

Division for Palestinian Rights
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine**
 Monthly media monitoring review
March 2009

Monthly highlights

- Donors pledge some \$4.5 billion at Gaza reconstruction conference in Sharm el-Sheikh. ([2 March](#))
- UN Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People opens in Cairo. ([10 March](#))
- Palestinian factions meet in Cairo for reconciliation talks. ([10](#) - [19 March](#))
- Nine countries agree on a plan of action to stop Gaza arms smuggling. ([13 March](#))
- Prominent jurists urge Secretary-General and Security Council to investigate violations of international law during Gaza conflict. ([16 March](#))
- Prisoner exchange talks suspended, Israel arrests 10 prominent Hamas leaders. ([17 March](#))
- Israeli Defence Minister Barak approves construction of a new Hebron settlement. ([24 March](#))
- Israeli military investigators dismiss soldiers' testimonies of intentional killing of civilians during Gaza war. ([31 March](#))

1

The Chinese Special Envoy for the Middle East, Sun Bigan, reiterated in a meeting with PA President Abbas that the Chinese Government was ready to contribute to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and to the Middle East peace process. (*Xinhua*)

Participants in the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza wanted the funds they would donate for post-conflict recovery to be channelled through existing channels including those of the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union (EU), and through the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development, rather than creating new ones, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. (*AFP, Haaretz*)

The World Bank said it would urge international donors to channel assistance for rebuilding the Gaza Strip through the PA, EU PEGASE, the World Bank trust fund, or certain independent groups with a proven track record. In a [report](#) to be presented at the donor conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, the World Bank stressed the importance of continued donor funding for the PA budget, 50 per cent which benefits the Gaza Strip. (*www.worldbank.org*)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair paid a brief visit to a school in the Gaza Strip run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). "I wanted to come to hear for myself first-hand from people in Gaza, whose lives have been so badly impacted by the recent conflict," Mr. Blair said at the school in Beit Hanoun. "Unless we get a viable basis for opening up Gaza sustainably, we will be back in the same situation again," he added. (*AFP, The Guardian*)

2

Palestinian militants fired a rocket into the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon from the Gaza Strip. No injuries or damage were caused in the attack. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli soldiers arrested and beat a 20-year-old Palestinian at the Hawara checkpoint near Nablus, witnesses said. Israeli forces also detained two young men from Nablus and the Balata refugee camp. Palestinian security sources said several Israeli military jeeps had entered the city and suburbs and raided half a dozen civilian homes. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

"I would like to hold in spring, in Europe, a summit to re-launch peace," said French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Sharm el-Sheikh, calling on Israel and the Palestinians to set up a time-frame leading up to the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside Israel by year's end. "We all want sustainable peace, and we are here to help the Palestinian people and to draw a political track," he said. (*AFP, Ma'an News Agency*)

The International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza began in Sharm el-Sheikh. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak opened the conference, telling the representatives of 75 States that the Gaza Strip was an inseparable part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. PA President Abbas said: "We are all conscious that the reconstruction and development efforts will remain insufficient, powerless and threatened in the absence of a political settlement." (*AFP, Ma'an News Agency, Japan Economic Newswire*)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [speaking](#) at the opening of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference, called for immediate action to reconstruct Gaza and establish a lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. "The people of Gaza cannot and should not wait any longer," he said. "The situation at the border crossings is intolerable. Aid workers do not have access. Essential commodities cannot get in ... there is no concrete or steel to build homes or shelters," he added. (*UN press release SG/SM/12120-PAL/2113*)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [told](#) the Sharm el-Sheikh conference: "Our pledge of over \$900 million, designed in coordination with the Palestinian Authority [...] will deliver assistance to the people of Gaza and the West Bank." US State Department spokesman Robert Wood said

that a third of the funding, \$300 million, had been earmarked for the reconstruction of Gaza. (AFP, Reuters, www.state.gov, Xinhua)

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi called for "the Palestinians and the Israelis to form national unity Governments that can reach compromise."

He added, "We are meeting to collect enough money to rebuild Gaza, and Europe will play a role in that. Italy will pay \$100 million," as he reiterated his call for a "Marshall Plan" for the Palestinian economy. (Ma'an News Agency)

Japan would offer a total of \$200 million to help reconstruct the Gaza Strip, Japanese State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Shintaro Ito said in Sharm el-Sheikh. (Japan Economic Newswire)

The European Commission pledged € 436 million in aid to the Palestinians at the Sharm el-Sheikh conference. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA))

The Gulf Cooperation Council announced that it had earmarked \$1.6 billion for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. (Emirates News Agency)

Following are excerpts from the [conclusions by the Chair](#) of the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt:

Participants expressed their concern that an understanding on a prolonged period of calm in Gaza could not be reached till present. They expressed their support for the ongoing efforts by Egypt to consolidate the current fragile ceasefire and to establish the necessary prolonged calm.

Participants underscored the importance of achieving Palestinian national reconciliation consistent with Arab League resolutions and voiced their support for the efforts exerted by Egypt to this end. They considered the achievement of both the calm and the reconciliation as necessary requisites for any successful reconstruction effort undertaken by the donor community.

...

Many participants emphasized the importance of access for the success of recovery and reconstruction efforts. In this context, they called for the immediate, unconditional and sustained re-opening of Israel's crossings with the Gaza Strip to allow for the movement of people and goods into Gaza in a manner that enables the Palestinians to effectively regain normalcy in their daily lives and rebuild what has been destroyed. Participants stressed the crucial need to break the cycle of construction and destruction in Gaza, and demanded that Israel fully respect its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law and desist from targeting or damaging the civilian and economic infrastructure of Gaza or taking any action that negatively impacts the collective livelihood of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

...

Participants welcomed the Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza, which represents the coordinated response of the Palestinian National Authority and its local and international partners to the destruction sustained by the Palestinians in Gaza. They recognized that the Plan will be explicitly linked to the priorities outlined in the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) which was launched at the December 2007 Paris donors conference. They stressed that it will form the basis for mobilizing the resources and efforts of the international community and donors in response to the needs presented by the Palestinian National Authority for 2009 and 2010.

To this end, participants pledged an approximate total of \$4,481 billion covering the next two years. They committed themselves to start disbursing these pledges as quickly as possible in order to rapidly impact the daily lives of the Palestinians.

Participants expressed their intention to channel their assistance for the Plan through the single Treasury Account (STA) as well as through existing international and regional mechanisms and funds, namely, the European Commission's PEGASE, the World Bank Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) trust Fund, the Islamic Development Fund and the UN Consolidated Appeals Process. They welcomed the EU readiness to put the PEGASE mechanism, which provides targeted support for specific recurrent costs of the Palestinian Authority, for private sector recovery and development of public investment, at the disposal of the international donor community. ... (Egypt State Information Service)

Israel partially opened its Kerem Shalom and Karni crossings with the Gaza Strip for humanitarian aid, PA Ministry of the Economy official Nasser As-Sarraj said. Mr. As-Sarraj told Ma'an News Agency that Israel would allow 110 truckloads to cross through Kerem Shalom, including 47 for UNRWA, and other international organizations. (Ma'an News Agency)

Another 3,458 Palestinian would be legally permitted to live in the West Bank following Israel's acceptance of the family reunification applications submitted on their behalf by the PA, Hussein al-Sheikh, head of the Civil Affairs Department, said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum urged the participants in the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza to "deal with the legitimacy [of Hamas] ... Bypassing the Palestinian legitimacy that exists in Gaza is like walking to the wrong address ... to hinder the reconstruction." (DPA)

Israeli forces demolished two Palestinian houses in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan. (AFP, Reuters)

Israel's Ministry of Housing and Construction was planning to build at least 73,300 new housing units in the settlements that would nearly double the number of settlers in the West Bank, according to Peace Now. (www.peacenow.org.il)

On his first visit to Gaza, the Secretary-General's Special Humanitarian Envoy, Abdul Aziz Arrukban, met with aid agency officials to discuss better ways of bringing in relief supplies, and with Gaza residents to assess how much aid they were actually receiving. "The borders are still closed and goods and building materials still can't enter," said Mr. Arrukban. (IRIN)

3

Israeli forces used heavy artillery fire against farmers east of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip. No casualties were reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli warplanes bombed the smuggling tunnels between the Gaza Strip and Egypt in what area residents said were at least seven strikes. An Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman confirmed that the Air Force had been carrying out strikes in the southern Gaza Strip. Palestinian medics said six people had been injured. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency)

Two Palestinians died in hospital of wounds sustained during the recent Gaza conflict, raising the death toll to 1,455. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces seized nine Palestinians across the West Bank overnight. (Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Israeli Air Force jets bombed six tunnels in the Gaza Strip near the border with Egypt and three more the following day. Gaza medical officials reported that seven people had been hurt in the attack. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces detained 13 Palestinians from Nablus, Ramallah, and Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

Fatah [released](#) the names of members assigned to the five committees set up to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation: on transitional Government formation, on issues of reconciliation, security, elections, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Each will include three Fatah and three

Hamas affiliates. Fatah leader Azzam Al-Ahmad said that the committee on Government would discuss the shape of the transitional body with a view to holding elections on 25 January 2010. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told a joint news conference with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in Jerusalem: "We happen to believe that moving towards a two-State solution is in Israel's best interests" and promised the US would be "vigorously engaged" in its pursuit. (*Reuters*)

