

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
DEPUTY EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, KYUNG-WHA KANG**

**STATEMENT TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION ON GAZA**

Geneva, 23 July 2014

As delivered

Mr. President and distinguished members of the Human Rights Council, thank you very much for convening this special session on the situation in Gaza.

You have heard High Commissioner Pillay's detailed briefing on the human rights and international humanitarian law elements of the conflict in Gaza and Israel. On behalf of Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos, my briefing will focus on the dire and deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the rapidly growing needs resulting from the escalating violence.

Mr. President, since 7 July, over 600 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip and another 3,504 injured following the launch of the Israeli military operation 'Protective Edge' in which over 2,900 targets in Palestine were struck. Twenty-eight Israelis – including two civilians – have been killed in fighting with Palestinian militants who have also reportedly fired more than 2,000 rockets and mortars towards Israel.

In Gaza, 443, or 74 per cent of the killed are civilians. One third of civilians killed so far are children. One child has been killed each hour in Gaza over the past two days. Each of these children had a name and a future and a life that was cut horribly short.

Houses have been bombed with people in them, burying entire families under rubble. For example, on 21 July, an Israeli airstrike hit a residential tower in southern Gaza City, killing ten members of the Al Qassas family, all civilians, including six children. Later that same day another Israeli air strike hit a house in central Gaza City, which killed another ten, including three children.

Half of the population of the Gaza neighbourhood of Shujaiya fled their homes amidst heavy Israeli military bombardment this past weekend. At least 120 people were reportedly killed and many further missing – believed to be buried under the rubble in inaccessible areas. Hundreds more are wounded. Of the dead, 26 were children and 15 women.

The absence of safety has amplified the terror and trauma faced by civilians. Families are taking the heart-wrenching decision to split to different locations – mother and son to one; father and daughter to another – hoping to maximise the chance one part of the family survives. The fear, despair and hopelessness of the parents having to make such a decision is beyond imagination.

Mr. President, the scope of displacement is immense. Nearly 118,000 are seeking shelter in 80 UNRWA facilities. This is more than double those sheltered by UNRWA during the three-week long Israeli Operation Cast Lead in 2008/2009. Elsewhere in Gaza, tens of thousands of people, reportedly, have also sought refuge wherever they can, including in government schools and buildings, open spaces, hospital grounds and unfinished buildings. Others have been taken in by relatives and neighbours. Hundreds more have sought refuge in the compound of Shifa Hospital, the main medical facility in the Gaza Strip, adding to the burden of overwhelmed doctors and medical staff. As the ground operations continue these figures are expected to grow.

Shelters are overwhelmed and overcrowded. This, coupled with the lack of access of humanitarian staff and the delivery of aid, has caused further hardship to the displaced. Eight UNRWA schools in the north have not been reached for two consecutive days due to fighting. Water supply has been particularly challenging, with people receiving as little as three litres per day; just enough to survive but not sufficient for basic hygiene and sanitation.

Mr. President, in the past few days Israeli forces have delivered additional warnings to large population centres in the middle and southern areas of Gaza, warning them to move to safer locations. However, civilians in Gaza have no safe place to go as 44 per cent of the land has been declared a ‘no-go zone’ by the Israeli army.

Even UN facilities and hospitals are not immune from destruction. On Monday, an UNRWA school in Maghazi that served as a shelter for 300 people was hit. Yesterday, when a team visited the site to survey the damage, the school was again shelled, seriously endangering the lives of UN humanitarian workers and displaced civilians.

At least 18 medical facilities, including 5 UNRWA health clinics, have been hit by airstrikes and shelling since the fighting began. An Israeli airstrike on the Al Aqsa Hospital on Monday killed three people and injured over 40. Hospitals are already overwhelmed by the rapid influx of injured and the severity of wounds. They are short staffed and lack medicine, equipment, clean water and power. Twenty-six Palestinian Red Crescent workers have been injured.

Mr. President, every seven-year-old girl and boy in the Gaza Strip today has lived their entire life under siege. This is their third major conflict and humanitarian catastrophe compounding the humanitarian crisis caused by the seven years of blockade.

The blockade has destroyed Gaza's economy, with high unemployment rates and growing dependence on international assistance. Food insecurity remains a grave concern with the UN feeding 67 per cent of the population.

The already poor basic infrastructure has also been severely affected by this round of conflict. Today, 1.2 million people in Gaza have had water and sanitation services cut or severely disrupted. Electricity is down to just four hours a day. Initial reports indicate that the Gaza Power Plant has been shut down following several strikes yesterday. This will further reduce what little electricity is available.

Mr. President, United Nations organisations and NGO partners are leading the humanitarian effort in the Gaza Strip. My colleague from UNRWA will update you on the extraordinary efforts of its thousands of staff on the ground in Gaza. In addition, WFP continues to deliver food to people in shelters, support logistics, and is working with UNRWA on humanitarian airlifts from Dubai. UNICEF and partners are procuring essential paediatric drugs for hospitals and health facilities and child protection teams are helping children and their caregivers cope with the psychological distress. WHO is urgently facilitating the transfer of medical supplies to hospitals including fluids and surgical kits.

But international support for these efforts is urgently needed. UNRWA has already appealed for US\$115 million and humanitarian agencies will be issuing a full Flash Appeal in the coming days. I urge your Governments to mobilise funding urgently to support our efforts.

Mr. President, the fighting must stop. A lasting ceasefire is needed for the people of Gaza and Israel. To truly break this devastating cycle of violence, as the Secretary-General has said, the root causes of the conflict must be addressed.

While this is being negotiated, we urgently need humanitarian cease-fires so that aid workers can get supplies into areas where people are desperate for help. Humanitarians and service providers must be able to conduct search and rescue to save anyone still alive under rubble, deliver food and water, repair essential infrastructure such as water, sewage and electricity, rescue the injured, and perform the grisly task of retrieving the dead. These pauses are also critical to allow civilians to seek safer shelter and to allow people to restock on basic supplies of food and water.

Much more must also be done to protect civilians. The expansion of hostilities into built up areas and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is deeply concerning. We know from experience that the use of such weapons gives rise to a predictable pattern of death, injury, displacement and damage or destruction of essential infrastructure.

Attacks on medical facilities and staff must stop. Such action is completely unacceptable and is a flagrant violation of international law. The neutrality and inviolability of UN premises must also be respected. The use of UNRWA schools for storing rockets by armed groups in Gaza is an unacceptable violation of international humanitarian law.

Mr. President, the seven-year-old children in Gaza deserve to know more than war and siege, more than helplessness and the entrapment that surround them. But this will not happen unless the war stops for good, the blockade is lifted and the international community and the parties to the conflict live up to their obligations.