

Op-Ed by United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon

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A time for justice, not revenge

UN Secretary-General: We need a bold, visionary Israeli and Palestinian leadership to break a deadlock that means more death, for innocent civilians and for a negotiated two-state solution.

This week, leaders and experts from Israel, the region and around the world are meeting in Tel Aviv to discuss how to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The backdrop for the Haaretz peace conference is one of the most challenging and volatile I have seen in my time as United Nations Secretary-General.

The despicable murders of four teenagers — three Israeli students and a Palestinian boy — have once again drawn the world's attention to this troubled region. My deepest sympathy goes to the families of Eyal, Gilad, Naftali and Mohammed. I have strongly condemned these callous acts, which serve only those who pursue an agenda of hatred, dehumanization and perpetual conflict. We must not let them prevail.

Tensions are running very high in the West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza and the south of Israel. Rockets fired from the Gaza Strip have threatened the population of Sderot; the Israeli response has been heavy. The United Nations position is consistent and clear: We unequivocally condemn rocket fire deliberately targeting civilian areas.

The situation in Gaza is growing ever more dire as a result of critical shortages of water and energy, weak governance and Israeli access restrictions. The population of Gaza deserves better. We must urgently prevent socioeconomic pressures and resumed hostilities from igniting a major conflagration in Gaza. Therefore, in Gaza as elsewhere, I call on all sides to exercise restraint and avoid further escalation.

I have urged the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to act responsibly, curb incitement and continue the crucial security coordination in the West Bank. Israeli security operations should not use disproportionate force, which could exacerbate tensions. The illegal acts of building and expanding settlements are not the right signal.

I know that Israeli civil society has again proven its vibrancy in speaking out against incitement and those who seek to answer violence with violence. It is justice we now need, not revenge.

I have been particularly worried about developments since the suspension of peace negotiations in late April. The absence of a political solution is having severe consequences. It is becoming increasingly difficult to contain the situation on the

ground. Too many are losing hope that the aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians can be realized – for an end to the occupation that began in 1967; for Israel to live within secure and recognized borders; and for an independent State of Palestine living alongside Israel in peace and security.

There can be no peace that does not address Israel's legitimate security needs. This must be mutually negotiated. Unilateral action or perpetuation of the status quo may appear tempting in the short term, but they will not provide lasting security to Israel or durable development for Palestinians. The only viable answer is a two-state solution.

It is imperative that both sides urgently resume meaningful negotiations and restore a political horizon to avert further escalation. More deadlock will only mean more death – for innocent civilians and indeed ultimately for a negotiated two-state solution.

Peace requires the support of the people from both sides, and bold and visionary Israeli and Palestinian leadership that does not shy from difficult decisions. The United Nations and the entire international community stand ready to support the parties in a renewed serious pursuit of a peace agreement. My representative, Special Coordinator Robert Serry, is resolved to continue working towards this end.

During my tenure, I have emphasized that Israel should be treated no differently to any of the other 192 UN member states, with the same rights and responsibilities. I want to see Israel fully assume its rightful place in the region and the international community, and that is why I urge it to do more to defuse the current crisis and not relent in its pursuit of a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

One day, in the not too distant future I hope to see Israel sitting together in the United Nations with Palestine as a full Member State, both working together on the central issues of peace and security, human rights and development in the region and around the world.