4

Israeli forces stormed the northern West Bank refugee camp of Jenin and the nearby town of Arraba, Palestinian security sources said. Soldiers also ransacked several homes. Israeli forces raided the town of Jit, east of Qalqilya. The soldiers stormed a number of houses there in search of "wanted" Palestinians, local sources reported. Soldiers closed entrances to the northern West Bank village of Haris, west of Salfit, arresting a young Palestinian. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Khaled Kharb Khalad Shaalan, a senior commander in the Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, was killed and his second-in-command, Hamzia al-Najah, was critically injured in an Israeli air raid as they drove through the Jabalya refugee camp near Gaza City, the Brigades said in a statement. Medics said five bystanders had also been wounded in the raid. An IDF spokesman confirmed the air strike, saying it had "targeted and killed" Mr. Shaalan. (*AFP*)

A Palestinian teenager was seriously wounded when Israeli soldiers opened fire against demonstrators near Hebron, a source at a hospital in Hebron said. Mahdi Abu Ayash, 16, was hit in the head when the soldiers fired live and rubber bullets to break up a demonstration by stone-throwing Palestinians, according to the source. (*AFP*)

Israeli troops arrested Hussam Al-Ruzza, a high-ranking leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, at the Hawara checkpoint south of Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli authorities began evacuating the Jbara military checkpoint, south of Tulkarm, in the northern West Bank. Israeli officers told local residents that there would be an alternative plan for entrance through an iron gate erected nearby. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton promised vigorous and personal involvement in the Mideast peace efforts and criticized Israel's plan to demolish 88 Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem as "unhelpful and not in keeping with the obligations entered into under the Road Map." Mrs. Clinton also displayed strong public support for PA President Abbas. The PA is the "only legitimate Government of the Palestinian people," she told a news conference, standing next to Mr. Abbas in Ramallah. "If there is to be a unity Government that includes Hamas, then we would expect that Hamas would comply with the principles as set forth by the Quartet," Ms. Clinton said. "[Those principles] are the same: that Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel, and agree to abide by prior PLO commitments," she added. "In the absence of Hamas agreeing to the principles that have been adopted by such a broad range of international actors, I don't see that we or, anyone, could deal with Hamas." (*AFP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Because of the actions taken by the Israeli military in Gaza and at West Bank checkpoints, PA Chief Negotiator Ahmad Qureia said negotiations with Israel were frozen until there was a major shift in Israel's policies. He said that the decision also stemmed from the Jerusalem Municipality's "assaults" on Palestinian residents there, which he called unprecedented. Mr. Qureia said for negotiations to continue, Israel's "policies of aggression, siege and settlement expansion" must come to an end first. There must be guarantees for Israeli commitments, especially by the US, he added. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Theo-Ben Gurirab, met with Ahmed Fathy Sorour, the Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament, in Cairo. The two discussed the crisis in the region and the destruction in Gaza. Mr. Gurirab informed Mr. Sorour of the findings of his visit to Gaza the previous day, and said it was important to speak with all parties, and particularly those who had been elected by the people to represent them. He shared with Mr. Sorour his thoughts on activities the IPU could undertake, with the help of its member Parliaments, in support of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Mr. Sorour underscored the importance of carrying out fact-finding missions to Gaza to establish the truth so that justice could be upheld and those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law could be brought to justice. Mr. Gurirab subsequently travelled to Amman, where he met with the Speaker of the Parliament of Jordan, Abdulhadi Majali. The two leaders had a long-ranging discussion on the imperative need to return to the one central objective of achieving peace in the region. He was to leave the following day for Ramallah where he would continue his discussions with Palestinian leaders and members of Parliament. (www.ipu.org)

The UK Embassy in Israel cancelled plans to relocate to new offices in Tel Aviv because one of the owners was believed to be involved in building settlements in the West Bank, embassy spokesperson Karen Kaufman said. "The UK Government has always regarded settlements as illegal, but what has happened in recent months is that we are looking for ways to make a difference on this issue," she said. (*AP*)

"Israeli authorities opened the Kerem Shalom crossing, south of the Gaza Strip, to let in 110 truckloads of aid sent by the UN and other organizations, as well as 35 truckloads of food products imported by the Gazan private sector, 10 truckloads of fruit imported by the private agricultural sector", said Nasser Sarraj, Assistant Undersecretary of the PA Ministry of National Economy. Mr. Sarraj added that the Karni crossing in eastern Gaza was also opened in order to let in 70 truckloads of wheat and fodder. Furthermore, the Nahal Oz crossing would be opened to deliver 450,000 litres of industrial diesel fuel needed to power the electric station, as well as 170 tons of cooking gas. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Donations collected from Arab countries to rebuild the Gaza Strip would be channelled through Arab funds, said Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

5

An Israeli air strike in the Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip killed three Islamic Jihad members and wounded two others, medics said.

An IDF spokesman said the raid had targeted a group who had fired an anti-tank shell at an army unit on the Israeli side of the border. (*AFP, Haaretz*)

Six Qassam rockets fired from the Gaza Strip struck open areas in Israel's western Negev region, causing no injuries or damage. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces overnight seized five Palestinian civilians in the West Bank towns of Sa'ir and Beit Ummar, north of Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian militants fired a Grad rocket that struck a synagogue in the Israeli town of Netivot, causing light damage to the building but no injuries.

The Israeli Air Force, shortly after the attack, struck four smuggling tunnels in the southern Gaza Strip, the army said. (*Haaretz*)

A bulldozer driven by a Palestinian crushed a police car and hit a bus on a busy Jerusalem highway before police and a taxi driver shot him dead in what Israel called a "terrorist" attack. A police source identified the driver as an Arab construction worker, but said it was unclear whether he had come from East Jerusalem or the West Bank. No Palestinian militant groups claimed responsibility for the incident. (*Reuters*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, meeting with IPU President Theo-Ben Gurirab, in Ramallah, stressed that halting illegal Israeli settlement activities and incursions into the West Bank was a condition that "cannot be ignored to restore credibility to the peace process and end the occupation." Mr. Gurirab said the world should pressure Israel to "comply on halting settlement activities," and lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip "in a way that would enable the PA to implement its plans to reconstruct." The IPU President also met with Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, who insisted that both parties to the conflict should be held to the same standards, including by recognizing the two-State solution. (*Ma'an News Agency, www.ipu.org*)

Researchers at the World Health Organization, other UN agencies and universities in the United States, Norway, France and the West Bank, said in a [two-year study](#) that Israeli security restrictions and Palestinian mismanagement had created a health crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as mental health cases were up sharply and infant mortality rates failed to improve. The study also showed a health system struggling to deal with a rising population and growing demand. Many Palestinians found it hard to obtain care for chronic conditions such as heart disease and cancer, and tuberculosis rates rose by 58 per cent between 1999 and 2003 while mental disorders were up by a third, according to the study. (*Reuters, www.thelancet.com*)

6

Palestinian militants fired a rocket into southern Israel. (*DPA*)

The Jerusalem bulldozer attacker was identified as Mir'i Radeideh, 26, a resident of the East Jerusalem suburb of Beit Hanina. Riad Malki, PA Minister for Foreign Affairs, called the incident a "traffic accident" and demanded an investigation into why Mr. Radeideh had been shot and killed. (*AP, Ma'an News*)

Israeli settlers blocked a road west of Hebron in protest at Israel's reported intention to remove military checkpoints. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli military said that it arrested two Palestinians during overnight raids in the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A senior PA official told *Ynetnews*: "The world will understand that this Israeli Government opposes the peace process and its current form in principle and ideologically, and therefore we anticipate that this is the best timing for the world to intervene and force Israel to implement the agreements." He added: "This is the time to show that the Palestinians are the peace camp." (*Ynetnews*)

Israel closed its embassy in Mauritania, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced, after being requested to do so by Mauritania's Government. Mauritania had frozen its ties with Israel in protest against its Gaza offensive. (*DPA*)

No peace agreement can be secured with the Palestinians "if a significant part of Jerusalem is not the capital of the Palestinian State," Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said during a public appearance before northern Israel residents. (*Ynetnews*)

7

Israeli warplanes bombed a car in the northern Gaza Strip killing one member of the Islamic Jihad and wounding two others. Warplanes also bombed an alleged munitions warehouse and two tunnels in the Salah al-Din ("Philadelphia") corridor. Local officials said the warehouse was empty, there were no injuries. Later, Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigades launched two mortar shells at the Israeli military base at Kissufim. (*Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad submitted his resignation to President Abbas, saying he wanted to pave the way for the establishment of a unity Government. President Abbas reportedly asked Mr. Fayyad to stay on until definitive results emerged from the reconciliation talks in Cairo. Mr. Fayyad expressed his full support for President Abbas' efforts to achieve reconciliation with Hamas that would "reunite" the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, "marathon" talks were to re-start the following day. Nabil Sha'ath, heading the Fatah delegation, said he had talked to a number of Hamas officials and was under the impression that talks would likely lead to positive results. (*AP, BBC, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post*)

