

Security Council Open Debate

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Statement by H.E. Ms Sylvie Lucas,
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I would to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements. Luxembourg fully associates itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union during this debate.

First, I would like to address the peace process in the Middle East.

Today, we have an opportunity to develop a serious political initiative to achieve a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. Recent visits to the region by President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry are important milestones in the relaunching of the peace process. It is crucial that, for the sake of Israelis and Palestinians alike, both parties now make a genuine commitment to overcoming the stalemate, resuming negotiations and developing an action plan with a clear timetable. There is an urgent need to move forward. In the current context, doing nothing is tantamount to regressing.

Recent remarks by Israeli authorities reiterating their commitment to the two-State solution are a first step in the right direction. The new Israeli Government must now translate those words into action and adopt measures conducive to the resumption of talks by stopping all settlement activity and respecting the agreements reached with the Palestinians.

Luxembourg is indeed deeply concerned by the settlement policy. We deplore the initial authorization, granted at the beginning of April, for a new construction project, the pursuit of existing settlement projects and the demolition of Palestinian infrastructure. We also deplore the statements made last week by some members of the new Israeli Government in support of efforts to strengthen the settlements, including in the E-1 sector.

No one in Palestine will believe that the peace efforts can succeed if settlement activities continue, if the blockade of Gaza continues, if the construction of settler roads increases, if the wall of separation continues to tear Palestinians from their lands, and if administrative detentions continue. Such illegal actions only exacerbate tensions and suffering and undermine confidence in the future

of the peace process. It must be emphasized that such actions are contrary to the vision of two States coexisting in peace and security.

Palestinians, too, must of course create conditions conducive to the resumption of talks by meeting their commitments, observing the Quartet principles and continuing their efforts to combat terrorism. We condemn, in this context, the rocket fire of recent weeks that has targeted civilians in southern Israel. Nothing justifies violence. Those attacks are unacceptable.

It is with regret that we learned of the resignation of Mr. Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister of Palestine. We take this opportunity to thank him for his service to his people in that difficult position, particularly with regard to the establishment and strengthening of Palestinian State institutions. It is important that his work be continued at this crucial time for the peace process.

Indeed, 2013 will be a decisive year. It is no longer time to listen, or even to talk. It is time for action, and, for the umpteenth time, we must avoid giving rise to bitter disappointment and the anger and violence that follow. With its partners in the European Union, Luxembourg is ready to actively contribute to the efforts to revive the peace process, in close cooperation with key actors, the Quartet and the countries of the region.

I now turn to Syria. While the situation is worsening by the day, words can no longer describe the horrors experienced by the Syrian people, including the use of missiles and cluster munitions, torture, sexual violence and the recruitment of children for military aims. It would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all the crimes committed on a daily basis. Like others, we are gravely concerned by the possible use of chemical weapons. It is urgent that the commission of inquiry set up by the Secretary-General be able to visit Syria and given full access in order to shed light on all the credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons.

The list of crimes condemned by human conscience, unfortunately, grows ever longer. Those crimes must not go unpunished. We said it in January, and we repeat it today forcefully — in the absence of a credible process of accountability at the national level, a referral to the International Criminal Court is essential.

The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Amos, told the Council last week (see S/PV.6949) that Syria is nearing the breaking point — the point of no return. Syria is collapsing. It is therefore urgent for the Security Council to act before it is too late.

This past Thursday, the Council was able to take a first step in agreeing on a message calling for the lifting of restrictions on humanitarian access and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid across borders. It is absolutely unacceptable that the work of United Nations agencies in Syria should be hindered and that humanitarian convoys should be the target of attacks. All parties to the conflict

must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including access for humanitarian and medical personnel and the protection of humanitarian workers.

At the same time, the Council called on all parties to the conflict to cease armed violence and stressed the need for a political process leading to a political transition on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). That message was a first step; we must now go further. If we want the Council to fulfil its primary responsibility under the Charter, we must overcome our divisions and work to bring the parties back into dialogue as soon as possible and to reach a political solution, considering the gravity of the humanitarian situation.

The Syrian National Coalition is a legitimate interlocutor on the opposition side. We must give it our full support, encourage it to increase its representativeness and inclusiveness, and focus its efforts on a common vision of the political transition so that it can ensure a political solution for the future of Syria and build on the proposals for dialogue made by Mr. Moaz al-Khateeb. President Al-Assad must realize that he cannot prevail on the battlefield or cling to power indefinitely. He cannot claim to represent the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The conflict has overflowed Syria's borders. No neighbouring country has been spared the security and humanitarian impact of the war in Syria. It is no exaggeration to say that Lebanon and Jordan face an existential threat. We once again express our gratitude to the neighbouring countries for the solidarity with which they continue to host refugees fleeing Syria. In this tragic situation, it is now more important than ever to deliver on the pledges made at the Kuwait City conference on 30 January.

For its part, Luxembourg has fulfilled its commitments and transferred the funds promised to United Nations agencies and programmes. Given the growing needs, our Government decided last week to make an additional contribution of humanitarian aid amounting to €1 million.

I will conclude my remarks by urging the Syrian authorities to stop the cross-border firing, and to fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and other neighbouring countries. We welcome the continued efforts of President Michel Sleiman to preserve the unity and stability of Lebanon. We call on all parties to respect the policy of dissociation adopted by Lebanon. In general, everything must be done to prevent the Syrian conflict from spreading to the regional level.