

Royaume de Belgique

Intervention of H.E. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve,
Permanent Representative

Briefing on the situation in the Middle East,

Including the Palestinian question

New York, 29th of April

Mr President,

Belgium supports the statement which will be made on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General for her briefing. I would like to welcome Ms Nada Majdalani and Mr Gidon Bromberg and thank them for their presentation. Belgium supports dialogue with civil society, and the invaluable contribution of women and young people in this context; it also stresses how much their work contributes to creating an environment conducive to peace and respect for human rights. The dynamism and plurality of civil society are part of an open and democratic society and it must be allowed to carry out its work without hindrance. We have some concerns about the hostile actions and policies against them.

Mr President,

The objective of the international community must remain the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian State that lives side by side with Israel, in peace and security. Developments on the ground are moving us further away from this two-State solution every day. Belgium remains convinced that there is no other option than a negotiated solution, based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as the future capital of these two States, in accordance with internationally agreed parameters. Any credible initiative to relaunch a peace process must be based on international law, put an end to colonisation and allow Palestinians full and free access to their resources and rights. A just, comprehensive and sustainable solution supported by the international community, and particularly by this Council, is in the interest of Israel, its security and the stability of the entire region.

Mr President,

With the objective and principles thus established, we must note that the settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continues unabated, accompanied by measures such as forced displacements, expulsions and demolitions; this policy seriously undermines the viability of the two-State solution. In accordance with Resolution 2334, we strongly condemn this policy, which is contrary to international law and only exacerbates tensions, as evidenced by the increase in violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. Any use of violence is unacceptable, regardless of the perpetrators, who must be prosecuted.

We are also concerned about the situation in Hebron. OCHA's April 2019 report on the subject paints a bleak picture. We recall the responsibility of the parties to respect international law, as well as Israel's responsibility, as the occupying force, to ensure the protection of Palestinians in Hebron and throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

Mr President,

With regard to the situation in Gaza, I would like to stress that all leaders must respect the fundamental right to peaceful protest. While recognising Israel's right to ensure its own security, we reiterate that Israel must respect the principles of proportionality and necessity in the use of force. We urge the Israeli authorities to conduct independent investigations into the alleged unlawful use of lethal force, so that the perpetrators are held accountable.

At the same time, it is unacceptable for demonstrations in Gaza to be hijacked by extremist elements. By establishing the International Independent Investigation Commission, the Human Rights Council has shown responsibility in examining the situation. The conclusions of the report are serious and substantial, in particular the fact that the Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that serious crimes under international law occurred during the Gaza border protests. We call on all parties to respect human rights and international humanitarian law and to ensure free access for humanitarian actors. UNRWA plays an indispensable role as a humanitarian actor and Belgium will continue to support its efforts on the ground.

Mr President,

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the fact that in accordance with the relevant resolutions of this Council, in particular Resolutions 242 and 497, we do not recognise Israel's sovereignty over the territories it has occupied since June 1967, including the Golan Heights, and we do not consider this land part of the territory of the State of Israel. We will not accept that the occupation of the Golan Heights should serve as a precedent to justify similar possible initiatives in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Thank you.