8

Palestinians fired four homemade projectiles at the western Negev. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Residents of the villages of A'qraba and Kherbet At-Taweel, both south of Nablus, said Israel planned to demolish six homes and a mosque in their villages. Israeli military officials had handed out demolition orders to the residents. A local official said A'qraba was surrounded by the settlements of "Gatit," "Ma'leh Afraim," "Itamar" and "Majdulin," and 90 per cent of the land had been confiscated. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas official Ismail Radwan said that they would not join a unity Government headed by Salam Fayyad. His announcement came in response to reports that the US administration had demanded that Mr. Fayyad head the new Government as a precondition to recognizing such Government and providing financial aid. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

9

Israeli forces detained two Palestinians from the northern West Bank villages of Fahma and Iqaba. The villages of Al-Fari'a, Tammun, and Az-Zababda, near northern Jenin, were raided overnight. No arrests had been reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Security forces of Hamas in Gaza detained several Islamic Jihad activists and made them sign an agreement not to fire rockets at Israel. (*AFP*)

PA President Abbas welcomed the planned visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the West Bank. The Pope is planning to visit Amman, Israel and the West Bank from 8 to 15 May. He will spend four days in Jordan and will head to Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel opened all three commercial crossing points of the Gaza Strip, allowing a fraction of the waiting food products, humanitarian aid and fuel purchased for Gaza residents. Israel partially opened the Kerem Shalom crossing to let in 110 truckloads, 38 of which were humanitarian aid for UN and other agencies. Some 62 trucks were destined for the private sector, bearing frozen meat, flour, sugar, rice, beans, cooking oil, diapers, and blankets. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli military imposed a three-day closure on the West Bank, banning Palestinians from entering Israel during the Purim holiday. The military said exceptions would be made for Palestinians needing urgent medical care and in other humanitarian cases. (*AP*)

PA Prime Minister Fayyad met with Indian officials in his office at Ramallah, who informed him that India would deliver \$10 million in funding to the PA. India pledged the contribution during the recent International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt on 2 March. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli human rights group Yesh Din said Israel was violating international law by exploiting rock and gravel from West Bank quarries for its own benefit. In a petition filed to Israel's Supreme Court, the group said that 75 per cent of the rock and gravel removed from 11 West Bank rock quarries was transferred to Israel. The group called on a halt to all Israeli mining activity in the West Bank. The mining activities were "illegal and executed through brutal economic exploitation of occupied territory for the economic needs of the State of Israel, the occupying power," according to the statement. (*AP*)

A European Union internal report said that Israel was damaging the prospects for peace with Palestinians by grabbing land and violating civil liberties in East Jerusalem. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, a Jerusalem-based non-governmental organization, obtained a copy of the document drafted by the heads of EU member State embassies in Tel Aviv on 15 December 2008. The report also said, "Israel is, by practical means, actively pursuing the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. House demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem are illegal under international law, serve no obvious purpose, have severe humanitarian effects and fuel bitterness and extremism." (www.euobserver.com)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in [a report](#): "The generous pledges of international donors at the Sharm el-Sheikh conference for Gaza last week have yet to be implemented on the ground as the overall humanitarian situation in Gaza remains

unchanged. Access remains the single most important condition for the advancement of the relief and rehabilitation efforts. ... During the reporting period, there was little improvement in the types and quantities of materials being held up or delayed to enter Gaza.” (www.ochaopt.org)

10

Israeli forces detained 10 Palestinian civilians across the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian militants in Gaza fired two Qassam rockets into Israel's western Negev. No casualties or damage were reported. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces have imposed a curfew on the southern West Bank town of Beit Ummar and arrested more than 30 Palestinians. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli military patrols stormed Tulkarm, witnesses said. Soldiers reportedly opened fire in the city and in the Tulkarm refugee camp, as well as fired tear gas canisters and percussion grenades. Clashes erupted between the Israeli forces and Palestinian youths, who pelted them with stones. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian factions began a meeting in Cairo aimed at forming a national unity Government and resolving major disputes between Hamas and Fatah.

Senior delegations from Hamas and Fatah and smaller factions were due to start work in five reconciliation committees that they had agreed to form last month. The talks were expected to last for 10 days. (*AFP*)

British MP George Galloway donated thousands of dollars and dozens of vehicles to the Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip after arriving in an aid convoy. “We are giving you now 100 vehicles and all of their contents, and we make no apology for what I am about to say. We are giving them to the elected Government of Palestine,” Mr. Galloway said at a press conference in Gaza City. He said he personally would be donating three cars and £25,000 (\$35,000) to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. (*AFP*)

A Palestinian family who lost 29 members in Israel's recent offensive in Gaza filed a law suit against the Israeli leadership, demanding some \$200 million in compensation, Israeli media reported. The Samouni family, from the southern Gaza City suburb of Zaytoun, filed the suit at a court in northern Israel against Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Army Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi. (*DPA*)

The United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People opened in Cairo. The theme of the Seminar, held under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, was “International response to the humanitarian and economic needs of the Gaza Strip”. Speaking in the opening were Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee Zakaria El-Agha, member of the Executive Committee of the PLO and Abed Rahman Salah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, among others. (*UN press release GA/PAL/1115*)

11

Two Palestinians were injured when Israeli aircraft shelled tunnels in Rafah. Meanwhile, Israeli Navy shelled Tal As-Sultan. No injuries were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Two rockets fired from the Gaza Strip struck the western Negev. The rockets landed in open areas, causing no casualties. (*Haaretz*)

An Israeli soldier was injured and hospitalized when a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a military jeep southeast of Tubas. Palestinian security sources and witnesses said that Israeli soldiers immediately responded by opening fire on a group of young Palestinians. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A senior Hamas leader and member of its delegation to Cairo, Ismail Radwan, insisted Hamas was serious about unity and hoped talks in Cairo paved the way for a broader conciliation with Fatah. Mr. Radwan insisted in a statement on the need to release Hamas detainees in the West Bank in order to strengthen the work of the conciliation committees. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas official Mushir al-Masri said any new government must be formed on the basis of the results of the 2006 parliamentary election, which, he said, should allow Hamas to form the Government and pick the prime minister. (*Reuters*)

Fatah would not object if Hamas forms a new Palestinian Government so long as there is cooperation with Fatah and the Government recognizes the PLO, explained Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO. Mr. Erakat said: “The Fatah movement was founded to liberate Palestinians, and Ahmad Yassin, who founded Hamas, had the same view to liberate Palestine. This is the major goal for all [Palestinian] factions.” (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel prevented a Swedish trade union delegation from entering the Gaza Strip. Tareq Al-Hindi, the secretary of the General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions, said that the delegation had received the needed permits from Israel. Al-Hindi said they had planned to discuss cooperation between trade unions, labour law, safety, and women's involvement in the union movement. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli authorities denied Palestinian lawmaker Khalida Jarrar passage to Jordan en route to Cairo to participate in the Palestinian dialogue being held there. Ms. Jarrar was supposed to represent the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the elections committee in Cairo talks. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Malaysia organized a Palestinian Awareness Exhibition, which will tour the country. The exhibition was part of Malaysia's effort to condemn Israel's brutality in Gaza while at the same time conveying deep sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinians, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim said after the opening of the event. “I will propose to the Cabinet that the Malaysian Government become the pioneer in creating awareness on Israeli atrocities at the international level,” he said. (*Xinhua*)

The EU Presidency [urged](http://www.eu2009.cz) the Israeli authorities to prevent the demolition of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem. (www.eu2009.cz)

12

Firas Atta, 17, was shot dead by Israeli soldiers who said that he had thrown a Molotov cocktail at a car near an Israeli settlement north of Ramallah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli army said that it had detained 16 Palestinians during overnight raids throughout the West Bank. Another Palestinian was seized at a checkpoint north of Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli military said that it had bombed smuggling tunnels in the southern Gaza Strip. No damage or injuries resulted from those attacks. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

According to PA security sources, Israeli forces raided the villages of Yabud and Yamoun while firing into the air. No injuries or arrests were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

“Regarding the report about rockets fired from Gaza, we emphasize that these rockets have no link to any of the Palestinian resistance groups and are being fired at the wrong time,” Hamas-controlled security services said. “We emphasize also that the security agencies are following up who is behind such acts.” (*AP*)

Israeli sources reported some progress in talks with Hamas in Egypt towards a prisoner swap. Israeli envoy Ofer Dekel had travelled back to Egypt in a sign that negotiations had resumed. Meanwhile, Hamas officials in Cairo said a decision could be made, and there would be no need for further “rounds of consultations”. (*Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak pledged to work together to close Arab ranks and promote Palestinian reconciliation. “The two leaders underscored the need for achieving pan-Arab solidarity in such a manner that serves the supreme Arab interests and enables Arab States to face the common challenges,” according to a joint communiqué at the end of a visit by Mr. Mubarak to Aqaba. Mr. Mubarak briefed King Abdullah II on the outcome of the mini-Arab summit on 11 March in Riyadh which was attended by the leaders of Egypt, Saudi

Arabia, Syria and Kuwait. "The two leaders stressed the importance of achieving a Palestinian consensus which is key to the accomplishment of Palestinian people's aspirations and regaining their legitimate rights, foremost the setting of an independent Palestinian State over their national soil," the communiqué also said. (DPA)

The PA had released 45 Hamas detainees who had been held in its West Bank jails. Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar had earlier said failure to release all the detainees would lead to the collapse of the reconciliation talks. (The Jerusalem Post)

