

25 October 2023

Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, addressed the Security Council on the situation in Gaza:

Your Excellency, Mr. Mauro Vieira, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

We express our gratitude to Brazil for convening this emergency session to deliberate on the perilous conditions prevailing in Gaza. We believe that the credibility of the Council is hanging in the balance. What unfolds today in Gaza, characterised by a retaliatory conflict devoid of a discernible objective, aside from inflicting collective punishment on millions who are, without clear wrongdoing, inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, constitutes a breach of international law and humanitarian norms. These norms form the cornerstone of the international order, with the Security Council entrusted with the oversight of matters pertaining to security and peace.

On 11 October, the League of Arab States took a resolute stance concerning the events occurring in Israel and the Gaza Strip. It unreservedly denounced the targeting and loss of civilian lives on both sides, a stance that garnered approval from the international community. We earnestly hope that this position remains etched in the memory of all. It was founded on the firm conviction that all parties must abide by international humanitarian law.

One of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law pertains to distinguishing between armed combatants and civilians. This principle, essential in preventing humanity from descending into the depths of barbarism and savagery that marked wars prior to the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, has been consistently and systematically violated by Israel in the Gaza Strip over the past two weeks. It is a principle that serves as a safeguard against inhumanity and cruelty.

Therefore, I must emphasise that the immediate cessation of Israel's assault on the civilian population in Gaza is the only means to avert a

significant humanitarian catastrophe and a massacre that the world will not forgive itself for if it stands idly by. This is a relentless conflict claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians each day. Halting it is the responsibility of this Council, charged with upholding international peace and security. It is a war waged with no discernible strategy beyond indiscriminate retaliation, and its duration remains unknown.

We find it perplexing that some invoke the right to self-defence to justify committing the most heinous crimes. Even more bewildering is the acceptance of a war conducted outside the purview of international humanitarian law, effectively the law of armed conflict, without any respect for established boundaries.

We witness a relentless scheme in action, day by day, targeting the entire population of Gaza without discrimination. This scheme encompasses bombings of their homes, starvation, and depriving them of basic necessities such as food, water, and medical care.

With deep concern, we observe the occupying forces consistently compelling the people of Gaza to abandon their homes, forcibly displacing them from northern Gaza to the south. It appears as though the intent is to generate a humanitarian catastrophe, whether within the Gaza Strip itself or along its border with Egypt, thereby opening the door to a scenario of a second displacement for the people of Gaza, the majority of whom were refugees to begin with.

The League of Arab States rejects forced displacement, not only as a crime stipulated in Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention but also as a systematic strategy that Israel seeks to implement to undermine the Palestinian cause. I have full confidence that the Palestinian people are aware of this danger that threatens their cause, and Arab countries are equally vigilant. It is shameful for the world to allow officials of any country to perpetuate such baseless assertions, which will not materialise on the ground but will only escalate anger, bitterness, and violence. Palestinians and Arabs will not endure a second Nakba, and we hope that the world, through this council, comprehends the gravity of this statement.

Today, the most pressing priority is to establish an ongoing mechanism for the transportation of aid from Egypt into Gaza through the Rafah crossing. We must create a seamless supply line for delivering humanitarian essentials to the Strip until calm is restored. The recent influx of trucks is merely a fraction of the population's requirements. They used to depend on around a hundred trucks loaded with essential supplies, including food and medicine on a daily basis.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to remind this esteemed Council that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict did not commence on 7 October. The Palestinian issue is not, and will not be, an offshoot of the war on terrorism. We and many others have repeatedly warned that the situation in all occupied Palestinian territories — be it Gaza, the West Bank, or East Jerusalem — where Palestinians live under a military occupation regime founded on apartheid, is untenable.

Violent operations will only breed more violence and a desire for revenge. It's high time we address the root cause of these cycles of violence. Ending the occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian state along the 1967 borders is the key to ensuring security for all parties. Being on the right side of history entails standing by the Palestinian right and the Palestinian people, rather than siding with the occupying power. There is no other formula that preserves the dignity and freedom of the Palestinian people while ensuring security for Israelis, other than the two-state solution. I hope that the current events encourage us to contemplate the future and the generations to come, preventing the repetition of past mistakes.

Thank you.