



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Israel

United Nations

Secretary-General's Press Encounter on the Middle East

I felt compelled today to voice my profound concerns about escalation between Israel and Hezbollah along the Blue Line.

Escalation in continued exchanges of fire.

Escalation in bellicose rhetoric from both sides as if an all-out war was imminent.

The risk for the conflict in the Middle East to widen is real -- and must be avoided.

One rash move – one miscalculation -- could trigger a catastrophe that goes far beyond the border, and frankly, beyond imagination.

Let's be clear: The people of the region and the people of the world cannot afford Lebanon to become another Gaza.

On both sides of the Blue Line, many lives have already been lost, tens of thousands of people have been displaced, and homes and livelihoods have been destroyed.

Bushfires sparked by explosions are further devastating communities and the environment.

Unexploded ordnance and remnants of war litter the landscape.

These pose additional threats to people in both Israel and Lebanon and to United Nations and humanitarian personnel.

The parties must urgently recommit to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 and immediately return to a cessation of hostilities.

Civilians must be protected. Children, journalists and medical workers should never be

targeted. And displaced communities must be able to return to their homes.

The world must say loudly and clearly: immediate de-escalation is not only possible – it is essential.

There is no military solution.

Further military escalation will only guarantee more suffering, more devastation to communities in Lebanon and Israel, and more potentially catastrophic consequences for the region. ...

Question: Today, as you call for de-escalation in the region, Israel has continued strikes in Gaza City, in the north, as well as in a displaced community near Rafah. ...

Secretary-General: Our position has been very clear since a long time ago. We need an immediate ceasefire, as we need an immediate release of hostages. Going on with a military operation that has a dramatic impact on civilians is not solving any problem.

Question: ... can you tell us what the United Nations is doing to try and overcome the lawlessness that is preventing aid from actually getting to the people in need, in Gaza ...

Secretary-General: ... the situation in Gaza became a situation of total lawlessness. Most of the trucks with humanitarian aid inside Gaza are now looted, because this is a war that is different from any other one. Usually, in a war there is one force that attacks, they occupy part of the territory of the force, then they guarantee security and management of the areas that they occupy. Here, we have attacks, we have bombings, then groups move to other places. Hamas returns to the original ones, and there is total chaos in Gaza and there is no authority in most of the territory. And Israel does not even allow the so-called Blue Police to escort our convoys because it is a local police linked to the local administration. So, lawlessness is total. We see extreme difficulty in distributing inside Gaza. So the problem is not only to bring things to Gaza, there must be a mechanism guaranteeing that there is a minimum of law and order that allows for that distribution to take place, and that is why a ceasefire is so necessary to get properly organized and implement a plan for that purpose. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2024-06-21/secretary-generals-press-encounter-the-middle-east>

UNSCR 1701, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1701\(2006\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1701(2006))

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)

Gaza Strip: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Special Snapshot: 1 May - 30 September 2024

https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Gaza_Strip_Acute_Food_Insecurity_MaySept2024_Special_Snapshot.pdf

UNRWA

Statement by Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner-General at the meeting of the Advisory Commission (ADCOM)

... In the last nine months, we have witnessed unprecedented failures of humanity in a territory marked by decades of violence.

Palestinians and Israelis have experienced terrible losses and suffered immensely.

Gaza has been decimated.

For more than two million Gazans, it is a living hell. A nightmare from which they cannot wake.

Catastrophic levels of hunger across the Gaza Strip are the result of human action.

Children are dying of malnutrition and dehydration, while food and clean water wait in trucks.

The breakdown of civil order has resulted in rampant looting and smuggling that impede the delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid.

Gazans are clinging to life, displaced repeatedly across a ravaged territory.

In the shadow of Gaza, another tragedy is unfolding in the West Bank.

More than 500 Palestinians have been killed since October.

Daily attacks by Israeli settlers, military incursions, and the destruction of homes and critical infrastructure are part of a well-oiled system of segregation and oppression.

On the Israel-Lebanon border, clashes are intensifying, threatening full-blown war.

Millions of Palestine Refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan are anxious and afraid.

Most have been living in camps for generations, often with limited rights and in grinding poverty, waiting for a political solution that will bring an end to their plight.

