

UN Security Council holds emergency meeting, calls for ceasefire in Gaza

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USPA News - The United Nations Security Council on Monday called for an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire in the war-torn Gaza Strip, where more than 1,000 people have been killed since the start of an Israeli offensive and where humanitarian assistance is gravely needed. The 15-member Security Council expressed strong support for calls for a truce by international partners and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, urging all parties involved to "accept and fully implement the humanitarian ceasefire into the Eid period and beyond."

The Council also praised efforts by Ban and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry towards a ceasefire. "The Security Council expresses strong support for the call by international partners and the Secretary-General of the United Nations for an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire, allowing for the delivery of urgently needed assistance," the Council said in a statement at the conclusion of a midnight emergency meeting. Following a largely observed 12-hour humanitarian ceasefire on Saturday, Ban has called on all those involved in the conflict to extend the suspension of the fighting for an additional extendable period of 24 hours to permit necessary humanitarian efforts, including relief operations. "The temporary weekend pause in fighting brought a brief respite to war-weary civilians. It also revealed how much the massive Israeli assault has devastated the lives of the people of Gaza," the secretary-general said in a press conference in New York on Monday. "We saw scenes of indiscriminate destruction. Some described it as a 'man-made hurricane.'" The Security Council welcomed the efforts of international partners and the international assembly to support the ceasefire agreed in Paris on Saturday. Furthermore, the statement urged all worried regional and international contingents to "vigorously support" efforts to synthesize a lasting agreement between the parties. "The Security Council calls for full respect of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilian population, and reiterates the need to take appropriate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians and their protection," the statement said. "The Security Council emphasizes that civilian and humanitarian facilities, including those of the UN, must be respected and protected, and called on all parties to act consistently with this principle." At least 1,035 people have been killed and more than 6,000 others have been injured in Gaza, which is home to 1.8 million people, since Israel launched its military offensive earlier this month. More than 170,000 people have fled to UN-run facilities after being displaced from their homes, but several UN facilities have also been targeted. Ban emphasized the responsibility of both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to address the primary causes of the conflict in addition to halting ongoing violence. "This is the only way finally to break the seemingly endless cycle of violence and suffering," his spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said. The Council exhorted the parties involved and the international community as a whole to "achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders," as imagined in a Security Council resolution passed in 2008. But speaking with Ban, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday's statement released by the UN Security Council "does not address Israel's security needs, including the demilitarization of the Gaza Strip." He said that the statement does not refer to attacks against Israeli civilians, Hamas' alleged utilization of civilians as "human shields," or Hamas' alleged utilization of UN facilities to attack Israeli citizens. "Instead of the funds of the international community serving the construction of terrorist tunnels for perpetrating large-scale attacks against Israeli civilians, the international community needs to act toward the demilitarization of Gaza," Netanyahu said, according to his office. Before the UN Security Council's emergency meeting, U.S. President Barack Obama on Sunday also spoke with Netanyahu concerning the situation in Gaza. The president recapitulated the United States' growing concern about the increasing number of Palestinian and Israeli civilian deaths, as well as the regressing humanitarian state in Gaza, the White House said. Amplifying Secretary Kerry's efforts, President Obama emphasized the necessity of instituting an "immediate, unconditional humanitarian ceasefire that ends hostilities now and leads to a permanent cessation of hostilities" based on the November 2012 ceasefire agreement, the White House said. He also stressed the U.S. belief that any enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must include "the disarmament of terrorist groups and the demilitarization of Gaza."

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