



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

April 2008

Volume XXXI, Bulletin No. 4

Bulletin
on action by the United Nations system and
intergovernmental organizations
relevant to the question of Palestine

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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL CONDEMNS PALESTINIAN ATTACK ON FUEL DEPOT IN SOUTHERN ISRAEL

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 9 April 2008 (SG/SM/11505):

The Secretary-General condemns the terrorist attack today by Palestinian militants against the Nahal Oz depot in southern Israel, in which two Israeli civilian contractors working to supply fuel to the Gaza Strip were killed and others injured.

He is gravely concerned at the prospect of an escalation in violence and, while recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, deplores the reported civilian casualties among Palestinians during Israeli military operations this afternoon. The United Nations calls for the protection of all civilians in the conflict.

II. UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES ISSUE JOINT STATEMENT ON FUEL SITUATION IN GAZA

The following statement was issued on 15 April 2008 jointly by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Children's Fund:

United Nations humanitarian and development agencies working in the occupied Palestinian territory are gravely concerned about the limited fuel supplies in the Gaza Strip, which are having a severe impact upon daily life for the population and UN operations. Israel's announcement that it will resume deliveries of fuel to the power plant is a positive step, but is insufficient to address the severe shortages of fuel used for transport and generators. The current absence of fuel at petrol stations has meant that normal transportation has ceased; many students have been unable to get to school, and many health professionals have been unable to get to hospitals and clinics. There have been difficulties transporting essential items such as food throughout Gaza.

Israel ceased supply of all fuel supplies to Gaza following the attack on the Nahal Oz fuel terminal on 9 April. Prior to that, 3.8 million litres of diesel fuel and 340,000 litres of benzene had been transferred from Israel into Gaza for the month of March. This amount was inadequate to fulfil Gaza's requirements and compares with over 8.8 million litres of diesel and 1.7 million litres of benzene that was supplied a year previously, in March 2007. The Israeli restrictions prompted the Gaza Petrol and Gas Station Owners Association to suspend supplies to protest at the effects of the limitations. As a result, existing stores of diesel and benzene, which are adequate for only two days usage, have not been distributed.

The current situation is a threat to the health and well-being of the population of the Gaza Strip, 56 per cent of whom are children. The work of the United Nations organizations in Gaza has been severely hampered, affecting schools, health facilities and food distribution.

United Nations organizations call for a cessation of all acts of violence, including attacks such as the one on Nahal Oz, and for the immediate resumption of the flow and distribution of fuel supplies sufficient to allow Palestinians to go about their normal daily lives.

III. SECRETARY-GENERAL GRAVELY CONCERNED AT VIOLENCE IN GAZA AND SOUTHERN ISRAEL

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 16 April 2008 (SG/SM/11517):

The Secretary-General is gravely concerned at the escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel today. He condemns the reported civilian casualties among Palestinians, including children, during Israeli military operations, and calls

on Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. The Secretary-General also reiterates his condemnation of rocket fire against Israeli civilian targets. He urges all parties to exercise restraint.

IV. UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPOREUR ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY ISSUES STATEMENT

On 17 April 2008, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, John Dugard, issued the following statement (OHCHR press release 17 April 2008):

The bloodletting in Gaza and, to a lesser extent, the West Bank continues. On Wednesday, 16 April, around 20 Palestinians were killed in Israeli military operations. The majority of those killed were civilians and five were children. On the same day, three Israeli soldiers were killed.

How long is this madness to continue without serious international intervention? It has become clear to many responsible persons with experience of the conflict, both

in Israel and elsewhere, that only direct negotiations or talks between the real parties involved - Israel and Hamas - can stop the killings.

Israel's unwillingness to talk to Hamas is understandable, given Hamas' hostility to the State of Israel. But there is no reason why the United Nations, acting through the Security Council or the Secretary-General, should not intervene and assert its role as mediator. This is a role that the United Nations has traditionally played, even where

one of the parties has been labelled as “terrorist”. It is the responsibility of the United Nations, as the ultimate guardian of human rights and international peace, to open lines of communication between Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and to bring them to the negotiating table. Such a step would also contribute to the advancement of Palestinian national unity - another area which the United Nations has to date failed to address.

