

Special session of the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in the Occupied
Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, on Wednesday, 23 July 2014

Statement by Mr. Thordur Sigtryggsson

Mr President

Yet again we find ourselves discussing the situation in the OPT, the focus today being on Gaza. And yet again, we need to focus on Palestinian civilians, innocent women and children, who suffer most. More than 600 lives have already been lost in this latest round of bloodshed.

We strongly condemn the violations of international humanitarian law by both sides. We call on Israel, as the occupying power, to cease all military operations in Gaza without delay and to comply strictly with its obligations under international law. As the occupying power, Israel bears great responsibility for protecting civilians in the Occupied Territories. The IDF's air and ground assault raises serious concerns about respect for the principle of distinction, proportionality and precaution under international law.

We also condemn the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel by Hamas and other militant groups. The targeting and terrorising of civilians is a clear violation of international law and should be denounced as such. The attacks on Israel must stop without delay.

Mr President

There is an urgent need for a ceasefire. We commend the Secretary General for going to the region. We strongly encourage him to continue being personally engaged and make full use of his good offices to find a durable solution to the conflict.

We also applaud the heroic efforts of relief bodies such as UNICEF and UNRWA, which continue to provide life-saving services to the Palestinians of Gaza under difficult circumstances and chronic financial shortfalls. My Government recently pledged an additional 100.000 USD to support their work.

Mr President

The civilian populations of both Israel and Gaza have experienced too much suffering for far too long in a climate of impunity. Iceland supports calls for an impartial investigation into the violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by both sides. We call on both parties to fully cooperate with such an investigation and allow full access. This Council must send a clear message that it will not allow further violations of international humanitarian law to go unreported and unpunished.

Mr President

The on-going conflict, as well as the occupation, represents a failure by the international community to bring about the change the Palestinian and Israeli people deserve. The Security Council needs to become actively engaged to ensure the protection of innocent civilians; to lead the way towards the end of the occupation and peaceful settlement. The alternative is more of the same – and that is not acceptable.

Thank you Mr President.