Today, they are witnessing the greatest Palestinian tragedy since the Nakba.

And, as they have done for 75 years, they are looking to UNRWA for protection and the fulfillment of basic human rights. ...

UNRWA has been a driver of human development for Palestine Refugees since its creation.

It has upheld the rights to education and health, while providing protection and assistance, in the absence of a full-fledged State.

By doing so, the Agency has been a force for stability across the region and a beacon of hope for Palestinians.

Today, however, UNRWA is staggering under the weight of relentless attacks.

In Gaza, the Agency has paid a terrible price.

193 UNRWA personnel have been killed.

More than 180 installations have been damaged or destroyed, killing at least 500 people seeking United Nations protection.

UNRWA personnel have been detained alongside other Gazans by the Israeli Security Forces and report mistreatment and torture.

Our premises have been used for military purposes by Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups.

Our convoys have come under attack despite coordinated movement with the Israeli authorities.

In the West Bank, UNRWA's operational space is shrinking.

Israeli security forces have deployed inside some UNRWA facilities during military operations in Palestinian refugee camps.

Arbitrary measures imposed by Israel severely restrict the presence and movement of staff.

Increasingly violent protests outside our premises in East Jerusalem recently culminated in arson attacks. ...

In 30 years of humanitarian work, I have never encountered such blatant disregard for the protected status of humanitarian workers, facilities and operations under international law. ...

Amid these extraordinary challenges, I received serious allegations that several UNRWA personnel in Gaza were involved in the abhorrent attacks against Israel on October 7.

If proved true, these allegations would constitute an appalling betrayal of Palestine Refugees and UNRWA's critical mandate.

I immediately terminated the appointments of the accused individuals.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) is seized of the matter, and the Secretary-General launched an independent review of how UNRWA upholds neutrality in its work.

The OIOS investigation is ongoing.

Of the 19 cases referred for investigation, one has been closed and the staff member has been reinstated.

Four cases are suspended, requiring additional evidence.

14 investigations are ongoing.

Separately, the independent review led by the former French Foreign Minister, Catherine Colonna, concluded that UNRWA has established policies, mechanisms, and procedures to ensure compliance with the principle of neutrality. ...

UNRWA is the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza.

The Agency will remain essential for a viable transition from ceasefire to “day after”.

It will play a key role in providing essential services – notably primary healthcare and education – to a shattered population.

Before the war, UNRWA met 70-80% of primary healthcare needs in Gaza.

Throughout the war, at least six out of 22 UNRWA health centers have operated continuously, in addition to nearly 100 mobile health teams.

Our extensive network and deep integration into the community allow us to rapidly introduce and scale-up services such as mental health and trauma care, which are crucial in the transitional phase.

Education is another priority in Gaza, where every second person is a child.

Palestinian communities value education highly, evidenced by a 98% literacy rate.

Education was the only investment from which they could not be dispossessed.

Gazan children have now lost almost three of the last four school years to the conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, more than 625,000 deeply traumatized children are living in the rubble without access to education – 300,000 of them were enrolled in nearly 290 UNRWA schools before the war. ...

UNRWA was created 75 years ago as a temporary agency.

A stop-gap measure, pending a political answer to the question of Palestine.

The Agency exists today because a political solution does not.

It exists in lieu of a State that can deliver critical public services. ...

The notion that the Agency can be dismantled without triggering the collapse of the humanitarian response in Gaza, and causing chaos in its fields of operation is naïve at best. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/statement-philippe-lazzarini-unrwa-commissioner-general-meeting>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Conveys Alarm at Violent Crackdown on Peaceful Demonstrators at Universities Calling for a Ceasefire in Gaza

... **Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education** ... [said] since last October, multiple mandate holders had repeatedly issued joint statements regarding the situation in Israel and Gaza. They unequivocally condemned targeted and deadly violence directed at civilians in Israel and violent indiscriminate attacks against Palestinian civilians in Gaza, including indiscriminate and disproportionate killing of children, women and men of all ages and the weaponisation of humanitarian assistance and essentials.

In April, they sounded the alarm on the systematic attacks on schools, universities, teachers, and students that suggested an intentional effort to comprehensively destroy the Palestinian education system, known as ‘scholasticide’. Demands for an immediate ceasefire, and for ending blockades and restrictions on the delivery of life-saving aid to civilians were not heeded, illustrating the lack of capacity, as human rights monitoring mechanisms, to protect people in the most vulnerable situations.

