



Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, 22 August 2024

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt

Chargé d'affaires a.i. of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you, President, and I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Dr Baxter for their briefings.

It has been over ten months since the dreadful terror attack against Israel on 7 October, and in the wake of countless civilians killed in Gaza, the open wound that is this conflict only continues to fester.

These hostilities must stop. An immediate and permanent ceasefire must be agreed as soon as possible. It is critical in the face of man-made famine conditions and the threat of polio virus and other diseases. We fully support the Secretary-General's call for a '*polio-pause*' to tackle this crisis. We stress however that the UN cannot work to save lives through vaccines, only to have them destroyed again by bombs and bullets.



We support ongoing efforts by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar towards a framework agreement, consistent with Council resolution 2735. Malta strongly urges both parties to agree to the terms and implement the ceasefire to ensure the hostages are released and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is addressed.

This is imperative as the devastating humanitarian situation in Gaza deteriorates daily.

When speaking of the living nightmare that Gazan civilians experience day after day, it is truly disturbing that all major threats to the human condition can be used as descriptors: famine; disease; displacement; lawlessness; impunity; psychological trauma; and hopelessness.

Women and children are among the most exposed to danger in this conflict. The deliberate denial of healthcare and decimation of infrastructure, severely impacts pregnant women and new-born babies. Over 16,000 children have been killed so far. We cannot even begin to comprehend the long-term effects this conflict will have on surviving parents, children, and the future generation of Gaza.



Strict adherence to international humanitarian law is urgently needed. This has been severely lacking, despite it being an obligation of the conflict parties.

Member States also have the responsibility to strive to *'prevent and stop violations of international humanitarian law'*.

Malta urges the unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance across Gaza, including through the opening of all crossings, including border crossings.

We also call for effective protection, and proper operational facilitation for UN and humanitarian personnel, to ensure they can safely access the population. This also includes support to UNRWA, which is a necessary actor for any humanitarian response in Gaza. We have consistently asked this at every meeting for the past ten months.

The full, immediate, and effective implementation of all relevant Council resolutions and the orders of the International Court of Justice, remain an imperative.



Moreover, we are deeply concerned that the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has also become plagued by numerous human rights violations. The latest of these include the appalling alleged sexual torture of Palestinian detainees in Israeli administrative detention facilities. Thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, are being arbitrarily detained in these facilities. They must be released.

We stress that independent, international investigations into these circumstances need to urgently take place.

President

In its Advisory Opinion delivered on 19 July 2024, the ICJ concluded that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful.

It further concluded that Israel has an obligation to bring this occupation to an end, cease all new settlement activity and evacuate all existing settlers.



As such, Israel's recently announced plans for a new illegal settlement in the occupied West Bank is unacceptable. Such decisions contravene international law and must be retracted.

We also condemn last week's violent settler rampage in the Palestinian village of Jit, which resulted in the killing of one man, as well as inflammatory visits which violate the historic status quo of Jerusalem's Holy Sites. The West Bank is already on the precipice, and these actions only breed further instability. We also condemn the most recent terrorist attack in Tel Aviv.

Malta urges all regional parties to prioritise diplomacy, reduce tensions, and avoid any actions that could escalate the situation further, jeopardising any possibility of a ceasefire agreement. In this context, and in fear of an imminent regional escalation, we continue to reiterate our appeal for a swift easing in tensions.



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To conclude, it is through this path that we can hope to return to a political horizon, which is the only way to make credible progress towards the comprehensive realisation of the internationally agreed two-State Solution, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides. Malta remains steadfastly committed to this end.

I thank you.