The right to life is the most precious and important human right. The United Nations, acting through the Security Council or the Secretary-General, must do its utmost to protect the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. Surely it is not too much to ask of the Security Council, and if it cannot act, the Secretary-General, to protect human life, even if it means talking to a group of which it may disapprove politically.

V. ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL

On 23 April 2008, Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The following are excerpts from the briefing (S/PV.5873):

During the reporting period, efforts to advance the political process have continued through direct bilateral negotiations. There have been major episodes of violence, especially in and around Gaza, and continued creation of facts on the ground in the West Bank. Gaza has also witnessed heightened humanitarian distress, while conditions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have not significantly improved despite continuing efforts.

The bilateral negotiations between the parties, key to the Annapolis process, consist of regular meetings at three levels: between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, between their negotiating teams, and between technical experts. Confidentiality is being maintained. We continue to urge progress towards the shared goal of a peace treaty this year.

During the reporting period, 69 Palestinians, including 15 children, were killed in Israel Defense Forces (IDF)

operations and 95 were injured. Six Israelis were killed by Palestinian militants and 27 were injured.

At least 70 rockets and mortars were fired at Israel or at crossing points in the reporting period. Hamas and other militant organizations also staged a number of attacks against crossing points between Gaza and Israel, which are the only outlets for international humanitarian assistance. A terrorist attack on 9 April on the Nahal Oz fuel depot by Palestinian militants killed two Israeli civilians involved in supplying fuel. On 19 April, Hamas militants conducted an attack using armoured vehicles and explosives against the Kerem Shalom crossing, injuring 13 Israeli soldiers.

Israeli air and ground operations against militants in Gaza intensified following the 9 April attack. There were several instances in which Palestinian civilians were killed in those operations. On 16 April, 12 Palestinian civilians, including

children and a news cameraman, were killed in Israeli action against militants following the killing of three Israeli soldiers.

The Secretary-General continues to condemn rocket or other attacks by militants against civilians and the crossings. Not only do those attacks threaten Israeli civilians; they also cause unacceptable suffering to the civilian population of Gaza and threaten to lead to a wider escalation.

The Secretary-General also condemns civilian casualties in IDF operations against militants. We reiterate the Secretary-General's repeated calls for a cessation of all acts of violence and for all parties to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law. Measures of collective punishment should not be continued.

We are deeply alarmed at the prospects of a further intensification of violence, given the terrible implications for civilians and the threat such conflict would pose to the security of all parties - the Palestinians, Israel and Egypt. We support and encourage Egypt to continue its efforts to achieve calm in Gaza leading to a reopening of crossings, as well as its ongoing efforts to ensure security along the border. We urge all parties to work with Egypt with a sense of urgency and responsibility, and we urge all States in the region with influence to work for calm.

Special Coordinator Serry was in Gaza today, where he conveyed the United Nations concern over the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation.

Prior to the 9 April attack on the Nahal Oz fuel terminal, approximately 65 per cent of the fuel needs of the Gaza power plant were being met by imports. Because of the

attack, Nahal Oz was closed from 9 to 21 April, except for two days. The Government of Israel is now re-examining security mechanisms to ensure the secure delivery of commercial fuel into Gaza. Had Nahal Oz not been able to reopen today, the power plant would have shut down and most areas of Gaza would have experienced increased electricity cuts.

Equally critical are the low levels of fuel to meet transportation needs due to the continued closure of Nahal Oz. Even before the 9 April attack, import levels of diesel and petrol had been significantly reduced, with no petrol imported since 18 March and no diesel since 2 April. Vehicular traffic has effectively been brought to a standstill. The impact of the low import levels of petrol and diesel has been exacerbated by the refusal of the Palestinian Petrol Stations Association to distribute the supply that does exist, in protest against the low levels of imports.

