



Security Council high-level open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, 23 January 2024

Malta Statement delivered by Her Excellency Ambassador Vanessa Frazier
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you, President. I also thank the Secretary-General for his valued insights.

Over one hundred days have passed since Hamas launched its brutal and deadly attack on innocent civilians in Israel, during which hundreds were taken hostage. Many Israelis are still living the nightmare of knowing that their loved ones continue to suffer in captivity.

It has also been over a hundred days of intolerable and perilous conditions for millions of civilians in Gaza, who continue to live under a relentless siege. Over 24,000 Palestinians have been killed and over 60,000 wounded during Israel's military campaign, two-thirds of whom are women and children. An entire generation of Palestinian children will be physically and psychologically marred by this war.



Malta has consistently condemned the Hamas terrorist attacks of 7 October and the continued barrage of rockets fired at Israeli population centres. We are gravely concerned by all reports of sexual violence and call for them to be investigated. We repeat that terror has no justification.

Malta will continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas.

However, the collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza equally has no justification.

Actions taken by Israel need to be in strict accordance with its obligations under international humanitarian law and its foundational principles, including distinction, proportionality and precaution. All parties are obliged to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected.



Yet in Gaza, nowhere and no one is safe. No UN facility. No Hospital. No school. No place of worship. Whether under a white flag or a blue one, civilians, doctors, and journalists face the horrors of this war; without the protections they are guaranteed under international law.

Recent reports of intensified bombing in southern Gaza, including around hospitals, where thousands are seeking refuge, are deeply disturbing.

The people of Gaza are living under a daunting spectre of manmade starvation, coupled with the looming threats of disease, malnutrition, and other health crises.

Urgent action is needed to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid into and within Gaza. Additional crossing points must be opened. Arbitrary bureaucratic impediments hindering effective humanitarian operations need to cease.



Furthermore, respect for the inviolability of UN premises, medical staff, facilities, and for humanitarian notification and deconfliction is essential. Too many staff from the UN and their implementing partners have already been killed and continue to work in treacherous conditions. We applaud their heroism.

The immediate implementation of Council resolutions 2712 and 2720 is thus crucial to address these concerns.

President

Malta remains convinced that only a humanitarian ceasefire can ensure that a sufficient and effective humanitarian response operation can be properly executed.

It would also permit conditions which are conducive for a return to dialogue and eventually, peace. Palestinians and Israelis equally deserve to live in peace, dignity and security.

This is all the more urgent since this conflict continues to foster turmoil across the Middle East.



We continue to witness a rapidly deteriorating situation in the West Bank. We are concerned at recent reports highlighting an increase in intensified armed exchanges, the destruction of basic infrastructure, imposed widespread movement restrictions, and mass detainment, extending across the occupied West Bank, including in refugee camps. Demolitions of property owned by Palestinians and their displacement in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City, are also to be condemned.

We further stress that illegal settlements are in violation of international law and that Israeli settler violence must be effectively addressed without impunity. Malta condemns the forced displacement or transfer of Palestinians from any of their lands or homes.

Looking to the broader region, we are alarmed at precarious skirmishes along the Israeli-Lebanese border and in the Red Sea. Malta condemns all violations on the Blue Line, including attacks against UNIFIL, and attacks by Houthis against commercial shipping in the Red Sea. We urgently call upon all parties, including non-state actors in these regions, to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, and uphold the norms of international law.



It is in times like these, when the threats of war loom large, that we must work together towards a more stable and peaceful future for 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 all the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

I thank you.