

# **Remarks by Ambassador Rosemary A. DiCarlo, Acting U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At a Security Council Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, July 23, 2013**

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Thank you, Special Coordinator Serry, for your briefing. I will begin with Middle East peace before turning to Syria and Lebanon.

The United States is deeply committed to a just and lasting peace with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security. This is why Secretary of State Kerry has made repeated visits to the region and focused so heavily on this effort. Last week, after his sixth trip to the region as Secretary, he was able to announce that the Parties had reached an agreement that establishes a basis for resuming direct final status negotiations.

He also stressed that the agreement was in the process of being formalized and that, in the meantime, none of the parties would be making public comments about the negotiations so as to improve the likelihood that the talks could indeed succeed.

As Secretary Kerry noted, everyone is aware that this process will not be easy. And no one believes that the longstanding differences between the parties can be resolved overnight or just wiped away. We know that the challenges require some very tough choices in the days ahead. Today, however, we are hopeful, because the representatives of two proud people have decided that the difficult road ahead is worth traveling and that the daunting challenges that we face are worth tackling. So they have courageously recognized that in order for Israelis and Palestinians to live

together side by side in peace and security, they must begin by sitting at the table together in direct talks.

It is important to note that this diplomatic effort would not have been possible without strong international support. The Arab Peace Initiative Follow-Up Committee, the Quartet envoys, and many others played a vital role in supporting the resumption of negotiations. The Secretary General, European partners and others around the world also weighed in with strong statements of support.

We should now continue to urge all sides to avoid taking unilateral actions, including steps at the United Nations. Our shared objective at this critical moment must be on building the trust and confidence necessary for a lasting peace. In this regard, the United States' position remains that UNGA resolution 67/19 did not establish that "Palestine" is a state. The United States is committed to helping bring about a viable Palestinian state through bilateral negotiations with their Israeli counterparts. This is the only real path to genuine statehood for the Palestinian people, as repeatedly affirmed by both sides and endorsed by the international community.

In the end, those who are most responsible for this process are the parties themselves. We applaud the courageous leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu in taking this step forward. As the parties work through the complicated issues they face, we should encourage them with all possible support.

Turning to Syria, the United States continues to believe that the only sustainable outcome to the conflict is through a political solution based on the Geneva Action Group Communiqué, which clearly calls for a transitional governing body with full executive powers, chosen by mutual consent. We continue to work toward this end. In this regard, we welcome the election of Syrian Opposition Coalition President Ahmed Assi al-Jarba and look forward to working with him. A united opposition that represents all Syrians is essential to achieve a negotiated political solution that will provide dignity, freedom, and hope to the Syrian people.

Despite professed support for negotiations, the Assad regime is in fact working to thwart any possibility of a peaceful solution. In collusion with Iranian and Hezbollah-backed fighters and advisers, the Assad regime has waged war against the Syrian people. Further, the United States assesses the

regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition, multiple times in the last year, in violation of international norms.

We again call upon the Assad regime to grant the United Nations team led by Dr. Sellstrom free and unfettered access to investigate any and all credible allegations of the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria. We urge all members of this Council to use their influence with the regime to reinforce this point and take other appropriate steps to support the investigation initiated by Secretary-General Ban.

We also remain deeply concerned by the regime's ongoing campaign against the besieged city of Homs, aided by Hezbollah and Iranian-backed paramilitaries. Residents of the Old City of Homs have received little humanitarian aid for the past year, a result of heavy fighting and the Syrian Government's refusal to support the delivery of such aid.

We reiterate that there is no justification for the Assad regime preventing humanitarian access to Homs and call on it to allow humanitarian organizations safe access to evacuate the wounded and provide medical treatment. And we reaffirm that those responsible for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be held accountable.

The impact of the Syrian conflict has created immense challenges for Syria's neighbors. We strongly commend Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan for their steadfast support of Syrian refugees and urge all neighboring countries to keep their borders open to vulnerable people fleeing for their lives. Refugees and host countries alike need our urgent and sustained financial support.

Finally, we remain gravely concerned by the violent clashes and bombings in Lebanon, including in Sidon, Tripoli, and Beirut. We condemn in the strongest terms the attacks by militants against the Lebanese Armed Forces that have killed soldiers and civilians. The United States again reiterates our full support of Lebanon's policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis and commitment to supporting a stable, sovereign, and independent Lebanon. We call on all parties in Lebanon to abide by the disassociation policy and to act with restraint to ensure Lebanon's stability and security.

We welcome the important step the European Union took yesterday in agreeing to designate the military wing of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

With this action, the EU is sending a strong message to Hezbollah that it cannot operate with impunity and that there are consequences for its actions, including last year's deadly attack in Burgas, Bulgaria – which this Council rightfully condemned – and for plotting a similar attack in Cyprus. We call on other governments to follow the EU's lead and to take steps to begin reining in Hezbollah's terrorist and criminal activities.

Thank you.