



**Kingdom of Belgium**

Speech by H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Ambassador,  
Permanent Representative

At the United Nations Security Council

**Open Arria Meeting**

**"Israeli Settlements and Settlers:  
Core of the Occupation, Protection Crisis and Obstruction of Peace"**

New York, 9 May 2019

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Mr President,

I would also like to thank both the participants for their illuminating speeches.

First of all, I would like to speak about the escalation of violence this weekend. We strongly condemn the firing of rockets into Israeli territory and call on all parties to exercise restraint and respect the principle of proportionality in accordance with international humanitarian law. We express our solidarity with the populations affected by this upsurge in violence. Belgium reaffirms its support for the mediation efforts undertaken by the United Nations and Egypt. We reiterate that there will not be lasting peace in Gaza unless there is a comprehensive negotiated solution, including the full lifting of the blockade, the return of the Palestinian Authority and the consideration of Israel's legitimate security concerns.

Mr President,

Approximately 250 Israeli settlements and outposts have been established in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since 1967. This policy continues at a steady pace. It is accompanied by measures such as forced displacements, evictions, movement and access restrictions and demolitions, including of projects financed by Belgium. This policy targets areas of strategic importance for the establishment of a viable and contiguous State of Palestine, and may affect the status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites.

Mr President,

I would like to highlight three points:

(1) Firstly, Belgium strongly condemns the settlement activity policy and its related measures and demands compliance with Resolution 2334. Settlement activity is illegal under international law and constitutes an obstacle to a just and lasting peace. It **undermines the viability of a solution involving two States, living side by side, in peace and within secure and internationally recognised borders**. The only possible outcome is a negotiated solution based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, in line with agreed international parameters. Therefore, any credible initiative to relaunch a peace process must be accompanied by measures to halt settlement activity, reverse the current trend and allow Palestinians full and free access to their resources and rights.

2) Secondly, the settlement policy causes **increased tensions and violence** between Israeli settlers and Palestinians.

We call for a de-escalation of tensions and condemn any use of violence, whoever the perpetrators may be. The climate of impunity must end and the perpetrators of violence must be brought to justice. We call on the parties to respect international law and recall Israel's responsibility, as the occupying power, to ensure the protection of Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

3) Finally, the occupation has **negative financial, economic and social effects on Palestinians**. In this regard, we reiterate our deep concern about the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority. Israel's decision to partially suspend the transfer of the tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, followed by the Palestinian Authority's decision to no longer accept any transfer of tax revenues unless they are transferred in full, is likely to have detrimental socio-economic and security consequences.

Restrictions on the movement of goods and people impose considerable socio-economic costs on Palestinians. The lifting of these restrictions could help to revive the Palestinian economy and reduce social tensions, although only an end to the occupation and full Palestinian access to their resources can lay the foundations for a sustainable recovery of the Palestinian economy.

Mr President,

Now more than ever, it is time for the parties to resume the path of dialogue and act to build peace. We are convinced that this is in the best interests of Israel and the Palestinians. In this context, Belgium reiterates the key role of the Security Council as the guarantor of any global, fair and lasting solution, in line with its previous resolutions and in full respect of international law. Belgium will continue to work along these lines, within the Security Council and together with our Palestinian and Israeli friends.

Thank you.