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Briefing of the Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos to the
Security Council
On the Situation in the Gaza Strip

31 July, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to brief on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Mr. President,

The current crisis in Gaza takes place against the backdrop of decades of instability, poverty and vulnerability resulting from repeated outbreaks of hostilities and the ongoing blockade on land, air and sea.

The blockade leaves only two crossings for limited pedestrian movement and one crossing for the movement of goods. As a result, over 80 per cent of Gaza's population of 1.8 million – more than half of them children under the age of 18 - relied on humanitarian aid

before the outbreak of hostilities. Various restrictions apply on the use of land within the Gaza strip and 85 per cent of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible. Around 57 per cent of Gazans are estimated to be food insecure and unemployment remains high at 43 per cent. The economy is moribund.

This volatile situation has been exacerbated by twenty four days of conflict. More than 1,300 Palestinians have been killed and 6,000 injured. Over 80 percent of those killed are civilians; 251 children. Israel has faced rocket fire. 59 people have been killed, 3 civilians and 56 soldiers. Dozens injured.

Up to 440,000 people in the Gaza Strip are now displaced, almost 24 percent of the population. And over 240,000 are being hosted in UNRWA schools, while others are seeking refuge wherever they can; in government buildings, hospital grounds or with families and friends. People flee to areas they believe are safe from attack. But these areas are becoming harder to find. Gaza is just 45 kilometers long and 6 to 14 kilometers wide and the Israeli military

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have advised that 44% of Gaza is a buffer zone. With the blockade in place most people are unable to leave Gaza even to get urgent medical attention.

So they come to United Nations facilities for protection when their homes and neighbourhoods came under fire. More than 240,000 people. But over 103 UN facilities have come under attack including an UNWRA school hosting over 3,300 displaced yesterday. 19 people were killed and over a hundred injured. The United Nations has lost seven staff and other humanitarian workers have been killed since the outbreak of hostilities. The reality of Gaza today is that no place is safe.

Mr. President,

The Secretary General and other senior UN officials have condemned this and other attacks in the strongest possible terms. The parties to the conflict have an obligation – an absolute obligation – to protect civilians from direct or indiscriminate attacks. Under

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international law, United Nations operations, personnel and premises, must remain inviolable, and parties to the conflict should protect humanitarian workers. There can be no justification for failing to do so.

Mr. President,

The ongoing violence has led to a widespread destruction of homes, public services and infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip.

More than 9,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged according to preliminary reports. More than 130 schools and other educational facilities have also sustained damage. Two of the three main UN compounds, including OCHA's office in Gaza, have also been damaged.

Medical facilities have not been spared. 24 medical facilities have been damaged or destroyed, some hit multiple times. This includes Al-Aqsa hospital, which was hit on 21 July, causing

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significant damage to the top two floors of the hospital and killing 4 people. On 29th of July, Shifa hospital – Gaza’s main hospital which is also sheltering thousands of displaced people was also damaged.

In addition to schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, Gaza’s only power plant was struck on Tuesday, destroying the fuel tanks. Parts of Gaza will remain without any electricity while others will only receive 2 hours of electricity a day. Repairs are expected to take months to complete under the best of circumstances. The immediate, medium and longer-term impact on the functioning of water, sanitation and health-care facilities, as well as on food production cannot be overstated.

Water and sewage systems are also severely damaged and I am deeply concerned about possible contamination of water systems. Hundreds of thousands of people are without access to regular water. And the ongoing violence is preventing urgent repairs to systems. If the current situation persists, the number of people without water will significantly increase.

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Mr. President,

The United Nations and our partners on the ground are working to meet increasing humanitarian needs. UNRWA is delivering water and food to shelters in addition to its regular programmes. WFP is providing food to people sheltering at UNRWA and other shelters, as well as to patients and hospital staff. WHO is facilitating the transfer of medical supplies to hospitals including fluids and surgical kits, and is coordinating requests from NGO hospitals for medical supplies, fuel and other supplies. UNICEF is delivering paediatric drugs to hospitals and health facilities, is providing psychological support for children and families and is working to restore access to water and sanitation.

But, the relief effort is stretched. Ongoing fighting and insecurity is hampering our ability to move around and has made sustained delivery of assistance to people in need, difficult.

Until a longer-term ceasefire is agreed, we need more humanitarian pauses to enable us to reach those in need. Pauses must be daily, predictable, and adequate in length so that humanitarian staff can dispatch relief to those in need, rescue the injured, recover the dead and allow civilians some reprieve so that they can restock and resupply their homes.

We urgently need the Government of Israel, Hamas and other militant groups to comply with their international legal obligations, including international humanitarian and human rights law. Each party must be held accountable to international standards; not the standards of the other party. We have all watched in horror the desperation of children, of civilians as they have come under attack. With no safe place to go. Under international humanitarian law, the Government of Israel, Hamas and other militant groups must distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects and between combatants and civilians. They must also avoid harming civilians or civilian objects, and protect them from the effects of military operations.

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As I have said to this Council before and in different circumstances, even war has rules.

Funding is also urgently required. The UN family has appealed for additional funds and I ask Member States to respond quickly and generously to these appeals. We cannot provide adequate assistance without an urgent injection of funds.

Mr. President,

We need the violence to stop and the root causes of the conflict to be addressed. The people of Gaza want to live in safety, security, and dignity. The people of Israel want the same thing. I hope the international community can help them to achieve it.

Thank you.