

OFF-THE-CUFF

Secretary-General remarks to press encounter with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu

Jerusalem, 13 October 2014

Mr. Prime Minister,

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to see you again soon after our very constructive meeting in New York on the margins of the General Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister for welcoming me despite this very pleasant holiday season. I hope I am not [inaudible] during this holiday season.

On my way from the airport yesterday to my hotel, I saw so many Israeli people enjoying this holiday -- Sukkot holiday. And I congratulate them and wish you all the best.

As you remember, I was here in July most recently.

After a summer of immense suffering and destruction, I am back to strongly urge leaders and Member States to find the way to peace and contribute to the pressing issue of Gaza's reconstruction.

The conflict left unprecedented levels of damage and pain for thousands of civilians living in the Gaza Strip.

On the other side of the border, Israelis repeatedly lived with constant fear for their own lives and safety and security -- running for shelter at a moment's notice. I consistently condemned the rocket fire from Hamas and other armed groups, the tunnels and breaches of the ceasefire.

In the end, more than 2,100 Palestinians were killed together with 70 Israelis and one foreign national.

Today as we move toward a more sustainable ceasefire and peace, I welcome steps taken by the Israeli Government to ease movements and restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza.

The UN-brokered trilateral agreement on a temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism has opened the door for much needed reconstruction, taking fully into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. I thank the Prime Minister Netanyahu for his support for this mechanism.

I urge both sides to implement this mechanism in good faith.

Large scale reconstruction must start without delay.

But that is not enough to break the cycle.

If conditions in Gaza simply revert to where they were before this escalation, the clock will be reset for more instability, underdevelopment and conflict.

Economic revival – which requires the predictable exit and entry of goods and people -- can change the dynamics on the ground and ultimately enhance stability in Gaza, which in turn will improve Israel's security.

I am confident that we can work together so that this economic revival enhances, not harms, Israeli security.

Turning to a subject I am very sorry to have to raise yet again --- I am very concerned about the recent announcement of plans to advance settlements in East Jerusalem, which are in clear violation of international law.

This does not send the right signal and I urge the Government of Israel to reverse these activities.

As you mentioned this Holy Site in Jerusalem and as I also said this morning, I am deeply concerned by repeated provocations at the Holy Sites in Jerusalem. These only inflame tensions and must stop.

After this difficult summer for Palestinians and Israelis, both sides need to take steps to build trust and confidence

I am also well aware that the current regional turmoil continues to pose many challenges to Israel.

In view of recent incidents, we count on both sides to cooperate to reduce tension and prevent escalation along the Blue Line.

I also want to once again thank the Israeli government for its good cooperation with UNDOF.

Finally, let me say that as the rounds of hostilities indicate, the status quo is not tenable.

It is clear that the sides must quickly return to the negotiation table with the readiness to make the tough but necessary compromises.

This is the time for leadership Mr. Prime Minister – for the resumption of talks – for an end to polarization. There is not a moment to lose.

The outlines of an agreement are clear – the ultimate destination is known to all.

Unilateral action is no foundation for the future. The two-state solution is the only way to bring peace to both sides.

Toda. Thank you.