Israel had agreed to free all 450 of the prisoners demanded by Hamas in exchange for IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, but the dispute now revolved around Israel insisting that several dozen of the released prisoners be exiled abroad and that the others be released to the Gaza Strip rather than the West Bank. Hamas has thus far only agreed to the deportation of a handful of prisoners, and has conditioned this on the consent of the prisoners to be deported. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported that 1,434 people, including 960 civilians, 239 police officers and 235 fighters were killed during Israel's recent 22-day offensive on the Gaza Strip. The report also said that throughout the course of the assault, Israeli forces used excessive, indiscriminate force, in violation of the principle of distinction, which "obliges all parties to the conflict to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants." The group also said it would publish a list of the identities of those killed and would post them on its web site in Arabic, with an English version to follow. (Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, www.pchrgaza.org)

13

A rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in an open area east of the Gaza Strip. There were no reports of casualties or injuries. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli soldiers arrested two Palestinians from their homes during early morning raids in the West Bank. The Israeli military said one person had been arrested in Bethlehem and another in Jenin. Both were taken to detention centres. (Ma'an News Agency)

Experts from the United States, Canada, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway had agreed, while meeting in London, on a plan of action to stop the flow of weapons to Gaza by methods such as interception at sea, information sharing and diplomatic pressure, a senior British diplomat said. (Reuters)

Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum said PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's name had not come up in the Cairo negotiations on the next Palestinian Government but that Hamas would not necessarily oppose Mr. Fayyad as head of the Government. Mr. Barhoum, however, said there were other "alternatives", such as independent billionaire businessman Munib Al-Masri. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said he would not review his decision to resign by the end of March regardless of the outcomes of Cairo talks.

He said, "There will be no constitutional void" and stressed his full trust in President Abbas, who would "take the right decision" and appoint an appropriate representative in his stead after 1 April. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel would open the Kerem Shalom crossing into the Gaza Strip to allow the passage of 79 truckloads of supplies while other crossing points would stay closed. Some 19 of the trucks were designated for UNRWA and other international organizations. (Ma'an News Agency)

14

Two rockets fired from the Gaza Strip slammed into open fields in southern Israel overnight, without causing any casualties or damage, the Israeli military said. (AFP)

Palestinian reconciliation negotiators in Cairo signed an agreement to prohibit fighting and the use of weapons to settle internal disputes, a Palestinian academic said. Palestinian factions were deadlocked on the composition and obligations of a unity Government, officials said. "The committees have done all their work with the exception of the two difficult issues," said senior Fatah official Nabil Sha'ath, the faction's representative in the committee tasked to agree on a unity Government. "The difficulties are, first, what kind of commitments the Government ought to give to gain international acceptance and, second, whether [the Government] is composed of [the factions] or independents" he said. (AFP)

Egypt sent official invitations to Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal and Islamic Jihad leader Ramadan Shallah to join the Cairo reconciliation talks. The two leaders were expected to arrive later in the week. (DPA)

A delegation of British parliamentarians met with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Syria. Labour Party member Clare Short told reporters that the aim of the visit was to urge the British Government to talk to Hamas in the interest of peace. (AP)

Outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Olmert dispatched two senior negotiators, Shin Bet Chief Yuval Diskin and Ofer Dekel, to Egypt in a last-ditch effort to conclude a prisoner exchange deal with Hamas. (AFP, Reuters)

15

Security and rescue officials said that two Israeli police officers had been killed near the settlement of "Masu'a" in the northern part of the Jordan Valley as their car came under fire by Palestinians. (AP)

Three young Palestinians were injured by Israeli bullets after the army invaded the village of Beit Rima, northwest of Ramallah. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel returned 300 confiscated weapons to the Palestinian Authority, according to the head of the PA Department of Civil Affairs. (Ma'an News Agency)

"The peace negotiations with the Palestinians made a big step forward and were more interesting and deeper than any talks held in the past by any Government, including Ehud Barak at Camp David," Prime Minister Olmert said. "We were ready to sign a peace deal but the Palestinians unfortunately did not have the courage to do so," he said. A spokesman for PA President Abbas, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, denied this. "What Olmert says is entirely false; the proposals did not include conditions for the creation of an independent Palestinian State on all Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel did not present a single map and not a single serious position that could lead to a real peace on the basis of two States," he said. (AFP)

A joint poll carried out by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research and Hebrew University of Jerusalem in early March, found that 54 per cent of Palestinians supported attacks on civilians inside Israel compared to 42 per cent who opposed them. The poll found that 66 per cent of Israelis thought the Gaza offensive had been halted too soon. Israeli researchers found that 30 per cent of Israelis supported re-occupying Gaza and another 38 per cent supported limited raids to combat rocket fire from the territory. (AFP)

The secretary-general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, arrived in Gaza to observe first-hand the destruction caused by the Israeli assault. He expressed the hopes of the OIC to stimulate and support aid and reconstruction that other institutions had been unable to provide. (Ma'an News Agency)

"The Rafah border will be open on [18 March], for two days, in order to allow the passage of Palestinian students and the sick who are stuck on the Egyptian side," MENA news agency reported, quoting an unnamed Egyptian official. (AFP)

The Israeli army announced that it would turn the contested settler-occupied building in Hebron into a military post rather than return it to its original Palestinian owners. (Ma'an News Agency)

16

Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lawrence Cannon, said: "Canada is proud to be a partner in the Gaza Counter-Arms Smuggling Initiative, which aims to develop an effective framework for international cooperation to stop the flow of weapons to Gaza. ... We look forward to working with our partners on the plan of action to coordinate diplomatic and legal cooperation and intelligence-sharing to stem the flow of arms, ammunition and related material into the Gaza Strip," Mr. Cannon said. His office announced that Canada would host the next meeting of experts for the initiative in May in Ottawa. (www.international.gc.ca)

Israeli settlers injured a young Palestinian woman during attacks in Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian groups meeting in Cairo, had agreed that elections for the PA Presidency and the Palestinian Legislative Council would be held on 25 January 2010. (*Haaretz*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II said, after meeting with Portuguese President Aníbal António Cavaco Silva in Lisbon, that Jordan and Portugal would launch joint diplomatic efforts to push for an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians over the next few months. (*DPA*)

Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy told reporters: "We will be ready to do business as usual, normally with a Government in Israel that is prepared to continue talking and working for a two-State solution. If that is not the case, the situation would be different." (*AP*)

The United Arab Emirates Red Crescent (UAERC) and UNRWA signed two agreements for relief activities in refugee camps in Lebanon. UAERC pledged \$5 million to rehabilitate 343 shelters in Bourj El Shemali camp in South Lebanon. UAERC will also contribute \$1 million towards 149 temporary housing units for refugees affected by the Nahr el-Bared conflict. (www.unrwa.org)

Sixteen prominent jurists wrote an [open letter](#) to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the members of the Security Council urging the UN to launch an investigation into "all serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by all parties to the [Gaza] conflict." The letter argued that the UN investigation "should not be limited only to attacks on UN facilities." The signatories, who include Antonio Cassese, First President and Judge of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Head of the United Nations International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, Richard Goldstone, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and Chairman of the UN Independent Inquiry Commission on Kosovo, and other prominent figures, argued that they "have seen at first hand the importance of investigating the truth and delivering justice for the victims of conflict and believe it is a precondition to move forward and achieve peace in the Middle East." (*AP, Reuters, AFP, www.amnesty.org.nz*)

Human Rights Watch said that the European Union should press for a comprehensive and impartial international inquiry into allegations of serious violations of international law committed by Israeli and Palestinian forces in Gaza and southern Israel. In a [letter](#) sent to EU Foreign Ministers attending the General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting in Brussels, Human Rights Watch said: "failure to push for accountability in Gaza would undermine the credibility of both the EU as a global voice for international justice and international justice institutions themselves." (www.hrw.org)

Palestinian Legislative Council member Jamal Al-Tirawi, said in a letter smuggled out of the Israeli prison where he had been held since 2007, that the Israeli Government should release all Palestinian female detainees without conditions. Mr. Al-Tirawi estimates that Israeli forces had detained at least 9,000 women "over the past decades." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

17

A Palestinian was wounded after Israeli warships opened fire at civilians and fishermen in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli troops detained six Palestinians in the village of Silwad, east of Ramallah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

US Assistant Secretary of State David Johnson and PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad formally [opened](#) the Presidential Guard Training Centre in Jericho. The State Department said that the centre, built with its assistance in the amount of \$10.1 million, had a training capacity of 700 officers and enlisted men, including accommodations and dining facilities, waste water treatment, parade grounds, classrooms and an obstacle course. (www.state.gov)

The first round of intensive reconciliation talks between Hamas, Fatah and other factions concluded in Cairo. Yasser al-Wadai, an independent academic who took part in the talks, said that "a number of outstanding cases had been settled. We are closer than ever to reaching a reconciliation ending this black era of the Palestinian history." Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoom said that the remaining controversial issues had been referred to a higher committee for further discussion. "Only the higher coordination committee, which is made up of the leaders of the factions' delegations and Egyptian mediators, remained in Cairo to discuss the remaining files," Mr. Barhoom said. (*DPA*)

