



Explanation of position by H.E. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations, delivered at the 9584th meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

22 March 2024

Thank you, Mr. President,

After five months of war in Gaza and the horrific attacks of 7 October 2023, this Council has still not been able to adopt a text that addresses all the dimensions of the conflict in a manner that impacts the situation on the ground and upholds the rule of law. While Guyana welcomed the US' initiative to develop a draft resolution and the transparency with which the negotiations were conducted, we are of the view that given the length of time spent on those negotiations and certain positions consistently expressed by several delegations, the draft could have better reflected that broad-based feedback.

Guyana abstained on this draft resolution for a number of reasons which I will elaborate.

First, contrary to media reports, this resolution does not call for an immediate ceasefire. Instead, we note that it “determines the imperative for a ceasefire” and calls for support for diplomatic efforts that are ongoing outside of the UN. While those efforts must be commended, given the responsibility and mandate of this Council, Guyana could not support a resolution that does not unequivocally call for an immediate ceasefire. Nearly 32,000 persons have been killed in Gaza since 7 October, the majority of whom are women and children. More than 74,000 have been maimed. Initial UN assessments have concluded that it would take years to clear the 23 million tons of rubble and unexploded weapons scattered across Gaza. The latest IPC report projects famine between now and May 2024. In summary, this man-made disaster cannot be halted without an immediate ceasefire, and it is this Council’s responsibility to unequivocally demand one, even as it acknowledges the efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the United States.

Second, the demand for a ceasefire should not be linked to or conditioned on the release of hostages. The taking of hostages is strictly prohibited under international law and their release must be unconditional. Guyana reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Two wrongs cannot make a right and the Palestinian people should not be collectively punished and themselves held hostage for the crimes of others.

Third, in our view this text lacked attribution in a number of key areas. While the draft includes the condemnation of Hamas for the October 7th attacks and demands they immediately grant humanitarian access to the hostages, and rightfully so, there is no attribution or demands to the Israeli authorities for what is taking place in Gaza. For example, who is responsible for 1.5 million Palestinians taking refuge in Rafah? And who has announced a planned military ground offensive there? To whom is the

demand for compliance with obligations under international law regarding the protection of civilians and civilian objects, humanitarian access, and the protection of humanitarian relief and medical personnel, their assets and infrastructure applicable? Who has erected and maintained the existing barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale? Who is responsible for the forcible displacement of the civilian population in Gaza? Who is preventing the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip? Who does not respect deconfliction and notification mechanisms? We know the answers to these questions. We have heard briefer after briefer both from the UN system and civil society describe the situation on the ground, explaining where the problems are and who is responsible for creating these problems. Why then were the relevant demands in the resolution not clearly addressed to the occupying power? Not even once was this done.

Indeed, if one were to read this resolution without background knowledge, it would be difficult to ascertain which party in this conflict is committing the atrocities in Gaza – atrocities which necessitated this draft resolution being put forward. In a resolution of 41 paragraphs, 2,036 words, the occupying power is mentioned once – in the penultimate paragraph.

Fourth, preambular paragraph 7 was of particular concern to Guyana. This Council is the organ with the Charter responsibility for addressing threats to peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. How can we endorse the idea of “ongoing and future operations” in Gaza as long as measures are taken to “reduce significantly civilian harm?” This idea was rejected by several delegations during the course of the negotiations. In Guyana’s view, this is in direct contravention of the Council’s responsibility. It would set a dangerous precedent and make the Council complicit in the atrocities being committed in Gaza now and in the future.

Fifth and final, we took note of the four paragraphs treating with the mandate of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. While we applaud the Coordinator's efforts, we are of the view that the scale of efforts that would be required in Gaza after the war would warrant a key role for UNRWA given its decades of experience in the Strip and its capacity vis-à-vis other agencies operating there. This Council has heard many times of the indispensability of UNRWA. It is the lifeline for Palestinians. We were, therefore, disappointed that the only mention of UNRWA in the draft pertained to the investigations into the allegations against a small number of its staff. Guyana, supported by several delegations, had requested an affirmation of UNRWA's important mandate in the text but this was not taken onboard.

Mr. President,

This Council still has an opportunity to take action to end the suffering of all parties. Civilians in Gaza need a respite. Palestinians need a respite. Israelis need a respite. Both need a respite from this continuous cycle of violence and pain. That is the real window of opportunity – the strong desire by the people of Palestine and Israel for peace. Guyana is prepared to work with other Council members to respond to their needs and legitimate aspirations, including the two-state solution. This must not be postponed.

I thank you.