Remarks at an Emergency UN Security Council Briefing on Gaza

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Thank you, Madam President, and thank you, Special Coordinator Mladenov, for your briefing.

The United States called this meeting today to talk about the dangerous and destructive activities of the terrorist organization Hamas in the Gaza Strip. You might think that the rest of the Security Council would join us in condemning a terrorist organization like Hamas. There shouldn’t be any debate about this. But of course, because this attack involves Israel, the standard is different.

The United States drafted a Security Council statement that would have condemned Hamas for launching rockets and endangering civilians. This should have been a no-brainer. You would think no one would want to side with Hamas when it comes to condemning rocket launches. But the statement was blocked.

We called for a meeting under the agenda item “threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.” But again, we were blocked. Apparently, some Council members did not think Hamas launching rockets qualified as terrorism. The United States begs to differ.

We all know that certain actions in and around Gaza receive an enormous amount of attention, both here in the Security Council, and throughout the international media. Strangely, other actions do not receive nearly the same attention that they deserve. One such action that calls out for attention and condemnation is what happened yesterday.

The facts are clear. On May 29th, Hamas and an allied militant group fired at least 70 – 7-0 – rockets and mortars from Gaza into Israel. This rocket attack was indiscriminate, aiming to cause as much civilian death and destruction as possible. There were several injuries, but thank goodness, there were no deaths. But the mere fact that one of the rockets landed on a kindergarten playground is all the proof we need of the intentions of the terrorists. The horrifying damage that could have been done is unthinkable. Unlike some situations we deal with here in the Security Council where guilty parties claim mistaken identity or lack of evidence of responsibility, this is clearly not the case.

Hamas openly claims responsibility for this attack. They do so proudly. Their only regret is that the attack did not kill anyone. The Security Council has always been quick to pounce on Israel, regardless of the facts and the circumstances. I am very interested in how my colleagues respond when the attacks are directly against Israel. Attacks that are a clear escalation of violence. Attacks that take no steps whatsoever to protect against civilian casualties. Attacks, in fact, whose entire desired outcome is to maximize civilian casualties.

There are a couple of major conclusions to be drawn from this disconnect.

First, this outrageous terrorist attack proves what we have consistently maintained. Namely, that Hamas’s stated purpose is the destruction of Israel. That is its purpose when it fires rockets into Israel. That is its purpose when it builds terror tunnels underneath Israeli territory. And that is its purpose when it orchestrates violent protests and riots at the boundary fence calling for a March for Return. All of these acts are indivisible parts of a single strategy. That strategy is to do as much damage as possible to Israel and to provoke a response in self-defense that will create international condemnation of Israeli actions.

Second, Hamas’s actions prove the falsehood of the idea that the people of Gaza require international protection. The people of Gaza do not need protection from an external source. The people of Gaza need protection from Hamas. It is the actions of Hamas that are putting Gazans in grave danger. Hamas’s indiscriminate attacks against Israel inevitably bring a response.

As I have asked my colleagues before, I will ask you again today. Who among us would accept 70 rockets launched into your country? We all know the answer to that. No one would.

The Palestinian people of Gaza are facing desperate humanitarian hardships. We want to help address their needs. We support Special Coordinator Mladenov’s engagement to restart initiatives that could improve conditions in Gaza.

But here again, we must look at the destructive actions of Hamas. In recent weeks, Hamas militants have repeatedly assaulted the Kerem Shalom border crossing – the biggest lifeline of basic humanitarian goods into Gaza.

In its attacks yesterday, Hamas rockets damaged three power lines, knocking out electric power to tens of thousands of Palestinians. These monstrous actions demonstrate complete disregard for the people of Gaza. Apparently it is not enough for Hamas to incite military responses to its acts of terrorism. Hamas also feels compelled to increase the suffering of the people of Gaza.

We note reports today that Hamas has unilaterally declared a ceasefire. We hope that that ceasefire holds and that there is no more rocket attacks. But the fact that Hamas can even declare a ceasefire is further confirmation of Hamas’s responsibility for these attacks in the first place. When we consider the situation in Gaza, this is what the Security Council should address.

It is outrageous for the Security Council to fail to condemn Hamas rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, while the Human Rights Council approves sending a team to investigate Israeli actions taken in self-defense.

I urge the members of the Security Council to exercise at least as much scrutiny of the actions of the Hamas terrorist group as it does to Israel’s legitimate right of self-defense. To allow Hamas to continue to get away with its terrorist acts, and to somehow expect Israel to sit on its hands when it is attacked, is the height of hypocrisy. To continue to condemn Israel without even acknowledging what is actually coming from the leaders of Gaza makes me question who actually cares about the welfare of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people deserve a better life. That can only happen if we acknowledge and reject the terrorist actions of Hamas and if we encourage more responsible Palestinian leadership. All responsible parties should be encouraging both sides to come to the negotiating table for the well-being of the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Thank you.