Egypt sent Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman to Washington, D.C. to seek a relaxation of the US conditions for the recognition of a Palestinian unity Government including Hamas. Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit was also in Brussels for talks with officials including EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. (*AFP*)

Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman met with US Middle East envoy George Mitchell and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman. An Egyptian official, who declined to be named, said that Mr. Suleiman was in Washington to seek a softer stance on Hamas so that it could participate in an internationally-recognized Palestinian unity Government. (*AFP*)

Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado said in a letter to EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana "During 2008 we did not witness relevant progress on critical issues like settlements or movement and access. [...] On settlements, for example, we have seen precisely the opposite. This situation can not last longer, as we risk losing the moderate Arab camp. Today, we hope to see a halt of the settlement expansion and a clear commitment to the peace process, or we will need to reassess this question [of EU ties with Israel]. This needs to be clearly said to our Israeli friends." (*AFP*)

The situation in the Middle East was the main [focus](#) of debate at the three-day fifth plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) held at the European Parliament in Brussels. In a recommendation, EMPA backed the Arab Peace Initiative and efforts to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation. Parliamentarians also called on a freeze on all settlements, including those already in existence. On Gaza, they took the view that violations of international humanitarian law and the use in civilian areas of banned weapons should be the subject of an independent inquiry and they called on Israel to shoulder its responsibilities and contribute to the reconstruction of Gaza. (www.europarl.europa.eu)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert rejected Hamas' terms for a prisoner swap. "We have been generous in our conditions and we will not free other prisoners than those we agreed to release," Mr. Olmert told a news conference after his envoys had briefed the Cabinet upon their return from two days of talks in Egypt. "There will be no expansion of the opening of the Gaza crossings until they release Gilad Shalit," a senior official said after the Cabinet meeting. Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said he hoped Israel would resume talks on the prisoner exchange. (AFP, Reuters, www.pmo.gov.il)

18

Israeli forces seized seven Palestinian teenagers in the Askar refugee camp in Nablus after storming dozens of houses. Also, Israeli soldiers seized an 18-year-old Palestinian at the Hamra checkpoint in the northern West Bank and raided several villages in the area. (Ma'an News Agency) The Chair of the Gazan Committee for Entry of Goods, Raed Fattuh, said Israel had opened the Kerem Shalom crossing to allow 115 truckloads to enter the Gaza Strip to deliver food and other supplies. (Ma'an News Agency) Egypt opened its border crossing with the Gaza Strip for the second time in two months to allow medical aid and Palestinians to enter the territory. Border official Ghazi Hamad said that more than 40 trucks carrying medicine and mineral water had crossed into Gaza so far, and 120 Palestinians stranded in Egypt had also been able to cross. The border would remain open until the following day. (AP)

19

The IDF confirmed that troops had arrested 10 senior Hamas officials during overnight operations in the West Bank. Among those detained were four Hamas lawmakers, a university professor and former Hamas Deputy Prime Minister Nasser As-Sha'er. An army statement said, "These men have been the leaders of the ongoing effort to restore the administrative branch of the Hamas terror organization in the region, while attempting to increase the power and influence of Hamas." Meanwhile Hamas spokesperson Ayman Taha said if Israel worsened the conditions of the group's prisoners, captive IDF soldier Gilad Shalit would be treated likewise. More than 40 Hamas members from the West Bank were already in Israeli jails. (AFP, BBC, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak promised to investigate reports that soldiers recounted on how some troops opened fire too hastily and killed Palestinian civilians during the recent Gaza assault, believing that they would not be held to account under relaxed rules of engagement. One account told of a sniper killing, at close range, a mother and children whom troops had told to leave their home. Soldiers also reported large-scale destruction of Palestinian property. The soldiers gave their accounts at a get-together with students at a military preparatory institute. The institute's director, Danny Zamir, said that the soldiers pointed to an atmosphere of "unbridled contempt for, and forcefulness against the Palestinians."

An infantry squad leader said, "The climate in general, from what I understood from most of my men ... was the lives of Palestinians ... are far less important than the lives of our soldiers. So, as far as they're concerned, they can justify it that way." (AP, BBC, Reuters)

In the wake of the Defence Minister Barak's promise to investigate reports of soldiers killing civilians during the recent Gaza assault, it was reported that Maj. Gen. (res.) Ami Ayalon, former head of the Navy and Shin Bet, stated that "the IDF has neither the tools nor the culture to carry out inquiries into ethical dilemmas ... The IDF never knew how to investigate such things, and in recent years, the problem has become more difficult because there are more such incidents." (Haaretz, www.timesonline.co.uk, Ynetnews)

Palestinian groups adjourned reconciliation talks in Cairo without a deal on a national unity Government. The groups had earlier agreed to hold presidential and legislative elections by January 2010 but remained deadlocked over the issue of a unity Government that would prepare for the polls.

They had agreed that the new Government would be called a "coalition Government." Talks would continue after the Arab Summit at the end of March. (AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

During a visit to the village of Khirbet Al-Litwani, south of Hebron, Quartet Representative Tony Blair said Palestinians living in "Area C" of the West Bank under full Israeli control were denied basic rights afforded to Israeli settlers. "The reason for coming here today is to draw attention to the fact that without a new and different system applying in Area C, it is very hard for Palestinians to enjoy a standard of living so that they can enjoy and develop their land as they should be able to develop it," he said. He noted that Palestinians were "obviously denied the right to live decent lives," while "around there are outposts where people do have a decent standard of living." (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas threatened to harm Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in the wake of Israel's arrest of 10 of its leaders in the West Bank. Hamas official Osama Hamdan said that his delegation had not left Cairo and was prepared to resume prisoner exchange talks. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

The Israeli Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, said that he would press forward with a plan to raze the entire Palestinian neighbourhood of Al-Bustan in East Jerusalem and to "relocate" more than 1,000 of its residents to make way for a park. The spokesman for PA President Abbas stated that "there was an unprecedented escalation ... against the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem through the destruction of tens of houses and the issuance of demolition orders against dozens of others." He added that "this is an infuriating campaign by the municipality to 'Judaize' the city and expel the Palestinian population." (Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk stated in an interview that Israel's military assault on densely populated Gaza appeared to constitute a grave war crime. He added that "if it is not possible to [distinguish between military and civilian targets], then launching the attacks is inherently unlawful and would seem to constitute a war crime of the greatest magnitude under international criminal law." Mr. Falk also stated that: "The denial of people's right to flee the war zone as refugees may also constitute a crime against humanity". In his view, "the aggression was not legally justified and may represent a 'crime against peace'; he suggested that the Security Council might set up an ad hoc criminal tribunal to establish accountability for war crimes in Gaza. He also called for the establishment of an independent experts group to probe possible war crimes committed by both Israeli forces and Hamas and to gather eyewitness testimony as well as explanations from Israeli and Palestinian military commanders. Mr. Falk was scheduled to present his [report](#) to the Human Rights Council at its tenth session on 23 March 2009. (Haaretz, Reuters, www.ohchr.org, Ynetnews)

20

Two women sustained bruises after being attacked by the Israeli army during the weekly protest against the separation wall in Al-Ma'sara village south of Bethlehem. Two Americans and one Palestinian were injured with rubber-coated steel bullets during a peaceful demonstration in the village of Bil'in. In yet another incident, six persons were injured during a rally in the village of Ni'lin, one of them critically. An American protestor, Tristan Anderson, was expected to suffer from severe disabilities as a result of being critically wounded at the site the week before. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Two Palestinians died in separate incidents when tunnels on the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt collapsed. (Ma'an News Agency)

A young Palestinian from Nablus, who had planned to carry out a poisoning attack at an Israeli restaurant in Ramat Gan, was sentenced to six years of imprisonment and two years' probation. (Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

A group of at least 15 armed Israeli settlers accosted villagers from Deir Istiya, south-west of Nablus, and prevented them from reaching their land.

Israeli troops intervened by forcing the Palestinians to remove their clothes and then turning them away from their land. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

According to one Israeli army commander's account published today, rabbis in the Israeli army had told battlefield troops participating in the Gaza offensive in January that they were fighting a 'religious war' against gentiles. The IDF Military Academy's director confirmed the published accounts that there was a "huge gap between what the [IDF] Education Corps sent out and what the IDF rabbinate sent out" ... and that the rabbinate's message implied "this [Gaza] operation was a religious war". (*Reuters*)

A senior Palestinian official who had participated in national reconciliation talks in Cairo stated that all Palestinian factions had left Cairo in preparation for the resumption of a third round of dialogue during the third week of March. The outstanding unresolved issues were said to be related to the programme of the national unity Government; elections; and reform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel announced that it would open one crossing in order to allow the delivery of 80 truckloads of humanitarian aid and commercial goods into the Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Jerusalem police announced that they would prevent the staging of the Palestinian Culture Festival on 21 March, meant to declare the city as the Capital of Arab Culture for 2009. The police said that they were determined to enforce the law which prohibits any event organized and funded by the PA within Jerusalem's municipal jurisdiction. (*Haaretz, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

21

Two Palestinian children were killed by an explosive charge left by the Israeli army during the Gaza offensive in the Al-Zaitoun neighbourhood in the Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

22

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoom announced that there would be a new round of talks between Palestinian factions in Cairo this week aimed at ending a factional split. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak issued an order against demolishing Israeli homes built on Palestinian land in the "Ofra" settlement in the West Bank, saying that the matter must be investigated before such action was taken. The order was made in response to a petition submitted last June by five residents of the nearby Palestinian village of Ein Yabrud and the Israeli human rights groups Yesh Din and B'Tselem, demanding that the High Court of Justice instruct the State to evacuate the settlement. (*Haaretz*)

23

Israeli ships opened fire at houses in the Al-Mawassi coastal area in western Khan Yunis, eyewitnesses said. No injuries were immediately reported. Meanwhile, explosions were heard in the Al-Farahin area in the east of the city, when an Israeli unit attempted to invade the area, residents said. Palestinian fighters reportedly clashed with soldiers. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian medical sources reported that an 18 year-old Palestinian fisherman was seriously wounded when the Israeli navy shelled an area north-east of Gaza City. (*Ma'an News Agency, IMEMC*)

Israeli troops detained three Palestinians during a raid in Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Deputy head of the PLO in Lebanon Kamal Medhat and three others were killed in a roadside bombing near the Mieh Mieh refugee camp in southern Lebanon, security sources said. They were there to pay condolences to the family of a Fatah leader in the camp killed in clashes over the weekend.

