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Statement by

**H.E. Ms Tanja Fajon**

**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the**

**Republic of Slovenia**

at the

**UN Security Council Briefing on the situation in the Middle East**

New York, 29 November 2023

Mr President,

Thank you for organizing this ministerial-level briefing. It is my honour to address this Council for the very first time, and to do this on the day of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Over the weekend I concluded my trip in the Middle East. Together with my Portuguese colleague we held numerous meetings in Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt. As emotions are running high on this topic, it is of utter importance to make way for diplomacy leading to a political solution. The United Nations and the Security Council should play a key role in this regard.

Firstly, a permanent ceasefire is urgent.

People in Gaza are experiencing unspeakable horrors. I am deeply disturbed by the blockade of Gaza and the lack of most basic items. In relation to yesterday's statement by the WHO, I am particularly concerned over the health situation on the ground. I welcome that increased levels of aid have been distributed in recent days and I urge for more crossings to be open. The aid delivered still falls below the dire needs. Let me inform that Slovenia has stepped up its humanitarian support, and is ready to play an active role in psychosocial rehabilitation of children.

I am appalled by reports of attacks on civilians and on schools, hospitals, UN facilities and other civilian objects. The number of victims is devastating. Two thirds of all victims in Gaza are women and children. Civilians must be protected. What we are witnessing today in Gaza, are clear violations of international humanitarian law. Even wars have rules.

I welcome the agreement on the release of hostages and prisoners, and a humanitarian pause. We commend the efforts of all involved, especially Qatar, Egypt and the US, in reaching the agreement.

Once again, this conflict must end now.

Collectively, we need to be able to condemn all forms of terror. I understand the agony, pain and vulnerability of the Israeli nation following the brutal terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October. I once again call on Hamas to release all hostages immediately.

Let me be clear: I condemn all forms of extremism. I am deeply concerned about the impact of this war on the children of Gaza. I am also troubled by the escalation in the West Bank, particularly the settler violence and announced expansion of additional illegal settlements, as well as in the south of Lebanon. This crisis will have broader future implications, including possible proliferation of extremism and extremist ideologies.

Lastly, I would like to stress that the international community must do more. We, Europeans, are ready to be part of achieving long and lasting peace. I thank the Secretary General, UNRWA and the whole of the UN for their active role and clear call for humanity to prevail. Let me express condolences on the death of UN staff members in Gaza.

We must recognize that we have failed the test of humanity. As an incoming Member, I want to emphasize that this Council must step up.

Mr President,

It has been 30 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords, and alarm bells in both the West Bank and Gaza have been ringing for years. This latest round of conflict is providing neither peace nor security to anyone in the region. I therefore strongly support the convening of an international peace conference in order to agree on a peace plan leading to a two state-solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peaceful coexistence. The only guarantee of the safety and security of Israelis is a recognition of the Palestinian state. Slovenia supports all initiatives seeking a politically viable solution to the conflict.

Mr President,

The images of the destruction and rubble in Gaza are devastating. Rubble under which many lives and families have been lost. Rubble which children used to call home. Rubble which many left behind to find a safer place. UNICEF recently posted a photo of 8-year-old Mohammed, sitting on the rubble of his family home asking for a ceasefire. If only one of my messages stays with you today, it should be me joining in his call for a ceasefire.

Thank you.