

'No steps taken' so far to end Israel's illegal settlement activity on Palestinian land – UN envoy

A senior United Nations official on Tuesday urged Israel to reverse course over illegal settlement construction on occupied Palestinian land, and for both parties to return to the negotiating table in pursuit of a lasting peace deal.

“The need to reverse, or at the very least contain the impact of negative trends – especially [illegal settlement activity](#), violence and incitement – is critical not only to preserve hope for a meaningful return to the negotiating table, but also to prevent the escalation of broader regional tensions,” UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, told the Security Council.

Mr. Mladenov presented to the 15-member body the sixth quarterly report on the implementation of Council resolution 2334, covering the period from 26 March to 12 June this year.

“As detailed in the report, no steps were taken during the reporting period to “cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem’ as demanded by the resolution”, he said.

The July 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet – comprising the UN, Russia, the United States and the European Union – identified Israel’s settlement activity as one of the main obstacles to achieving a two-state solution, which is to establish a viable, sovereign Palestinian state that lives in peace and security with Israel.

In Tuesday’s briefing, Mr. Mladenov noted that some 3,500 housing units in settlements in what is known as “Area C” of the occupied West Bank had either been “advanced, approved or tendered”. One-third of those units are in settlements in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank.

Plans for 2,300 units were advanced in the approval process, while 300 units had reached the final approval stage. Tenders had gone out for about 900 units, he said. As in the previous period, no advancements, approvals or tenders were made in occupied East Jerusalem.

“I reiterate that all settlement activity is illegal under international law. It continues to undermine the practical prospects for establishing a viable Palestinian state and erodes remaining hopes for peace,” he said.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 84 Palestinian-owned structures, resulting in the displacement of 67 people and potentially affected the livelihoods of 4,500 others.

The reporting period was characterized by high levels of violence, including rocket attacks from Gaza, Mr. Mladenov said.

Since 30 March, during a series of protests in Gaza, 135 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists, have acknowledged that a number of their members were among those killed. Two Israeli soldiers were also injured during the protests, with at least five others injured as a result of rockets and mortars launched from Gaza.

Under the cover of the protests, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants engaged in violent and provocative acts, stated Mr. Mladenov.

Hundreds approached and attempted to breach the fence, burned tires, threw rocks and fire bombs at Israeli forces, launched incendiary kites and laid improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Palestinian protesters also damaged and looted equipment and installations on the Gaza side of the border at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

“I want to again reiterate the call of the Secretary-General on all to unequivocally condemn, in the strongest possible terms, all actions that have brought us to this dangerous place and led to the loss of so many lives in Gaza,” he said.