and responsibility to protect its people. At the same time, we also emphasise that such actions must be consistent with obligations under international humanitarian law, and in line with the principles of distinction and proportionality.



President

At the beginning of the current crisis, we had underlined the need for steps in the right direction. In this context, we welcome the news that four hostages have been released, and greatly appreciate the efforts by all involved to this end. We call on Hamas to release all remaining hostages safely and unconditionally, and without further delay.

We are also gravely concerned at the current humanitarian situation in Gaza. Thousands of Palestinians have been killed, many of whom are civilians, including women, and children. Scores more are likely still buried under the rubble of levelled neighbourhoods.

Malta condemns all attacks against civilians, UN, medical and humanitarian workers, religious places, as well as civilian infrastructure. We call for an independent investigation into the blast at Al Ahli Baptist Hospital on 18 October. We stress that whoever is responsible must be held accountable. International Humanitarian Law must be respected by all.

We are deeply concerned by the decision taken by Israel to cut off the supply of water, electricity, food, and fuel into Gaza. This action is resulting in dire humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. It will inevitably lead to a public health catastrophe, due to compounding effects of mass displacement, inadequate sanitation, and waterborne diseases.



Parties must adhere to their obligations to allow the safe, rapid unimpeded, and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing and to establish humanitarian corridors and safe zones. We commend efforts made by the UN, the United States and Egypt in this regard.

We must also note that this conflict has already had a disproportionate effect on women and children on both sides. Over 200 people, including women and children, are being held hostage by Hamas. Internally displaced women and girls in Gaza are at an elevated risk of gender-based violence, including sexual and psychological violence.

It is in view of these extraordinary levels of suffering, that Malta strongly reiterates its call for the establishment of an immediate humanitarian pause.

President

The legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people should not be confused with the terrorist group of Hamas. It is crucial that this distinction is made clear to all to avoid further inflammatory polarisation and potentials of regional escalation.

Neither can we lose sight of the West Bank. Since 7 October, killing, violence and forced displacement of Palestinians has seen a sharp increase, including through settler violence and hundreds of arrests.



We call on parties to de-escalate and exercise the utmost restraint. Avoiding further conflict fronts, particularly on the Israeli-Lebanese border and in the West Bank, is crucial for regional peace.

Parties with influence must take steps to achieve dialogue which promotes peace. In this vein, I would like to once again recall the importance of adequate measures to suppress the financing of terrorism. Ensuring that terrorist groups do not have access to financing is a basic condition for promoting peace.

In closing, President, Malta remains committed to a lasting and sustainable peace in the Middle East. A peace which is based on a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future Capital of two States, living side-by-side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

I reiterate our call for de-escalation, and ensuring the safe and immediate release of all hostages.

Ultimately, the only viable path towards peace remains clear: a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict where violent acts have no place.

I thank you.