



الأمانة العامة
أمانة شؤون مجلس الجامعة

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مداخلة

السيدة سيغريد كاغ

وكيل الأمين العام للأمم المتحدة كبيرة منسقي الشؤون الانسانية
وإعادة الاعمار في غزة

في الجلسة الافتتاحية

لمجلس جامعة الدول العربية على المستوى الوزاري

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أصل الكلمة باللغة الإنجليزية

SHRC Kaag's Remarks to the League of Arab States

Cairo, 10 September 2024

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Your Highnesses, Excellencies and Distinguished Guests. We convene today, as has already been recalled by the previous speaker, at a time in the Middle East where a devastating human tragedy keeps unfolding in front of our very eyes, televised, in the year 2024.

Now, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has frequently said that nothing can justify the horrific attacks by Hamas and other armed groups on the 7th of October. In Gaza, the United Nations and all other humanitarian workers, civilians of Gaza, are witness to the horrendous and inhumane conditions Palestinian civilians are subjected to, day in, day out, after 11 months of war. Unwavering conflict, there is unsurmountable suffering and lasting trauma inflicted on young and old.

I travel to Gaza frequently. As you can tell from the words of my colleague Philippe Lazzarini, it's not given to all. I am there frequently. My office is there. And I meet women, boys, girls, young and old men. And if I listen to their painful recollections throughout their days, their nights, the loss that they suffer, as a human being, as a fellow human being, it is unconscionable. The people in Gaza, Palestinians in Gaza, want an end to the war. And they're desperate for a restoration of a minimum, and I'm saying the bare minimum, of their human dignity. And I have to say, even though Gaza is televised, what is happening there is televised, I've been to Gaza since 1988, almost 40 years of my lifetime. I can tell you, nothing compares to seeing with your very own eyes the scale of destruction, the inhumane conditions people are forced to live under, and the absence of hope to get through to the next stage.

As my colleague Philippe Lazzarini said, children that should be learning in UNRWA schools or other learning facilities are scavenging in rubble and waiting to collect water for their parents or other people actually that host them in their shelters. And the number of children in Gaza that are without a known living relative, let this sink in, a known living relative to families that are extended families, that have a high number of relatives, no one is alive. These children have to fend for themselves in the hope that someone else might take them in.

And it cannot be repeated enough, we need an immediate, full, and complete ceasefire in Gaza. We need an unconditional release of all hostages, and unimpeded and continued, and continuous access to deliver aid at scale throughout the Gaza Strip, in line with Security Council Resolutions, above all, Security Council Resolution 2735 (2024).

International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights law must be respected by all. And protection of civilians remains a paramount priority. And, as we have just listened to my colleague Philippe Lazzarini, it has to be said repeatedly given all the issues he has raised, UNRWA must be allowed to deliver on its mandated role every day and any day. UNRWA is vital to all our efforts in Gaza.

As we speak, and it's been referenced, and we speak to the polio vaccination campaign against the odds, the health community, WHO, UNRWA, and UNICEF, but a lot of local partners, Palestinian partners, are implementing the most complex polio campaign globally, made possible through agreement by all parties. But it's a complex exercise. It depends on humanitarian pauses. But it shows, again, the importance of UNRWA. It shows the importance of the political will that has made this possible. However, polio should never have occurred in Gaza in the year 2024.

If we take a step back, 11 months ago, Mr. President, Gaza was largely cut off from all its supply lines. All but one access point was closed. And in this context, the resolution that I stand for, Security Council Resolution 2720 (2023), was adopted in December last year. And today systems are in place to secure supplies, to secure the routes, to establish a more sustained and transparent humanitarian flow into Gaza from Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus, West Bank, and Israel. And I'd very much like to commend the active and very much supportive role of the Royal Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and of course the Arab Republic of Egypt in this entire endeavor as we roll out this effort.

