



Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, 29 December 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt

Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you, President, and I also thank Assistant Secretary General Khairi, Mr Muasher, and Mr Epshtain for their remarks. They truly illustrate the precarious situation we continue to observe in the region.

The catastrophic humanitarian situation and continued state of hostilities in Gaza is untenable. It is leading to unprecedented levels of human suffering, with thousands of civilians being killed and thousands more injured and maimed.

The continued bombardment of Middle Gaza, including the air strikes on three refugee camps, is especially worrying. These attacks follow instructions from Israeli forces for residents from the south of Wadi Gaza to move to Middle Gaza. The resulting scenes, including strikes that hit residential buildings in Al-Maghazi refugee camp, are truly harrowing.



On several occasions, Malta has unreservedly condemned Hamas' acts of terror, including the heinous attacks of 7 October. Terror has no justification, and this Council must also be clear in rejecting it. We once again call for the release of all remaining hostages safely and unconditionally.

At the same time, Malta has also reiterated Israel's right to protect her citizens. However, we continue to stress that it is paramount that any such actions need to be taken with respect for international humanitarian law. The principles of international humanitarian law, including distinction, proportionality, and precaution, must be respected at all times. All parties are obliged to ensure that all measures to protect civilians are taken.

As highlighted by OCHA, most people in Gaza have been displaced on multiple occasions. The civilian population continues to suffer limited food supplies and lack basic survival items. 40 percent are at risk of famine. Despite this desperate situation, continued hostilities continue to impede the delivery of aid.



In these circumstances, the full implementation of all provisions of resolution 2712 and 2720, and the establishment of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, are the only ways to avoid further death and destruction.

Malta remains deeply concerned with the rapidly deteriorating situation in the West Bank, including the scale of recent Israeli military operations in the West Bank. This threatens to lead to even more violence. Malta urges Israel to exercise utmost restraint, including in the usage of live ammunition and explosive weapons, to abide by international human rights law, and to prioritise the protection of civilians.

In this context, we stress our concern with the recent OHCHR report which reports on the use of military tactics, disproportionate force, and imposition of movement restrictions in the West Bank. These measures impact broad segments of the Palestinian population. We echo the call of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for Israeli authorities to take clear and effective steps towards ceasing such practices.



We also remain deeply concerned about demolitions, the forceable transfer of Palestinian communities, and the resurgence of illegal settler encroachment, and violence. Settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. Attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian residents and properties are inexcusable and cannot be met with impunity.

The continued recurrence of these acts only threatens the viability of a two-State solution which remains the only path to a lasting and sustainable peace in the Middle East.

Provocations and increased tensions around the Holy Sites in Jerusalem is another factor that only serves to exacerbate tensions. The integrity of the Holy Sites and the legal and historic status quo must be upheld and fully respected at all times. Any act that undermines this is unacceptable.

President

The situation poses a serious threat to regional peace with international repercussions.



Continued, and escalatory, skirmishes along the Blue Line continue to raise tensions. We strongly call on all parties, including non-state actors in the region, to exercise restraint, including in their messaging, de-escalate and respect the norms of international law.

The deteriorating maritime security situation in the Red Sea is also of deep concern. Avoiding a regional conflagration is of utmost importance and must be avoided at all costs.

President

This violence continues to push us further away from a political horizon to the conflict. Malta reaffirms its unwavering commitment to 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 thank you.