UN chief said to slam Israel, Liberman over Gaza in new report

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UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has circulated a document that severely criticizes Israel over violence on the Gaza border and singles out Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman for making what are described as “inflammatory” comments, according to a report Sunday.

The report from Guterres, which has not yet been made public, also warns that Gaza is on the brink of another war with Israel and slams Hamas for encouraging violent protests on the border fence, according to Israel’s Channel 10 news, which obtained a copy of the paper.

The document was mandated by [UN Security Council Resolution 2334](https://www.timesofisrael.com/choosing-not-to-veto-obama-lets-anti-settlement-resolution-pass-at-un-security-council/), which passed in December 2016 and focused mainly on demanding an immediate halt to all Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

However the report, which US and Israeli diplomats fought to delay for months, deals mainly with concerns over Gaza, particularly violence along the border over the past several months in which over 130 Palestinian protesters have been killed by Israeli fire.

“Israel has a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire, and to not use lethal force, except as a last resort against imminent threat of death or serious injury. It must protect its citizens, but it must do so with due respect of international humanitarian law.  The killing of children, as well as of clearly identified journalists and medical staffers by security forces during a demonstration are particularly unacceptable,” the report reads, a[ccording to US news site Axios,](https://www.axios.com/un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-report-israel-gaza-war-warning-07a8fb55-ee0e-4d0f-89c8-50d952780945.html) which carried a concurrent item on the UN document.

Israel has said most of those killed were members of terror groups, many of whom were in the midst of carrying out attacks or attempting to breach or damage the fence. Hamas has acknowledged that dozens of the dead were its members. The IDF has repeatedly accused Hamas of trying to carry out terror attacks under the cover of the protests.

However, Guterres’s report is also said to express exasperation at Israeli comments attempting to justify Israel’s use of live fire and describing all protesters as members of Hamas, the terror group which rules the Strip, particularly comments to that effect apparently made by Liberman.

“Israeli officials also made provocative and inflammatory statements. In a radio interview, a senior Israeli minister …falsely asserted that all Palestinians [in Gaza] are affiliated with Hamas, and thus by extension legitimate targets. … [This] signaled a permissive Israeli policy towards the use of live fire against protesters and contributed to the tragedy we have witnessed over the past 11 weeks,” the report reads. It is not clear if Liberman is actually named is Guterres’s report.

Guterres also criticizes Hamas, which he says has “enflamed and encouraged a highly volatile situation that contributed to violent actions at the fence and risked a serious escalation,” according to the report. He said the actions of Hamas and other groups in Gaza was putting a return to normal life for Gazans at risk.

A UN resolution passed last week by the General Assembly harshly criticized Israel, but did not address Hamas. A US amendment seeking to also condemn Hamas was blocked from being added to the measure, despite being widely supported by the body.

According to the Israeli news report, Guterres’s document was circulated to the 15 members of the Security Council after France put pressure on the secretary general to release his conclusions, after US envoy Nikki Haley managed to bury it for 17 months.

It was not clear when the report, which will be updated every few months, would become public.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujaric confirmed to The Times of Israel that “Guterres’s] report as requested by resolution 2334 is due to the [Security] Council this week.” He refused to elaborate on the content of the report.

Hamas, which seized control of the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, has been under increasing pressure as the coastal enclave teeters on the verge of an economic and infrastructure collapse that UN Middle East peace envoy Nickolay Mladenov said last week was already “well beyond” a humanitarian crisis.

Gaza’s woes have been exacerbated by an ongoing dispute between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, which has cut the salaries it pays to workers in Gaza and imposed various sanctions, including cutting off payments for electricity supplies to the enclave.

According to the Israeli news channel, Guterres also criticized Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas for withholding salaries in the Gaza Strip. He wrote that he was very concerned about the economic crisis as a lack of electricity, drinkable water and food in the coastal enclave.

Israel and Egypt maintain a blockade on the Strip which they say is designed to prevent Hamas from importing weapons and other goods that could be used to build fortifications or cross-border tunnels.

Israeli ministers are reportedly looking at ways to ease the crisis in the Strip as a way to defuse the weekly border protests, which are seen partly as a result of the dire situation there.

The border protests peaked on May 14, when some 40,000 Gazans protested along the fence and violent clashes took place between troops and Palestinians. The protest came on the same day that the US opened its embassy in Jerusalem.

Protesters have hurled grenades, improvised explosives and rocks at soldiers, burned tires and flown hundreds of incendiary kites and balloons into Israeli territory, sparking dozens of fires daily that have destroyed thousands of acres of fields and nature preserves.