PA President Abbas condemned the killing. (*AFP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Physicians for Human Rights - Israel said its new report "gives room for concern that during the operation in Gaza, Israeli soldiers repeatedly acted in violation of the army's code of ethics, the medical code of ethics, and basic human values. These actions suggest repeated violations of the international law regarding the treatment of the ill and the wounded and the protection of medical personnel." Such incidents reflected a general demonization of Palestinians, a process that "reached its nadir when soldiers in an army that flaunts its morality declined to help evacuate injured civilians and trapped families, when soldiers acted in a trigger-happy manner as they opened fire on ambulances, medical installations and medical personnel," according to the report. (*AFP, AP, Reuters, www.phr.org.il*)

A Palestinian Embassy would open in Caracas, Venezuela on 27 April, PA Minister for Foreign Affairs Riad Malki said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The chair of the committee coordinating imports into Gaza, Raed Fattuh, confirmed that Israeli authorities had opened the Kerem Shalom and Karni crossings to allow in goods and aid. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert had told the US and the EU that Israel would lift restrictions on food items, such as pasta and cheese, entering the Gaza Strip, diplomats said. The Obama Administration had protested these and other seemingly random Israeli restrictions. In one case, Israel blocked for weeks a World Food Programme shipment of chickpeas, used to make hummus, according to the agency. Western diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Mr. Olmert's office had informed Washington and Brussels that all types of food would be allowed into the Gaza Strip. (*Reuters*)

Israeli forces opened the Qusin-Nablus gate to allow Palestinians to move freely after five years of closure. There were, at the time of writing, 13 military checkpoints, 39 earth mounds, 12 road blocks, and 26 road gates preventing Palestinians from moving freely in the Nablus area alone. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz signed four agreements with several UN agencies, pledging more than \$20 million in assistance to implement urgent humanitarian relief programmes and humanitarian projects to help Gazans. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli soldiers had used an 11-year-old Palestinian boy as a human shield during the war in the Gaza Strip, and they ordered the boy to walk in front of soldiers being fired on in the Gaza neighbourhood of Tel al-Hawa and enter buildings before them, said the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy. Ms. Coomaraswamy said the incident on 15 January 2009 was a violation of Israeli and international law. It was included in a 43-page [report](#) to the Human Rights Council, compiled by a group of UN Special Rapporteurs, and was just one of many human rights atrocities during the three-week Gaza war. Ms. Coomaraswamy accused Israeli soldiers of shooting Palestinian children, bulldozing a home with a woman and child still inside, and shelling a building they had ordered civilians into a day earlier. (*AP, www.ohchr.org*)

24

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired a rocket at southern Israel, causing no casualties or damage, the IDF said. (*AFP*)

A 27-year-old Palestinian was injured by Israeli fire at the Hawara military checkpoint in the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli troops handed interrogation orders to several Palestinians in Tulkarm. The notices came following raids on several houses in the Allar and Sayda villages north of the city. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The next round of Cairo conciliation talks would begin in the first week of April, said Rabah Mhanna, member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) political bureau and head of the Gaza office. He said that the PFLP would press the issue of proportional representation for the next elections. He noted that all factions, except Hamas, had approved of the method and hoped an agreement could be reached. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a press conference at the White House, US President Barack Obama said that "the status quo [in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict] is unsustainable."

"It is critical for us to advance a two-State solution where Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in their own state, with peace and security," he added. "We're moving in the right direction." (*Haaretz, Ynetnews*)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak approved a plan to construct a new settlement on Palestinian lands in Hebron. The plan includes 440 homes to host nearly 2500 settlers. The first part of the plan legalizes the 50 homes already built by the settlers in the "Senseneh" outpost. It also includes annexing a Palestinian agricultural area to be part of the "Eshkolot" settlement, although the settlement itself is three kilometres away. (*IMEMC*)

Paul McCartney officially joined the board of the [One Voice](#) movement, a grassroots organization aiming at publicizing the views of what it calls the "overwhelming but silent majority" of moderates in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

25

Israeli naval crews detained four fishermen near the Rafah coast in the southern Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

IDF soldiers arrested three Palestinians found with a pipe bomb south-east of Nablus. They broke into and searched dozens of homes in the areas of Nablus, Ramallah and Hebron. They arrested 17 Palestinians from the Qotna village near Ramallah; Beit Furik near Nablus; and Beit Surif near Hebron. (*Haaretz, IMEMC*)

Israeli forces bulldozed the agricultural lands of Wadi Ash-Shajjina, a village near Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Incoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his Government would be a "partner for peace with the Palestinians." "If we have a strong Palestinian economy, that's a strong foundation for peace," he told an economic conference in Jerusalem. "This means I will negotiate with the PA for peace." Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for PA President Abbas, said the incoming Israeli Government "must be committed in an explicit manner, without ambiguity, to the two-State solution." Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, said that "any Israeli Government that accepts the two-State solution, negotiates with us on all core issues without exception and agrees to stop settlement activity will be a partner... It's time for deeds from both sides as far as their commitments are concerned, not words." (*AP, Haaretz, Reuters*)

Knesset member Ophir Paz-Pines (Labour) criticized the Likud-Israel Beitenu plan to build 3,000 housing units in the "E1" area between East Jerusalem and "Ma'aleh Adumim". Mr. Pines said the plan, reported by *Israel Army Radio*, would "finally bury any chance of a peace deal with the Palestinians and lead to a crisis in relations with the US." (*The Jerusalem Post*)

One hundred and sixty trucks of aid and commercial goods were to pass through the Kerem Shalom and Karni crossing points between Gaza and Israel. The crossings had been closed the previous day. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Gaza Strip non-governmental organizations and mental health professionals were reporting increased incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault against women in Gaza. "According to our staff, and through clinical observation, there was increased violence against women and children during and after the war," said public relations coordinator for the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme Husam al-Nounou. "We can attribute this to the fact that most people were exposed to traumatic incidents during the war, and one way people react to stress is to become violent." (*IRIN*)

Several human right groups had filed a High Court petition against Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter and Central Command Chief Maj.-Gen. Gadi Shamni, demanding they refrain from holding administrative Palestinian detainees in prison facilities located outside the West Bank. The petition had also asked the Court to order that arraignment hearings for detainees residing in the West Bank not be held in facilities or courts outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (*Ynetnews*)

The Security Council held an open debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe [briefed](#) the Council. He said that despite international engagement and support, very little concrete progress had been made on key issues outlined in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), including the establishment of a sustainable ceasefire regime in Gaza, unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance, opening of the crossings, prevention of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, and intra-Palestinian reconciliation. (*UN press release SC/9626*)

The Israeli army unlawfully fired white phosphorus shells over densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip during its recent offensive, Human Rights Watch said in its new report. The group said the army had known the munitions threatened the civilian population but had "deliberately or recklessly" continued to use them until the final days of the operation in violation of the laws of war. The Israeli army had announced an internal probe, the results of which had yet to be made public. (*Reuters, www.hrw.org*)

26

Israeli soldiers invaded the Askar and Balata refugee camps east of Nablus, broke into several homes and arrested seven youths. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces stormed and searched several houses and then herded at least 150 local youths, with their heads covered with sacks, into a local school in the Haris village, north of Salfit, where they were roughed up and questioned. Israeli troops detained a PA police officer and raided a house in Beit Sahur near Bethlehem. They confiscated mobile telephones and arrested four men in Aqaba village south of Jenin before dawn. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli troops closed the main eastern entrance of Madama village, south of Nablus, by piling a several foot high dirt mound on the road. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Militants from the Saraya Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Islamic Jihad, clashed in Gaza with Israeli soldiers near the border fence at Al-Qarrara near the town of Khan Yunis. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

An IDF infantryman serving in the Givati Brigades was demoted and placed on probation for firing at the legs and wounding an unarmed Palestinian woman, in contravention of orders issued by his superiors to fire warning shots at the ground. The shooting incident took place near the ruins of the former Israeli settlement of "Netzarim" in the Gaza Strip, in January 2009 during "Operation Cast Lead". (*Haaretz*)

Incoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicated that as soon as he was sworn in, he planned to hold a series of consultations regarding his Government's policy towards the Palestinians. His first act to this end would be the establishment of an administrative body with the task to promote economic peace with the Palestinians. The body's mandate would include activities vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority and the international community, in particular the Quartet Special Envoy Tony Blair, with a view to advancing some 25 economic initiatives in the West Bank. The previous day, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, Gabriela Shalev, had assured the Security Council that the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians would continue to move forward. (*Haaretz*)

Incoming Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu stated that he did not expect to come under pressure from the United States over the Middle East peace strategy of his Government. He said that any such pressure was "irrelevant, since our ties with the US are so strong". Mr. Netanyahu played down any notion of friction with US President Obama, saying that the United States and Israel shared mutual interests and values and that the ties between the two allies were especially deep and strong. He sidestepped a question on whether he backed Palestinian statehood. (*AP, Haaretz, Reuters, Ynetnews*)

In an exchange of telephone calls between Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and Israel's President Shimon Peres on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty, President Mubarak stated that Egypt was exerting maximum effort to advance talks for a ceasefire in Gaza as well as the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. It had been reported the previous day that negotiations regarding the prisoner swap had resumed. Palestinian sources reported that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman had sent an envoy to Israel on 24 March 2009 for that purpose. (*Haaretz, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

It was revealed that an unauthorized settlement outpost, considered illegal even under Israeli law, was benefiting from State funding. It was established that a road was being built in the settlement of "Eli" near Nablus, towards the east in order to connect it with the "Hayovel" outpost. (*BBC*)

An Israeli court sentenced to six months of administrative detention Hamas-affiliated former Deputy Primer Minister Nasser Ad-Din Ash-Sha'er and Adnan Asfour, both from Nablus, who had been arrested the previous week. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The head of the Detainees Society in Tubas, in the West Bank, informed that prisoner Hassan Youssef Dabak from the Tayasir village in the northern West Bank had been so badly beaten by Israeli soldiers in Ofer prison that they broke his pelvis. The improperly healed fracture caused him great pain when he tries to walk. Mr. Dabak was arrested on 12 April 2008 and transferred from Jericho to Ofer prison during the winter. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli army announced that an internal investigation had found that 1,166 people had been killed during the recent Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip, of whom 709 were Hamas gunmen and just fewer than 300 were civilians, including 89 children aged 16 or under and 49 women. According to the IDF, it was unclear whether an additional 162 men who died were militants or civilians. The army did not provide a list of the dead but indicated that its information was based on intelligence sources and that the names had been thoroughly cross-referenced and examined. Palestinians say that 1,417 people were killed, including more than 900 civilians. The figures were contained in a briefing paper issued by the public affairs department of the Israeli Embassy in London on 25 March. (*Reuters, Ynetnews*)

The Human Rights Council had [adopted](http://www2.ohchr.org) five resolutions on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. (*www2.ohchr.org*)

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Israeli soldiers stationed outside the southern Gaza Strip opened fire at civilian homes and agricultural land. Damage was reported but there were no injuries. Also, soldiers stationed at the Kissufim military camp, east of Al Qarara in the southern Gaza Strip, opened fire at a number of homes and farmland in the area. (*IMEMC*)

Palestinians fired an anti-tank missile at an IDF force moving along the Gaza border fence south of the Karni crossing. There were no reports of damage or injury. (*Ynetnews*)

European Commission President José Manuel Barroso said in a message to Israeli Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu: "The European Commission is looking forward to working with the new Israeli Government in pursuit of a common agenda... It stands ready to assist and support you in your search for peace, prosperity and security for the people in Israel and the region, based on the vision of two States living side by side in peace and prosperity." Mr. Barroso's spokesman noted: "There are certain benchmarks that we would like to see followed in this relationship." Another Commission spokesman, Amadeu Altafaj Tardio, said that EU Foreign Ministers would be discussing developments in Israel, and the fallout from its war in the Gaza Strip. "There is a new administration, there is a new Prime Minister, and this has to be considered. Let's see what the intentions of the future Government are going to be on a number of issues. ... One of them is [humanitarian] access to Gaza. Restrictions are still there, and we will have to see what the policy of the new administration is," he told reporters. (*AFP*)

US diplomats assessed Israeli settlement activity at the "E1" corridor near Jerusalem. A spokesperson for the US consulate in Jerusalem, Micaela Schweitzer-Bluhm, confirmed the visit had taken place as part of "ongoing observation of activities in the area." An assessment prepared by the diplomats would be sent to Washington. (*Reuters*)

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Israeli forces entered the Tulkarm refugee camp and the nearby town of Deir Al-Ghusun in the northern West Bank. While in the area, troops handed out a number of interrogation orders to residents, according to witnesses. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli soldiers used tear gas to disperse some 50 demonstrators in Hebron's Old City protesting against the settlements and Israeli closures in the West Bank, according to the Israeli army and Palestinian witnesses. Palestinian youths threw stones at Israeli troops. Video footage from the scene showed Israeli soldiers pushing demonstrators, including Israeli Arab lawmaker Mohammad Barakeh. Demonstrators said the protest was part of several events aimed at marking Land Day, the annual protest against Israel's appropriation of Arab-owned land in Galilee. (*Reuters*)

A draft declaration drafted by Arab Foreign Ministers ahead of the Arab League Summit at Doha said that the Arab initiative would not be on the table for ever. "Arab commitment to this initiative is dependent on an Israeli acceptance of it," the declaration stated. It reiterated, however, that the peace initiative remains "a strategic Arab choice to achieve just and comprehensive peace." (*AFP*)

In an article published in *The Washington Post*, PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that the Middle East peace process might not survive if the new Israeli Government led by Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu failed to accept a two-State solution, with the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State based on 1967 borders. He said, "The peace process lives on borrowed time. With its credibility at stake, it will not survive another round of failed negotiations — and neither will the two-State solution." (*The Washington Post*)

Israeli Border Police seized 208 Palestinians living without permits in Israel and deported them to the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli police reported that undercover Israeli police officers disguised as Palestinians were attacked by settlers in the West Bank. Police spokesman Dany Peleg said that the settlers threw stones at the officers and damaged a Palestinian vehicle, while two others attempted to run the police over near an outpost in the West Bank. (*AFP*)

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The Saraya Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, said in a statement that they had fired two explosive devices at an Israeli Special Forces unit attempting to invade Khan Yunis and claimed that they inflicted casualties among the soldiers. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Four Palestinians from the Al-Lubban village north of Ramallah had been detained, according to the Israeli military. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a security briefing to the Israeli Cabinet, Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin said that since Israel concluded its three-week offensive against the Hamas leadership in January 2009, 45 tons of raw materials for the production of weapons had been smuggled into the Gaza Strip, along with 22 tons of explosives, dozens of rockets, mortar shells, and anti-aircraft missiles. He said that other organizations were pursuing plans to kidnap Israeli soldiers and carry out terror attacks from Sinai into Israel as well as in the West Bank. (*Haaretz*)

In Damascus, Gen. Omar Kinawi, Egypt's Deputy Chief of Intelligence, held talks with leaders of Palestinian factions ahead of renewed unity talks next week in Cairo, Palestinian officials said. Mr. Kinawi invited the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine to the inter-factional talks expected to resume on 1 April 2009. (*AFP*)

Ahead of his visit to the Czech Republic, Israel's President Shimon Peres gave assurances that Israel's new Government would keep up peace talks,

following the Czech Republic warning on 27 March 2009 of "consequences" if the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu did not accept the principle of a two-State solution of the Middle East conflict. "The new Government is bound by the decisions of the preceding one," Peres told *Israeli Public Radio*, adding there would be continuation of peace negotiations. (AFP)

In an interview aired on the Nazareth-based radio station *Al-Shams*, Hamas official Ayman Taha said that negotiations over a prisoner swap in exchange for detained IDF soldier Gilad Shalit would not remain open forever. Mr. Taha denied reports of progress in the negotiations saying that, with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's term almost completed, there was no chance for a deal before the next coalition took its place. Israeli Cabinet Secretary Ovad Yehezkel, said that a prisoner exchange deal with Hamas was all but impossible before the current Government steps down. (Haaretz)

The Israeli Cabinet voted in favour of imposing sanctions on Hamas prisoners held in Israel in an effort to pressure the organization to release Cpl. Shalit, held captive in Gaza since June 2006. Justice Minister Daniel Friedman recommended stripping the Palestinian prisoners of all privileges not anchored in Israeli or international law, such as education, television, newspapers and radio. Hamas' military wing spokesman, Abu Obeida, said the decision "exposes Israel's distress", adding that it would "only strengthen the organization's insistence on the conditions set for Shalit's release." Mounir Mansour, the head of the Palestinian Prisoners Committee, said these steps would not expedite the release of Shalit, adding that the Hamas prisoners were considering taking extreme measures in response, including an unlimited hunger strike in every Israeli prison. The prisoners' families had also voiced readiness to take steps to identify with the prisoners. (Haaretz)

Palestinian Authority Minister of Prisoners' Affairs Ashraf Al-Ajrabi said that Israel planned to deport six Palestinian political prisoners when they finished their sentences at the Ashkelon prison, north of Gaza. According to Mr. Al-Ajrabi, Israel had not found a country that was willing to accept the men. He said the PA was negotiating with Israel in an attempt to stop the deportation. (Ma'an News Agency)