Ms. Shaheed said she had officially visited the United States this year. Her visit coincided with anti-war demonstrations at universities, including encampments on campus premises, calling for a ceasefire and for universities to review investments with Israel. Ms. Shaheed said her report on the visit would be presented next year but she had already conveyed her alarm at the violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrators. Student protests expressing solidarity with the suffering civilians in Gaza and denouncing Israeli military actions took place in many other countries, receiving similar treatment. What was alarming was the unequal treatment of those expressing themselves, with pro-Palestinian protesters, including Jewish students, being confronted with disproportionately harsh responses, allegedly for anti-Semitic views, with criticism of the State of Israel conflated with anti-Semitism. All States should prohibit the advocacy of any views that constituted incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination. The expression of a critical political opinion was not, and never would be, a legitimate ground to restrict freedom of expression. ...

Academic freedom was the freedom to access, disseminate and produce information; to think freely; to develop, express, apply and engage with a diversity of knowledge within or related to one's expertise or field of study, regardless of whether it took place inside the academic community or outside it. Academic freedom should not be politicised. Ensuring academic freedom required institutional autonomy; so academic, research and teaching institutions themselves must respect academic freedom. Academic freedom was intrinsic to the entitlement to receive and provide quality education and needed to be protected at all levels of education. This should be followed even on controversial issues. ...

In the ensuing discussion, some speakers, among other things, stressed the importance of academic freedom as an integral part of the right to education. States needed to recognise and uphold the right to academic freedom. ...

A number of speakers discussed the impact of the actions of Israel in occupied Palestinian territory on the right to education for Palestinian children. Systematic targeting of education infrastructure by Israel continued with impunity, they said. Around 90 per cent of schools and all universities had been destroyed. These actions dismantled the future of Palestinian society. A permanent ceasefire was needed in Gaza and perpetrators of violations of children's rights to education needed to be held accountable. Some speakers expressed concern about violent repression of university students in the United States who protested the conflict in Gaza.

One speaker said the report of the Special Rapporteur dangerously misrepresented the definition of anti-Semitism and distorted the realities faced by Jewish students and scholars since 7 October. In 2023, there was a 235 per cent rise in anti-Semitic incidents. Universities had become hotbeds of Jewish hate. Protests in universities were not calling for the protection of the rights of the Palestinian people, they were calling for the destruction of Israel. Academic freedom and freedom of speech could not be used as an excuse for anti-Semitism. ...

One speaker called on the Special Rapporteur to, in a future report, focus on the effects of Israel's actions on Palestinians' right to education.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/06/special-rapporteur-right-education-conveys-alarm-violent-crackdown-peaceful>

Academic Freedom: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Farida Shaheed (A/HRC/56/58)

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session56/advance-versions/A-HRC-56-58-AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx>

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Other Relevant Information

Henry Jackson Society

Religious Diversity in UK Parliamentary Constituencies

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:eu:9fd1e764-c6f5-4a50-8d02-9b2384fb8bbe>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Holocaust Memorial Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421>

Scottish Parliament

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

Review of the RSHE statutory guidance (closing date 11 July 2024)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/rshe-team/review-of-the-rshe-statutory-guidance/>

Petitioning against the Holocaust Memorial Bill (closing date 17 July 2024)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8481/petitioning-against-the-holocaust-memorial-bill/>

House of Lords: Guidance on the right to be heard

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55634/documents/4871>

House of Lords: Guidance on submitting your petition

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55632/documents/4869>

£20k registration threshold for charities in Northern Ireland (closing date 11 August 2024)

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-ps20k-registration-threshold-charities-northern-ireland>

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill (closing date 16 August 2024)

https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-bill/consult_view/

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill: Financial Memorandum (closing date 16 August 2024)

https://yourviews.parliament.scot/finance/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland/consult_view/

Gaps in Equality Legislation [Northern Ireland] (closing date 6 September 2024)

<https://consult.nia-yourassembly.org.uk/committee-for-the-executive-office/gaps-in-equality-legislation-inquiry>

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