



**Statement by Dr Naledi Pandor  
Minister of International Relations and Cooperation  
of South Africa  
during the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council  
on The situation in the Middle East,  
including the Palestinian question**

**24 October 2023**

Mr President,

Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Antonio Guterres,  
Excellencies and Representatives,

We thank the Federative Republic of Brazil for convening this timely, open debate.

We also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr Tor Wennesland and Ms Lynn Hastings, Deputy Special Coordinator, for their briefings. The details they provided pointed to the terrible plight of innocent civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the urgent need to ensure the release of hostages as soon as possible.

South Africa agrees with many of today's speakers that the ultimate solution to the conflict is finalising the question of the two-state solution. We must work hard through the UN to create two states, Palestine, and Israel, living side by side in peace and security. And this must be in accord with the established UN resolutions on the two-state solution. The Palestinian State should be created along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

South Africa also joins the urgent calls for an immediate comprehensive ceasefire and that humanitarian corridors should be opened so that aid and other basic services reach all those in need.

Most importantly we call on all parties to exercise restraint and to desist from fuelling this patently unjust war and human suffering.

Mr President

We also express condolences to the people of Palestine and Israel for the lives lost during the past two weeks.

We are horrified at the blatant targeting of civilians, a clear violation of International Humanitarian Law, the Geneva Convention, and its Protocols. Both Hamas and the State of Israel have committed these violations.

Mr President,

The killing of civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza by Israeli forces goes against the tenets of international law, which prohibits the targeting of non-combatants, especially women, the aged and children. There is an added obligation on an occupying power over the people and territory it occupies in terms of the Geneva Conventions including a prohibition against collective punishment. This does not detract from South Africa's concern at the actions of Hamas which also targeted non-combatants.

Whilst we express concern at the current violence and deaths, we cannot ignore the fact that one more day of continued occupation has bred hatred, suffering and pain. Just as Israel deserves peace and security so are Palestinians deserving of sovereignty, peace and security. For international law to be credible, it should be uniformly applied and not selective.

Mr President

The conflict has again illustrated the inadequacy of our organisation, the United Nations, in particular the UN Security Council, which has the mandate of maintaining international peace and security. It has clearly not been able over time to prevent conflicts from spiralling into intense violence and harm to ordinary civilians. All of us need to work harder at reforming our organisation so that it is more capable of responding to the protection of civilians. We all recall that in 1994 a genocide occurred on the African continent with much of the whole world watching as innocent people were massacred. History cannot keep repeating such cruelty, we should establish a system of global governance that is fair, equitable, and has the capacity to respond to the needs of all persons in situations of threat and harm – a system that is not just a tool for the most powerful countries of the world but that provides protection for the most vulnerable.

Finally, South Africa is appalled at the Security Council's failure to agree on a unified resolution that signals a full commitment to ending the killing and suffering. There can be no compromise when this Council is faced with a crisis of such proportion.

We urge the Council to do its work.

I thank you.