The lack of fuel has also impacted adversely on water and sanitation. Some 15 to 20 per cent of the population now receives water for three to five hours every four days, impacting daily hygiene. Sixty thousand cubic metres of raw and partially treated sewage continue to be dumped daily into the Mediterranean Sea. Student and teacher absences at schools and universities have reached a level as high as 20 per cent, due to the lack of fuel for transport. All classes at Gaza's four main universities were suspended last week. Most fishing vessels are grounded, which will lead to the loss of the sardine season.

Humanitarian agencies are also severely affected. The fuel supplies of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will be exhausted on 24 April

and, in an effort to save fuel, UNRWA has prioritized food distribution, solid waste removal and sewage projects. It has stopped all monitoring activities and, as of 14 April, roughly half of the 1,240 vocational students usually transported by contractors have not been able to attend their classes. As of tomorrow, unless petrol is allowed in, UNRWA will discontinue its food assistance to 650,000 refugees, as well as its garbage collection services benefiting 500,000 Gazans. Another 500,000 Gazans are already living in 12 municipalities without any solid waste management capacity, largely due to the lack of fuel.

Import trucks were allowed through Sufa crossing on 22 April after an attack by Palestinian militants on the Kerem Shalom crossing on 17 April led to its closure. The United Nations has been informed by the Government of Israel that the reopening of a secured Kerem Shalom will take several weeks. Prior to 17 April, the level of truck imports into Gaza had almost doubled in March, but still remained at one third of that of May 2007. Only food, cattle, medical and cleaning supplies are entering on an ongoing basis. Shortages of daily necessities fluctuate, bringing corresponding price increases in accordance with supply and demand. No materials are entering for United Nations humanitarian infrastructure projects. Despite assurances, UNRWA has also not received approval for the import of materials needed for the annual summer games which the Agency facilitates for 250,000 children.

The Rafah crossing was opened briefly on 14 April for the transfer of 24 cancer and cardiac patients to Egypt for medical treatment.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Authority institutions in Gaza continued to come under

the direct control of Hamas, and independent Palestinian human rights groups report concerns over alleged violations of human rights, including denial of legal access to Palestinian detainees. No agreement has been reached on securing the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit or of Palestinian prisoners. The International Committee of the Red Cross has still not been provided access to Corporal Shalit.

On 30 March, following a trilateral meeting between United States Secretary of State Rice, Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad and Israeli Defence Minister Barak, the Government of Israel announced a number of measures to ease conditions in the West Bank. Those measures include, among others, the opening of additional Palestinian Authority police stations across the West Bank; approval for delivery of equipment to the Palestinian security forces; an additional 5,000 permits for Palestinian construction workers in Israel; and approval of measures to facilitate the passage of regional and international business figures to the Palestine investment conference in Bethlehem. We welcome that announcement, note that some progress has been made and strongly encourage full implementation.

The Government of Israel also announced its intention to remove obstacles in the West Bank and subsequently reported that it had removed 61 obstacles. United Nations staff on the ground, through their extensive fieldwork, have found that 44 obstacles have been removed, that six have not been removed, and that there is no evidence of the other 11 having previously existed or of their removal. Of the 44 removed, five were significant obstacles to movement - the other 39 did not appear on the list of 580 previously existing obstacles

identified in the database managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We welcome these removals, but strongly urge further and more substantive progress to ease restrictions, as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, as it is vital to Palestinian economic revival.

Tenders and construction permits for hundreds of housing units in Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory were announced this month. Construction continued in many settlements and on infrastructure such as roads for settler use. The Secretary-General has repeatedly made public his concern that all settlement activity in East Jerusalem or elsewhere in the West Bank is contrary to international law, Security Council resolutions and Israel's obligations under phase one of the Road Map. We are also concerned that Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order.

Construction work on the barrier continued within occupied Palestinian territory, in deviation from the Green Line and contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Restrictions on United Nations operations continued to increase in the West Bank, with the installation of Israeli civilian police at checkpoints, causing significant delays and security concerns to United Nations staff crossing from the West Bank into Jerusalem.

Twenty incidents of violence between settlers and Palestinians were reported in March in the southern West Bank alone, with two Palestinians reported killed.

Palestinian security forces in the West Bank have pursued militants and criminal

elements during the reporting period. Some militants were granted amnesty following the end of a term of probation, pursuant to Palestinian Authority-Israel understandings. A newly trained battalion of Palestinian security forces is expected to be deployed in the period ahead. Efforts to increase national security planning, reform and train security services and strengthen all aspects of the rule of law will need to continue, with support provided by international partners. An international conference to strengthen support in that area is planned for Berlin in June.

Quartet Representative Tony Blair continued to push for concrete measures to improve economic conditions for the Palestinian population. A Palestine investment conference, to be convened by Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad from 21 to 23 May in Bethlehem and supported by Mr. Blair, is aimed at encouraging new investment in Palestinian business.

The full draft of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan is nearly complete. Apart from ongoing projects, the Palestinian Authority has just distributed a preliminary list of new projects to facilitate the implementation of the Plan's priorities.

The Palestinian Cabinet approved the 2008 budget on 31 March. The Palestinian Authority is currently able to fund its recurrent costs, including for June, but will face a deficit of over \$600 million in the second half of 2008. That deficit is due to insufficient budget support commitments, the weakening dollar and the Palestinian Authority's decision to repay public and private sector arrears faster than originally planned. We note the historic levels of financial support being provided by the European Union, the United States and other donors, and we urge others, including

partners in the region who have not yet done so, to meet their Paris pledges as soon as possible. It should be borne in mind that just under half of the Palestinian Authority budget is spent in Gaza.

The League of Arab States held its annual summit in Damascus on 29 and 30 March. We note the expressions of concern over developments on the ground and welcome the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative, which remains a central element in the search for peace in the region. We encourage Arab support for President Abbas's efforts to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel, for Prime Minister Fayyad's efforts to build the institutions of a future Palestinian State, and for Palestinian unity. We continue to believe in the critical importance of close consultation with Arab countries on all issues.

...

Israelis and Palestinians are in the most intensive set of negotiations on final status issues since the breakdown of the political process nearly eight years ago. The significance of this should not be

underestimated, but neither should the grave risks to the process be overlooked.

Quartet principals will meet in London on 2 May to review all aspects of the process launched at Annapolis and the situation on the ground. The Secretary-General will chair that meeting, which will take place in the margins of a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee the same day. The Liaison Committee convenes to assess progress in Palestinian institutional and economic development since the last meeting here in New York last September.

The Secretary-General and Special Coordinator Serry are working with the parties and regional partners and in the Quartet to support the political process, to encourage action to meet commitments and improve conditions on the ground, and to address the grave humanitarian, political and security situation in and around Gaza.

The United Nations continues to work to secure, through negotiations, the full implementation of Security Council resolutions and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

VI. SECRETARY-GENERAL CONDEMNS LOSS OF CIVILIAN LIFE IN GAZA, ROCKET ATTACKS

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 28 April 2008 (SG/SM/11536):

The Secretary-General condemns the loss of civilian life earlier today in Gaza, including the tragic deaths of a mother and four of her children. The Secretary-General calls upon Israel to exercise maximum care and restraint, and reminds the Israel Defense Forces of its responsibilities to protect civilians under international humanitarian law during its military operations.

The Secretary-General also condemns the ongoing attacks and rockets fired today against Israeli targets by Hamas. He calls on Hamas and other militant groups to cease such acts of terrorism. He also reminds them that civilian areas within Gaza should not be used as a base from which to launch its actions.

The mounting loss of civilian life in and around Gaza is deeply worrying and the Secretary-General calls for an immediate calming of the situation.

