US blocks UN Security Council statement on Gaza violence

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The United States on Saturday blocked a draft UN Security Council statement urging restraint and calling for an investigation of clashes on the Gaza-Israel border that left 16 dead, diplomats said.

Clashes erupted as tens of thousands of Gazans protested near the border on Friday, with Israeli forces using tear gas and live fire to force back smaller numbers of demonstrators who approached within a few hundred yards (meters) of the heavily fortified border fence.

In addition to the 16 Palestinians killed, more than 1,400 were wounded, 758 of them by live fire, with the remainder hurt by rubber bullets and tear gas inhalation, according to the Gazan health ministry.

Kuwait, which represents Arab countries on the council, presented the proposed statement, which called for an "independent and transparent investigation" of the violence.

The draft council statement also expressed "grave concern at the situation at the border."

And it reaffirmed "the right to peaceful protest" and expressed the council's "sorrow at the loss of innocent Palestinian lives."

The draft statement was circulated to the council on Friday, but on Saturday the United States raised objections and said it did not support its adoption, a Security Council diplomat told AFP.

The US mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request from AFP for comment.

The proposed statement also called "for respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including protection of civilians," according to the draft seen by AFP.

Council members "called upon all sides to exercise restraint and prevent a further escalation," the draft said.

The proposed statement stressed the need to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians based on a two-state solution.