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Statement by the Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Ms. Jennifer Welsh, on the situation in Israel and in the Palestinian Occupied Territory of Gaza Strip.

(New York, 24 July 2014) The Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, express their serious concern at the escalation of violence in the occupied Gaza strip and at the targeting of civilians in the current crisis.

“We express shock at the high number of civilians killed and injured in the ongoing Israeli operations in Gaza and at the rocket attacks launched by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israeli civilian areas.” According to latest UN reports, fighting has resulted in the killing of 697 Palestinians including over 500 civilians, of whom at least 170 are children and 86 women. According to Israeli sources, a total of 29 Israeli soldiers and three civilians have been killed, since the hostilities started on 7 July. Homes, schools, medical facilities and basic infrastructure, including United Nations facilities have been destroyed by military bombardments in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli forces.

Dieng and Welsh stated that the high number of civilian casualties, particularly among the Palestinians, could demonstrate disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli Defence Forces. At the same time, the launching of rocket attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups into Israeli residential areas constitutes indiscriminate use of force. In this context, “both parties are in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and these acts could constitute atrocity crimes”, the two Special Advisers observed.

The Special Advisers urge all parties to adhere to the principles of distinction between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives. They also call upon the Israeli Defence Forces to fully respect the principle of proportionality.

“We are equally disturbed by the flagrant use of hate speech in the social media, particularly against the Palestinian population,” stated the Special Advisers. According to reliable reports, individuals have disseminated messages that could be dehumanising to the Palestinians and have called for the killing of members of this group. The Special Advisers remind all that incitement to commit atrocity crimes is prohibited under international law.

Israel, as the Occupying Power, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas, have the responsibility to protect the population in Gaza. The Special Advisers call on the three parties to take immediate measures to ensure the protection of the population. Taking into consideration the dire humanitarian and human rights crisis in Gaza, the international community also has a responsibility to assist in protecting the civilian population, first and foremost by encouraging

and supporting negotiations towards a ceasefire, and by ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid.

“The actions of all parties need to be thoroughly and impartially investigated, and those found responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, on either side, must be held accountable for their actions. Impunity for crimes committed in the past has had a lingering negative effect in this region. ” noted the Special Advisers. To achieve protection of the population in the region, the Special Advisers call for an end of hostilities, the creation of a humanitarian corridor, and lifting of the blockade of Gaza which has created further suffering. The Special Advisers call on the parties to return to serious negotiations that will end the cycle of violence and achieve a stable, just and durable solution to this longstanding conflict.

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