



**Statement**

**by**

**H.E. Dr. Nawaf Salam  
Permanent Representative of Lebanon  
to the United Nations**

**at the  
Security Council open debate**

**The Situation in the Middle East,  
including the Palestinian question**

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*Check Against Delivery*

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Mr. President,

Since the beginning of 2016, according to official UN figures – let me underline, “official UN figures”, not figures drawn from any Palestinian or Arab source – the Israeli authorities have demolished 539 “structures” in the occupied Palestinian territory's Area C, compared to a total of 453 for all of 2015.

Similarly, since the beginning of this year 805 Palestinians have been displaced as a result of the demolitions of their homes, compared to a total of 580 for all of 2015. In fact, UN OCHA figures show that from 50 demolitions a month in 2012-2015, the average has risen to 165 a month since January 2016, with 235 demolitions in February alone.

To put these figures in context, let me also recall that since September 2000, Israel has been responsible for the killing of over 9,300 Palestinian civilians, including 2,100 children, as well as for the injury of over 87,000. Moreover, since 1967, Israel has been responsible for the demolition of 28,000 Palestinian homes.

Mr. President,

These facts are a clear reminder that Israel, the occupying power, has not only failed to meet its primary responsibility, under the Fourth Geneva Convention, to protect the Palestinian Civilians, but has on the contrary been pursuing a deliberate and continuous policy of strangulation against the Palestinian civilians in total disrespect for their lives and basic rights with the aim to perpetuate and consolidate its illegal occupation of their territory.

After almost five decades of daily violations of their basic fundamental rights, including countless arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, torture cases etc....

And after almost five decades of confiscation of their private property, demolition of their homes, and forcible displacement,

The least that the Palestinians of the occupied territories, in both the West Bank and Gaza, can expect from this Council, which is entrusted under the UN charter with the maintenance of peace and security is that, pending succeeding to put an end to the longstanding Israeli occupation, it takes all necessary measures to ensure their protection, both as individuals and as a people, including stopping all forms of settlement activities on their land.

Mr. President,

Let me turn to the Syrian crisis now: last February's agreement on a cessation of hostilities has given Syria and its people a glimmer of hope that the settlement of the conflict has become a realistic possibility.

We take this opportunity to commend Special Envoy De Mistura for the tremendous effort and time he has employed to set the conditions for the achievement of the cessation of hostilities, guided by the work of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG).

We also recognize the leadership of the co-chairs of the Ceasefire Task Force, the Russian Federation and the United States, in supporting the cessation of hostilities, which resulted in a significant reduction in the number of civilian casualties, and cleared the path for the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva that should lead, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, to the achievement of a lasting political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in peace and dignity, in a sovereign and unified country.

Only such a solution could turn the present cessation of hostilities into a sustainable civil peace by allowing the Syrian people to begin the long and arduous trek of national reconciliation and reconstruction and paving the way for the return of the Syrian refugees and displaced to their homes and livelihoods.

Having said that, and until the eventual return of more the 1.2 million Syrian refugees who currently reside in Lebanon, we reiterate our call on the international community to meet its pledges, and provide Lebanon with the necessary means to deal with this massive responsibility. Only adequate assistance integrates humanitarian and developmental funding, would allow Lebanon to provide the required needs of refugees, and offset some of the negative impact that this protracted humanitarian crisis has left on my country's economic growth and unemployment levels, and the pressure on our infrastructure in the sectors of education, health, energy, water, sanitation and housing.

Mr. President,

It was only last month that my country was privileged to welcome the joint visit by the United Nations Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and the President of the Islamic development Bank. It was an important occasion for them to firsthand assess such needs. Five years into the conflict in Syria, and after multiple donors' conferences, in particular the one held in London February 3, 2016, it is crucial to establish a follow up mechanism to these conferences. We detailed our proposal regarding such mechanism in our statement before the General Assembly of November 20, 2015 to pursue with donors the fulfillment of their pledges. Today, we reiterate our call to act.

For Lebanon, this joint visit was also a significant message of international support and solidarity to help it maintain stability and security. In this context, my government stressed the need to fully implement UNSC 1701 and to put an end to Israeli violations of my country's sovereignty by land, air and sea.

Mr. President,

We would also like to inform you that based on operative paragraph 10 of UNSC resolution 1701 which requests the Secretary General "to develop in liaison with relevant international actors and concerned parties, proposals ... for the delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed and uncertain ..."

And recalling that among the chief "purposes" of the United Nations as stated in article 1 of its Charter is "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace",

My government also sought the “good offices” of the Secretary General in the delineation of the disputed maritime border and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) between Lebanon and Israel, emphasizing that the non-resolution of this issue shall remain a source of conflict that threatens the peace and security in our region.

Mr. President,

Let me now conclude by going back to where I started in order to stress one more time the urgent need for this Council to put an end to settlement activities in the occupied State of Palestine and to provide International protection to the Palestinians living under occupation. Failure to do so would not only constitute a moral and political abdication, it would amount to granting Israel permission to continue its blatant violation of the numerous resolutions of this Council and of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine, let alone the principles of the Charter and the rules of international law. In fact isn't this Council's failure to live up to its responsibilities which allowed Mr. Netanyahu to declare on Saturday: “It's time that the international community finally recognizes that the Golan will remain forever under Israel's sovereignty.” Mr. President, isn't it rather time for the International Community represented by this august body to remind Mr. Netanyahu of Israel's obligations under Security Council resolution 497 of 1981 which reaffirms the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and to condemn his declaration in the strongest possible terms?

Thank you.