



ROYAUME DE BELGIQUE

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

Security Council

The situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian question

New York, 26 March 2019

Mr President,

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank the Special Coordinator, Mr Nickolay MLADENOV, for his briefing and for the work carried out by him and his team.

We welcome the publication of a written report, in accordance with the standard practice of this Council, based on note 507, and we expect this practice to continue.

Mr President,

The continuation of the policy of settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is a matter of great concern to us. The settlements, accompanied by forced displacements, evictions and demolitions, also targets highly symbolic sites, including the Old City of Hebron and Jerusalem, and areas of strategic importance for the prospect of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. In this regard, we remain fully attentive to developments in Khan al-Ahmar.

We are strongly opposed to the policy of settlement activity and its related measures. Settlement activity is illegal in the eyes of international law. It undermines the necessary trust for the resumption of dialogue, and jeopardises any chance of achieving a just and lasting peace, based on the co-existence of two states. The policy of settlement activity also leads to increased tensions and violence between Israeli settlers and the Palestinians. We condemn all recourse to violence, while calling for a de-escalation of tensions, and an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these acts of violence.

Mr President,

30 March 2019 marks the first anniversary of the Great March of Return. While recognising Israel's right to ensure its own security, we reiterate that Israel must respect the fundamental right to peaceful protest, and the principle of proportionality in the use of force. Lethal force must only be used as a last resort. At the same time, it is unacceptable for demonstrations in Gaza to be hijacked by extremist elements - they must remain strictly non-violent. We strongly condemn the firing of rockets into Israeli territory.

We also condemn the violence used by the security forces of Hamas against the demonstrators in Gaza, including journalists, staff of the Independent Human Rights Commission, and defenders of human rights. The violent repression of demonstrations is unacceptable, and must stop. Hamas is required to respect freedom of expression and the fundamental right to peaceful protest.

We call on all parties to respect international human rights and humanitarian law, and to ensure that humanitarian actors have unrestricted and unconditional access to medical treatment - including treatment that can only be provided outside the Gaza Strip. It is essential that the international community support the efforts of these humanitarian actors.

In this regard, we should acknowledge the indispensable role of the UNRWA, whose mandate and efforts on the ground Belgium continues to support.

Mr President,

Recent months have been marked by a series of unilateral decisions that call into question the Oslo Accords. The decision of Israel not to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron has resulted in an increase in violence there. Israel's decision to partially suspend the transfer of tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, followed by the Palestinian Authority's decision to no longer accept any tax revenues unless they are transferred in full, is likely to have negative economic and security consequences.

More than ever, all parties involved must refrain from unilateral acts that are contrary to the agreements entered into, and contrary to international law. In accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, and in particular resolutions 242 and 497, Belgium reiterates that the annexation of territories occupied by force is illegal, and that it does not recognise Israel's sovereignty over the territories it has occupied since June 1967, including the Golan Heights.

Mr President,

I would like to conclude by stressing that there is no other solution than the two-state solution, with borders based on the lines of 4 June 1967 and the city of Jerusalem as the future capital of these two states, in accordance with internationally agreed parameters. The goal must be an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel.

International law and the relevant resolutions of this Council must be the basis for any credible diplomatic initiative to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. The Security Council plays a key role as the guarantor of any comprehensive, just and lasting solution, in line with its previous resolutions

and in full respect of international law. Belgium will continue to work along these lines, in the Security Council and together with our Palestinian and Israeli friends.