December 17, 2015

His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York, NY 10017

Your Excellency:

On behalf of B’nai B’rith International – the world’s oldest Jewish humanitarian, advocacy and social action organization, with a grassroots presence in nearly 50 countries – we are writing to express our dismay at a statement read on your behalf at a joint U.N. Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and Organization of Islamic Cooperation conference this week in Jakarta.

In your statement, you wrote that, “the anger we are witnessing is bred from nearly five decades of Israeli occupation” and you went on to blame the settlements as a cause of the continuing unrest. This represents an unacceptable rationalization of terrorism and blaming of the victim. If the U.N. is sincerely interested in calming the situation on the ground, then U.N. officials need to desist from using this kind of rhetoric, which is only seen by Palestinians as global validation of their attacks against Israelis.

The cause of the violence, simply, is the incitement by the Palestinian leadership. The Oslo Accords committed the Palestinians to end incitement against Israel. Clearly, they have not done so. In fact, since the signing of the Accords in 1993, the Palestinian Authority has raised an entire generation of young Palestinians on bitter hatred of Israelis and Jews. The Palestinian youth whom you cited in your statement have grown up listening to constant messages of hatred against Israelis and Jews from very young ages from official Palestinian media, in their schools, and now on social media.

This particular wave of terror can be traced back to the lie, spread by the highest levels of the Palestinian leadership, that Israel was changing the status quo on the Temple Mount. As you know, when Palestinians started rioting in the Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas praised “every drop of blood” that was shed by the “martyrs” and said that Israelis had “no right to no right to desecrate the mosque with their dirty feet.” Palestinian media and social media have only inflamed the situation and encouraged continued attacks. Only this week, Abbas claimed that the terrorism we have seen over the last few months is “justified.”

We note that in your statement you made brief reference to incitement, in that you called on “leaders” to rein in incitement during your emergency visit to the region in October. But this only obscures the problem, as you did not specify which leaders are the ones who are inciting the violence. Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government have been working diligently to calm the tensions that Abbas and the Palestinian Authority have provoked, justified and encouraged. The lack of clarity on this point in your statement
could lead an outside observer to the absurd conclusion that both sides were equally engaged in incitement.

In the same sentence in which you call for “leaders” to rein in incitement, you also called on the Israeli security forces to ensure that they were using a “carefully calibrated use of force in response to incidents.” Two months ago B’nai B’rith International issued a statement following your spokesperson’s comments that described Israel’s restrained response to terrorism as an “apparent excessive use of force.” We are saddened that we must, once again, renew our condemnation of your office’s mischaracterization of the counter-terrorism actions by the Israeli security forces to protect Israeli citizens during terrorist attacks.

The actions of the Israeli security forces to neutralize terrorists who are in the midst of trying to stab or run over Israeli civilians is perfectly in line with what any government would do in a similar situation. We note that you have not in the same fashion condemned the French police or the San Bernardino police department for engaging and neutralizing terrorists. Nor have you insinuated that these counter-terrorism actions would somehow lead to an escalation of violence by ISIS because to do so would be laughable and dangerous. Yet, your statement calls on Israel to “calibrate” the responses of the security forces in order to de-escalate the Palestinian violence.

If the U.N. is to be a stabilizing force in the region, and is genuinely interested in creating the conditions necessary for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, then the statements coming from officials of the world body must go beyond the same repeated—and often incorrect—talking points. Unless the U.N. makes clear that Palestinian incitement to hate and violence, not Israel, is the cause of Palestinian terrorism against Israelis, we will not see any meaningful progress towards an end to this conflict.

The cause of peace would have been better served if the remarks that were delivered in your name had insisted, instead, that the Palestinians return to the negotiating table. Only through a return to face-to-face negotiations can we ever expect any real measure of progress on this issue.

Sincerely,

Gary P. Saltzman
President

Daniel S. Mariaschin
Executive Vice President