But systems are patient. And systems can be in place to achieve the goals. But systems cannot substitute for political will. And systems do not substitute for compliance of International Humanitarian Law. Systems cannot give back people their lives and their livelihoods that have been lost. At the end of the day, humanitarian law, international law, can also not be reduced to counting trucks. Rights are not favors and rights cannot be traded for exceptions. The only metric that matters are the tangible, measurable improvements in the lives of civilians in Gaza.

As the reality of Gaza has been often referenced, and I am very mindful of your knowledge, but the severely impacted operating environment, the massive and continuous displacement, the repeat orders to move, to leave, the breakdown of law and order as a result means that Gaza, in Gaza, nowhere is safe. And the asks of the humanitarian community have remained the same for quite some time. The reopening of all land crossings, and as you know, some of you know, the Minister of Egypt knows, the UN has submitted proposals to the parties that may permit for the reopening of Rafah border crossing. Very much also in line with my friend Joseph Borrell has mentioned, the return of facilitation by EU Bam in order to support this effort in conjunction with the return of the

Palestinian Authority. Effective deconfliction, despite agreements made, incidents continue to occur. A massive increase in volume, and above all, I would say the type of goods that are allowed to enter Gaza. You have to consider the total destruction of the health infrastructure, the need to rebuild educational facilities, water, sanitation, all that is actually part and parcel of normal daily living. It requires much more than flour alone. And we need consistent and timely medical evacuations with over 14,000 severely injured or very diseased people. And I know a number of your countries have generously hosted the evacuees, and Joseph Borrell and I have discussed last week, we also need European solidarity to receive, to host and support.

Excellencies, the civilians in Gaza, in Palestine want the war to stop. The families of the hostages want their loved ones to return home. And a ceasefire cannot happen a day too soon. But even in the absence of one, we owe it to the civilians to plan for a better future. And governance and law and order in Gaza need to be re-established. While politics and conditions on the ground may dictate the pace and the nature of change, preparations for early recovery and reconstruction should not wait. The position of the UN is clear. The Palestinian Authority must be enabled and supported to resume its responsibilities in Gaza as soon as possible. The Palestinian Authority also has the necessary plans, the ideas and integrated vision to deliver, to deliver with all the other support actors, of course with UNRWA in a very primary role. And in my engagement with the Palestinian leadership very frequently, they have highlighted its priorities in education, the rule of law, the rehabilitation of schools, the health infrastructure. The list is long. And the creation of a local, modern economy across Gaza is possible. And it should be a priority. Commercial activities need to grow. It cannot be that in this century, in this year, we ask civilians in Gaza to live on handouts because they are educated, motivated, ambitious, and have all the acumen and abilities to achieve success for themselves if they are committed to do so.

Ambitious reconstruction planning requires ambitious and generous financing. My mission has developed a whole plethora of studies and instruments available to you. But ultimately, as has been said, Gaza should not be forgotten. Even on the first day of the first phase of the ceasefire, do not look away. Gaza, recovery and reconstruction requires enduring commitment, not only politically but also financially. And meaningful progress cannot be made, and I will wrap up, Mr. President, without a political horizon. It means an independent, democratic, viable, contiguous, and sovereign Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders with Israel, whose legitimate security concerns must be addressed.

I would have four suggestions or recommendations to you. The first one, as a repeat of what my colleagues have said, continue to deploy your political leverage. Keep your eyes

on the ball, I would say. Do not permit yourself to suffer from Gaza fatigue, as we fear might happen in the West. Phase one is only phase one if and when we reach a ceasefire. Press for full respect and implementation of International Humanitarian Law. These are not favors, these are duties. And rights cannot be reduced to counting trumps. Financial support also to Palestinian NGOs. They are the lifeline over decades of many Palestinian civilians. And of course, strong support for the Palestinian Authority as well as civil society. Your voice and actions are imperative. And I think we need to speak with all humility, we cannot give life back to those who have lost their lives. But we can create and provide for dignity. We must create hope. And ultimately, all solutions are political and are a matter of political will. Thank you.