According to Rawhi Fattuh, chair of the Gazan Committee for the Entry of Goods, Israel partially opened the Kerem Shalom crossing to let in 115 truckloads, 11 of them filled with humanitarian aid from the United Nations and other agencies. In addition, 104 trucks destined for the Gazan private sector, carrying perishable foods were allowed in. The Nahal Oz crossing was opened to allow the transfer of 200 tons of cooking gas and 450,000 litres of industrial diesel fuel to run the power-generating station in Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

Adnan Hindi, an official in the Jenin refugee camp, said that the director of a youth orchestra had broken rules by taking the orchestra's 18 boys and girls to a concert last week near the Israeli city of Tel Aviv to perform in front of Holocaust survivors. Consequently, the orchestra "Strings of Freedom" was shut down. Mr. Hindi said that the orchestra's director, Wafa Younis, had "used the children for political activities." (Reuters)

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Two Palestinian students from Ramallah attending Abu Dis University said that they had been severely beaten for several hours on 28 March by Israeli Border Police at a checkpoint between Jericho and Jerusalem. (MEMC, Ynetnews)

Israel's Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu said his Government would make every effort to reach "a viable peace with all of Israel's Arab neighbours." Mr. Netanyahu made the statement in an address to the Knesset in Jerusalem during a special session marking 30 years since the signing of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty. (Haaretz)

At the Arab League Summit in Doha, Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said, "The deliberate targeting of civilians is just one example of how the Israeli military's ideology is nearing madness". The IDF operation in the Gaza Strip in December and January was marked by "arrogance and recklessness," Mr. Moussa said. He called for Israeli soldiers to be held accountable for what he said were war crimes committed during Israel's 22-day offensive in the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)

At the Summit, Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad said that Syria was still interested in pursuing peace with Israel but the "real aim of Israel's recently elected Government is against peace" and that the composition of the incoming Cabinet was a "clear, unsurprising message to us". (AP)

In a speech delivered at the 21st Arab League Summit at Doha, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said: "I remain gravely concerned about Gaza and about where we stand in the search for an independent Palestinian State. The people of Gaza are suffering and the situation at the crossings is intolerable. The way forward is a durable ceasefire, open crossings, and Palestinian reconciliation. [...] Efforts to achieve this need your united support. It is vital that all those in the region act responsibly to exert what influence they have. The new Israeli Government must allow people and goods to move. It must also freeze settlements, cease unilateral actions in Jerusalem and continue negotiations. I am encouraged that US President Obama has signalled that Middle East peace is a major priority". (UN News Centre)

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Two Palestinian fighters were killed and one Israeli soldier was injured during border-area clashes in the central Gaza Strip. The military wing of Hamas said that it had launched 18 projectiles towards Israeli troops. (Haaretz, MEMC, Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Four rockets from Gaza landed in open fields around Sderot. A woman broke her leg as she and her daughter ran for cover. (Ynetnews)

A 30-year-old Palestinian woman died at a hospital in the Gaza Strip after she was unable to leave Gaza for medical treatment in Egypt. (MEMC)

Israeli forces detained a 21-year-old Palestinian man and a 39-year-old woman at the Jenin refugee camp. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Egyptian authorities announced that they had destroyed six tunnels used to smuggle contraband fuel and food into the Gaza Strip. (AFP, MENA)

Incoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that under his leadership, Israel would continue to work toward a comprehensive peace with the Arab and Muslim world, adding that it would also do everything required to guarantee Israel's security. Addressing a special session of the Knesset, he said that if the PA really sought peace, then "we can achieve it", but warned that it must do its part to fight terror if it is serious about peace. Mr. Netanyahu stated that "we have no wish to rule over another people. We will pursue a realistic route with the honest purpose of ending the conflict." He did not, however, speak of a two-State solution. Mr. Netanyahu outlined his aims for future dialogue with the Palestinians, saying that he believed "in the goal of reaching a permanent agreement" and that all previous attempts to achieve peace were "shortcuts," that only achieved "short-term solutions and more bloodshed". A spokesman for PA President Abbas said that Mr. Netanyahu's statement was "not encouraging". The Israeli settler movement welcomed the new Government. (BBC, DPA, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg stated that an EU-Israel Summit was unlikely to take place in the next three months. "We are not happy with some of the steps of the Israeli Government, namely construction works close to Jerusalem but also access to Gaza, which is today very limited", Mr. Schwarzenberg was quoted as saying. "The new Israeli Government has not raised much excitement either." Senior EU officials had sent messages to incoming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu making it clear that a refusal to adopt the two-State solution meant freezing any upgrade in relations between Israel and Europe. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters)

A Fatah delegation left for Cairo and a Hamas group is set to follow, for talks on forming a national unity Government which were scheduled to open on 2 April 2009. Egyptian officials would meet with Hamas and Fatah in preparation for a wider conference to be attended by all factions. (AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who had submitted his resignation on 7 March effective 31 March 2009, would remain in office until a new interim Government was formed, Palestinian officials said. "We are awaiting the return of the President. He (Fayyad) and the Government will remain until the President decides what he wants to do," PA Minister for National Economy and Telecommunications Mohammed Kamal Hassoneh told

Reuters after the weekly cabinet meeting. (Reuters)

In the [Doha Declaration](#) adopted at the Second Summit of Arab and South American Countries, the Heads of State and Government agreed to “reaffirm the need for the materialization of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people and for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), and the establishment of the independent Palestinian State, based on the 1967 lines, living side by side with the State of Israel, and the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories to the lines of 4 June 1967, including the occupied Syrian Golan and what remained of the Lebanese territories, and the dismantling of the settlements including these in East Jerusalem.” (www.qatar-conferences.org)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said that its survey indicated that “more than 80 per cent of young Palestinians are depressed. ... Depression was more marked in the Gaza Strip, where 55 per cent said they were “extremely” depressed.” It also said, “[69 per cent of those questioned] believe that the use of violence as a means to resolve the conflict is not very helpful, while only 8 per cent believe it is an important tool.” (AFP)

OCHA said in a [report](#): “In addition to limitations on humanitarian deliveries, restriction on imports and exports in general continue to seriously affect the living conditions of the population. The vast majority of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip rely on local farming to produce affordable fresh foods. ... Movement restrictions continue to prevent herders and farmers from accessing areas near the borders. Fishermen stand to lose substantial income as a result of new restrictions that limit fishing to three miles from Gaza’s shores.” (www.ochaopt.org)

UNRWA announced that Turkey had contributed \$500,000 to UNRWA’s Quick Response Plan for Gaza, launched to meet the acute humanitarian and early recovery needs of the refugees there. The donation was formally finalized at a signing ceremony attended by the Deputy Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi and Dr. Ercan Ozer, Ambassador and Consul General of Turkey. (www.unrwa.org, Wafa)

Israel indicated that it would allow 160 truckloads of aid, private sector goods but no fuel into the Gaza Strip, through the Kerem Shalom and Karni crossings. Frozen meat, dairy products, soap, shampoo, flour, sugar, rice, salt, spaghetti, cooking oil, diapers, toilet tissues, blankets, fruit, garlic, eggs and veterinary medicines would transit through Kerem Shalom while wheat and feed would go through the Karni crossing. (IMEMC, Ma’an News Agency)

A senior Hamas official told *Ynetnews* that they were “operating under the assumption that the [Israeli soldier] Shalit issue was going to be put on hold” during Netanyahu’s years in office. In exchange for Shalit, Hamas demanded “the entire list, without names being removed or deportations, except for single names we can agree on, if at all.” (*Ynetnews*)

Some 30 settlers attacked dozens of Palestinian houses on the road between the “Kiryat Arba” settlement and the unauthorized outpost in the Al-Rajabi building in Hebron from which settlers had been evacuated recently by order of the Israeli Supreme Court. They broke windows with their guns and tried to attack the owners. The IDF did nothing to prevent the attacks which lasted several hours. (IMEMC, Wafa)

Israeli troops began fencing in the northern side of Azun village east of Qalqilya in the West Bank. The action effectively separated the village from its agricultural lands, under the pretext that youths from the village were throwing stones at settlers as they drove on the road passing through the area. (Ma’an News Agency)

Palestinian detainees imprisoned in the Ramon prison in Israel appealed to the Red Cross and to human rights groups in order to oblige Israel to stop the body searches practiced against them by Israeli soldiers. (IMEMC)

The Israeli army concluded that no war crimes had been committed during its Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. It dismissed as “hearsay” the testimonies of soldiers who were alleged to have admitted to intentionally killing Palestinian civilians. The army declared that the confessions of soldiers relating to two incidents, one involving the killing of an elderly woman by a rooftop sniper, and another involving the fatal shooting by a sniper of a mother and her two children who had entered a no-go zone, was “purposely exaggerated” and not supported by facts. The Israeli military investigators concluded that the two incidents never took place and that the two young men who had made the allegations had embellished the stories.

Israel’s Military Advocate-General Brig. Gen. Avichai Mendelblit had the previous day instructed the Military Police Investigation Unit to close the investigation. The decision was welcomed by Defence Minister Ehud Barak. (*The Guardian, Haaretz, Times Online*)
