

Kingdom of Belgium

Intervention of Mr. Philippe KRIDELKA, Ambassador, Permanent Representative

United Nations Security Council
The Situation in the Middle East (MEPP)

New York, 25 August 2020

Mr. President,

I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay MLADENOV for his briefing and I thank him and his team for their relentless efforts.

Mr. President,

We welcome the recent announcement on the normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and we acknowledge the constructive role played by the US in this regard. The announcement of the suspension of plans to formalize the annexation of parts of the Palestinian Occupied Territory certainly constitutes a step in the right direction. However, we urge Israel to abandon these plans definitively. As we have stated before, any annexation, irrespective of its size and denomination, would constitute a grave breach of international law, including the UN Charter. We will therefore not recognize any changes to the 1967 borders, other than those agreed upon by the parties. Annexation would undoubtedly have consequences for the security on the ground and in the wider region. But most importantly, annexation would seriously undermine the viability of a two-state solution and close the door for future negotiations.

The normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates will not only benefit both countries, it also constitutes an important building block for peace and stability in the wider region. There can be no peace in the Middle East without a permanent solution to the Palestinian question. We hope that the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates will create opportunities for Israeli's and Palestinians to re-engage. In this regard, we reiterate our call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

We remain committed to a negotiated and viable two-state solution built upon the internationally agreed parameters and international law. All parties should come to the negotiation table, without preconditions and resume meaningful negotiations. Belgium encourages all international and multilateral efforts aimed at a meaningful resumption of talks, provided that they are fully in line with international law and the internationally agreed parameters and that they equally take into account the legitimate aspirations of both sides. We fully support the efforts of the Middle East Quartet, of which the European Union is a member.

Mr. President,

In the absence of a perspective on such a just and lasting peace, the humanitarian, socio-economic and security situation on the ground continues to deteriorate.

We are deeply concerned about the recent violent incidents in Gaza and the West Bank. We condemn the terror attacks and violence from all sides. International human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the principles of necessity, distinction and proportionality in the use of force must be fully respected. We call for independent and thorough investigations into alleged violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Perpetrators of such acts must be held accountable.

Following the firing of rockets and the launching of incendiary balloons from Gaza into Israel, the Israeli authorities have halted the entry of most goods to Gaza, including fuel, and prevented access to the fishing area along Gaza's coast. We call on both sides to de-escalate tensions and exercise maximum restraint. We commend the efforts of the UN and Egypt in this regard.

These developments only add further to the hardship of the Palestinian people in Gaza. We call for the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Against the backdrop of COVID-19, unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza is more than ever needed. In this regard, I reiterate Belgium's unwavering support for UNRWA.

Mr. President,

to conclude, I would like to voice Belgium's concern regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and in particular on children. We call on all sides to immediately and unconditionally release all Palestinian children from detention and to put a moratorium on new admissions into detention facilities.

I thank you.