



Briefing on Efforts To Stop Violence in Lebanon

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Jerusalem
July 30, 2006

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I am deeply saddened by the terrible loss of innocent life in the bombing in Lebanon this morning. The people of Lebanon have the deepest sympathies of President Bush, the people of the United States and my own heartfelt condolences. Our prayers go out to all the victims and their families.

I first learned of this tragic loss of life as I was meeting with the Israeli Defense Minister this morning and once again I was reiterating our strong concern about the impact of Israeli military operations on innocent civilians during crisis.

We are working very hard to try to stop the violence. Too many innocent people – Lebanese and Israeli – have suffered. Too many people have lost their lives; too many families are homeless and too many children have been killed, injured, are living in fear for their lives.

The circumstances are very difficult and emotions are understandably running high on all sides. I just spoke by telephone with Prime Minister Siniora and conveyed my condolences personally to him, to the people of Lebanon.



In the wake of the tragedy that the people and the government of Lebanon are dealing with today, I decided to postpone my discussions in Beirut. In any case, my work today is here. I will continue to meet with Israeli officials as we work to put in place the elements necessary to bring an end to this conflict.

We are making real progress on a political framework and believe the parties are coming together on this aspect. We are also pushing for an urgent end to the current hostilities. But the views of the parties on how to achieve this are different. The work we do here will make it possible for the United Nations Security Council to take decisive action for a cease-fire as soon as possible.

Now I am happy to take questions. Andrea.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, how upset are you that Israel proceeded with this action today while you were here on your way to Beirut? Have they not scuttled the diplomacy and debate beyond the loss of life? Isn't this an unacceptable action in the midst of the most sensitive time in the diplomacy?

SECRETARY RICE: Andrea, I fully understand and fully understood when I came here that I am working on this issue in the midst of ongoing military operations. I am quite aware that there are many dangers associated with military operations. I might note that there are, of course, rocket attacks continuing against Israel, as well. So, I recognize that this was not a situation in which there was already a cease-fire. I fully understand that. My job is to come here and to do what I have been doing: to work very urgently to help on the humanitarian side, to represent our views to the Israelis on what needs to be done on the humanitarian side - we had long discussions about that this morning – to talk about the impact that this is having on civilians. Most importantly, to try to work toward political arrangements that the Security Council can act on the basis of – to have a cease-fire that is going to be enduring.

I was really struck and in fact saddened by the references to the fact that it is very near this area that this happened in 1996. It just reminds us how fragile cease-fires are in this part of the world and it reminds us that we have to try and do our work well so that there will not be more and more and more incidents over many and many and many more years. That's why we are working so hard on the political framework. But I knew precisely what the circumstances were when I came.

QUESTION: The Prime Minister of Lebanon has said that he does not want to hold talks with you until there is a cease-fire. Does that change your thinking and planning? And secondly, you have told us repeatedly that you have mentioned your concern about this striking on civilian targets in Lebanon. Are you disappointed that the Israelis have not listened?

SECRETARY RICE: I am certainly going to continue to press the case that there be extraordinary care taken during military operations to avoid civilian casualties. I think we all recognize that this kind of warfare is extremely difficult, because in fact it is warfare within – situations within territory in which civilians are residing. It is extremely difficult. And it unfortunately has awful consequences sometimes, and these are awful consequences.

I spoke with Prime Minister Siniora, and what he said to me was that he was feeling extremely depressed and –depressed is not quite the right word – he was feeling very emotional about what had happened to his people. I fully understand that—fully understand that. But I want you to understand something too: I called him and told him that I was not coming today, because I felt very strongly that my work toward a cease-fire is really here, today.

QUESTION: What does that mean?

SECRETARY RICE: It means I have work to do here, on the political arrangements, and on how we get a security environment in Southern Lebanon that will permit a sustainable cease-fire. And I have work to do here on that issue.

QUESTION: Who is arguing against an immediate cease-fire? (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: I think it's time to get to a cease-fire. We actually have to try and put one in place. I've made the point and I made the point in Rome that we want a cease-fire as soon as possible. I would have wanted to have a cease-fire yesterday, if possible. But the parties have to agree to a cease-fire, and there have to be certain conditions in place. Any cease-fire has to have circumstances that are going to be acceptable to the parties.

We also have to realize that we cannot have a circumstance in which there is a return to the status quo ante, in which there is a zone in Southern Lebanon in which a terrorist can violate the Blue Line, and create the kind of devastating circumstances that we see today. And we would be not very responsible if we were not attending to those circumstances as well as working as urgently and as quickly as we can to get the fighting stopped.

QUESTION: Some of your critics say that you are not putting enough pressure on Israel and you bear some of the responsibility for what is happening. What is your response to that? And also have you spoken to Prime Minister Olmert and what was your message?

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, the United States has been working harder, and harder and harder. I would put our efforts beside anyone's efforts to deal with the current situation, to have a way to address the humanitarian concerns, to have a way to address the inevitable problems of warfare in which civilians get caught up. I would remind that it is because the United States pressed and worked with Israel to get the airport open so that humanitarian flights could get in that that got done. It is because

the United States pressed for humanitarian corridors, that that got done. The Israelis don't want to see a humanitarian crisis, so we have been really pressing that case. It is also the case that I am here, as Andrea noted, in pretty difficult and dicey circumstances, because I do believe that it is best to try to address these issues face-to-face with the parties, and to see what we can achieve.

Now, I think the Security Council will take this up. We want the Security Council to take it up soon, and we want the Security Council to take it up with as much concrete progress toward a real cease-fire, as is humanly possible by the time that that meeting takes place. So, I will continue to work, and work and work, that is what we can do. If there is any way humanly, to accelerate our efforts, I would do it. But we are already doing really what is of the human limitation to try to get to an end of this conflict.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Prime Minister Olmert?

SECRETARY RICE: I have not spoken with the Prime Minister, I was speaking with the Defense Minister when this happened. I understand that there is an Israeli Cabinet meeting, and I will be speaking with the Prime Minister immediately after that Cabinet meeting.

Thank you.

2006/T19-12

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