



August 14, 2022

Secretary General Antonio Guterres

Excellency,

We were deeply concerned to learn of the situation in which OCHA head in the West Bank and Gaza, Ms. Sarah Muscroft, has been placed over the last few days. This situation started when a tweet she posted welcoming the ceasefire in Gaza and criticizing “indiscriminate rocket fire” against civilian populations was badly received, and led to pressures by different Palestinian factions, including some of the UN local staff, who called for her dismissal from her post. Ms. Muscroft had to delete her tweet, apologize and was quietly relieved of her duties. Oddly, Israel was not notified, and we had to learn about it from the media.

While we have not always agreed with all of Ms. Muscroft’s tweets, or those of her UN counterparts, Israeli disagreement or criticism has been expressed in a normative way. This is the manner befitting democratic host countries who may take issue with various public diplomatic comments. However, Israel is disturbed to see that Palestinian outrage over tweets would so quickly devolve into ending the ability of a senior UN staffer to keep her job, and to express herself. This represents a clear surrender of the UN to threats and intimidation, and poses a very problematic norm.

This norm effectively grants the Palestinian players and the local UN staff an “unwritten veto” over UN statements, and stands in clear contradiction with the basic principles of objectivity and neutrality that the UN claims to hold. In the best case, this is a recipe for misguided self-censorship by UN officials. In the worst case, it is a prescription for UN officials to exclusively emphasize the Palestinian narrative, even if this falls in contradiction with facts on the ground, honest reporting, or Israel’s legitimate interests.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time this has happened. In the Palestinian territories, the UN has a problematic history of not backing its staff when they dare to speak their minds in a way which does not please the powers that be in Gaza or Ramallah. Just last year, UNWRA representative Matthew Schmale in a television interview during May 2021 operation in Gaza, indicated that in his opinion, “there is a huge sophistication in the way the Israeli military struck over the last 11 days,” when asked if he agreed that the IDF strikes were precise. There was Palestinian backlash, Schmale apologized, and he was recalled from his post.

Somehow, it is always open season to criticize Israel, with no repercussions; but if a UN staffer dares to speak against Palestinian terrorism, there is immediate backlash in fear of reprisal.

On the other hand, we recently witnessed a clear case in which a UN official who clearly breached the principles of impartiality and neutrality required from a member of an HRC Commission of Inquiry used clear antisemitic vicious parlance, and yet still maintains his position. HRC Commissioner Miloon Kothari’s interview, where he clearly stated that the Jewish lobby controls the social media, should have been met with a firm response that would have led to his resignation. Outrageous is diplomatic understatement. We expect the UN to act accordingly.



Excellency,

We ask that the issue of Ms. Muscroft be examined with utmost concern. We call on OCHA and the UN to reverse this unfortunate decision which is perceived as a reward for intimidation and threats. While Israel supports constructive engagement with UN officials and agencies, we cannot accept such blatant double standards.

Please accept, Excellency, the expression of my highest consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Erdan'.

Gilad Erdan

Ambassador of Israel to the United Nations

cc: Martin Griffiths

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

cc: ASG Joyce Msuya

Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs