



Secretary-General
SG/SM/10580
SC/8790

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES SECURITY COUNCIL TO CONDEMN ISRAELI ATTACK ON QANA, CALL

FOR IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES, IN STATEMENT TO EMERGENCY MEETING

Following is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's statement to the Security Council, in New York on 30 July:

We meet at a moment of extreme gravity -- first and foremost for the people of the Middle East, but also for the authority of this Organization, especially this Council.

As you know, during the night, the Israeli air force bombed the village of Qana, in southern Lebanon. This village is no longer in UNIFIL's area of operations. Therefore, we had no UN personnel nearby at the time of the attack -- though Chinese engineers and two medical teams have now managed to reach the area. They are helping to clear the rubble and giving treatment to survivors.

I am, therefore, relying on the Lebanese authorities for my information. Preliminary reports say that at least 54 people have been killed, among them at least 37 children.

Excellencies, we must condemn this action in the strongest possible terms, and I appeal to you to do likewise. I am deeply dismayed that my earlier calls for immediate cessation of hostilities were not heeded, with the result that innocent life continues to be taken and innocent civilians continue to suffer. I repeat that call once again from this Council Chamber, and I appeal to the Council to do likewise. And I send my deepest condolences to the families of all the victims of violence -- in Lebanon, in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza.

Excellencies, this tragedy has, rightly, provoked moral outrage throughout the world.

Regrettably, some Lebanese people have turned their anger against this Organization. Earlier today, a large number of protesters broke into our headquarters in Beirut and briefly set fire to it. I am glad to say the fire was quickly put out. As of now, three staff members have been reported injured -- and I am glad to say, none critically.

The demonstrators have now left the building after intervention by the Lebanese armed forces. I am deeply grateful to the Government of Lebanon for this prompt action, and also to the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, and other Lebanese leaders, whose statesmanlike appeals for calm were decisive. The UN House is the hub of our humanitarian

activities in Lebanon. These will continue throughout the country.

But, naturally, we fear similar reactions elsewhere in the region or in the wider Islamic world. I appeal to the authorities and people in all countries to respect and ensure the safety of UN personnel. I appeal to everyone to understand that we are doing our best to help -- through diplomacy, through humanitarian action and by the efforts of UNIFIL, which, as you know, itself suffered tragic losses only a few days ago.

The tragic events in Qana remind us that, 10 years ago, over 100 people who had taken refuge in this same village suffered a similar fate. We must deliver the region from this seemingly endless cycle of violence.

In the last 18 days, several hundred Lebanese citizens have been killed -- the vast majority of them civilians, and at least a third of them children. During the same period, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have had to flee their homes, many of them under heavy shelling.

Meanwhile, over 50 Israelis have died, including 19 civilians, and the population of northern Israel has been subjected to intense and continuous rocket fire, and thousands are now in shelters.

It is important to stress that both sides in this conflict bear a heavy responsibility, and there is strong prima facie evidence that both have committed grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

The present fighting began on 12 July, with an unprovoked Hizbollah attack on Israel and the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. Since then, Hizbollah has continued firing rockets indiscriminately into northern Israel, from positions apparently located in the midst of the civilian population.

No one disputes Israel's right to defend itself. But, by its manner of doing so, it has caused, and is causing, death and suffering on a wholly unacceptable scale.

As you know, I have repeatedly condemned all actions that target civilians, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights has reminded all parties that they may be held accountable for any breaches of international humanitarian law.

But, my friends, the most urgent need is to bring the fighting to a halt without further delay. For that, this Council has a solemn responsibility.

Action is needed now, before many more children, women and men become casualties of a conflict over which they have no control.

Therefore, I reiterate my call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, to allow desperately needed humanitarian relief to reach the victims. While that is happening, we can work together on the political framework needed for a lasting ceasefire and a sustainable solution: the strengthening of Lebanon's Government, the disarming of all militias, and the implementation of all Security Council resolutions, including 1559 and 1680. I will work with you in the development and deployment of a stabilisation force to support the Government of Lebanon in its decision and responsibility to extend its authority throughout the country.

I know there are differences among the Council's members about the precise sequence of actions needed. I beg you to set those differences aside, and come together on the most urgent point -- the immediate cessation of hostilities.

I should also share with the council that, this morning, in my conversation with the Prime Minister Siniora of Lebanon, he told me his Government has taken a decision that they will no longer engage in further diplomatic discussions, and efforts to find a solution, without a ceasefire. And, I asked him if the Government as a whole took that decision, and he reaffirmed that's the decision of his Government.

The other information that I would like to share with you, is that UNIFIL did receive a request from the Israel Defense Forces that the population of two villages, Ramyah and Ayta ash-Shab, that they wanted the villages to be evacuated before sunset today. Of course UNIFIL has refused to evacuate the villages, indicating that they don't have the capacity and these requests have come where the assistance is required from the Government of Lebanon.

This is something I thought you should know, to let you understand the dynamics in the region and in the south.

Let me conclude, Mr. President, by stating very clearly and briefly that the authority and standing of this Council are at stake. People have noticed its failure to act firmly and quickly during this crisis. Today's events at ESCWA were in part an expression of that frustration. For the sake of the people of the region and of this Organization, I urge you to act, and to act now.

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