VII. UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PALESTINE REFUGEES CONVENES IN PARIS

The United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees was held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris on 29 and 30 April 2008, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Following are the Recommendations and Conclusions of the Conference (GA/PAL/1087):

The United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees was convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 29 and 30 April 2008. The Conference was held in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 62/80 and 62/81 of 10 December 2007.

The objective of the Conference was to assess the present situation of Palestine refugees and examine the role of the United Nations in alleviating their plight. The Conference also examined efforts at finding an agreed, just and fair solution to the refugee issue in keeping with relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 194 (III) of 1948, as a prerequisite for resolving the question of Palestine and achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The Conference evaluated the progress achieved since the previous United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees organized by the Committee, held in 2000. Participants noted with grave concern that today, 60 years since the

original displacement of the Palestinians as a result of the Israeli-Arab conflict of 1948, the situation of the refugees, a particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged group, which numbers over 4.5 million, remained as precarious as ever, and the problem was no closer to a solution than it had been in 2000. For six decades now and for several generations, the refugees have remained in exile away from their homes, living in overcrowded camps with inadequate facilities, facing demographic pressures, severe socio-economic constraints and, frequently, dangerous security environments.

The participants expressed particular alarm at the situation in the Gaza Strip, where the refugee-majority population has seen its already meagre living deteriorate further due to a crippling Israeli blockade and routine military operations. The participants called for an immediate and unconditional lifting of the Israeli sanctions imposed on the Gaza Strip. They held Israel fully responsible for the welfare and protection of the refugees in the Palestinian territory it continued to occupy, including the Gaza Strip

The participants also expressed their support for the rebuilding of Nahr Al Bared refugee camp which was destroyed in the summer of 2007.

As the participants analysed the various practical approaches to resolving the issue, they stressed that a durable solution to the Palestine refugee problem, and by extension to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole, could only be achieved in the context of their inalienable right of return to the homes and property from which they had been displaced. The participants underscored the abiding relevance of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine embodying this principle, and of the Arab Peace Initiative.

The participants noted that the right of return of refugees, which is a fundamental and widely acknowledged humanitarian and human rights principle, did not diminish with the passage of time, and was equally applicable to the Palestinians displaced as a result of the 1967 hostilities as it was to the Palestine refugees of 1948. The various refugee resettlement and compensation schemes advanced over the years only supplemented but never substituted for this inalienable right of Palestine refugees.

The participants examined the broader political context surrounding the refugee problem. They expressed strong support for the Israeli-Palestinian political process resumed in late 2007 at Annapolis, where the parties committed themselves to meaningful and ongoing negotiations with the intention of concluding an agreement by the end of 2008. At the same time, they expressed the view that any final Israeli-

Palestinian peace agreement must encompass a just and fair solution to the Palestine refugee question.

The participants were of the view that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility as a custodian of international legitimacy and uphold the rights of Palestine refugees until the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects. The participants expressed their sincere gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its important and valuable work aimed at sensitizing international public opinion to the ongoing plight of the refugees, and for its role as a catalyst for efforts aimed at promoting a search for a just and lasting solution to the refugee issue, such as the current Conference.

The participants expressed their gratitude to States, intergovernmental organizations, such as the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union, and the European Union, and to civil society organizations, which remained unwavering in their support for the refugees' rights over the years and provided material support to alleviate their conditions.

The participants emphasized the continuing responsibility of the United Nations and its agencies for the relief and protection of Palestine refugees. The pivotal role played by UNRWA in this endeavour was particularly highlighted and emphasized. The participants noted the growing demand for UNRWA assistance and services, especially in light of the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and called on the donor community to redouble

its efforts and provide vital support to meet the refugees' immediate and longer-term development needs.

The participants also welcomed the outcome of the Paris Donors' Conference and the generous assistance pledged by the international community to the Palestinians to underwrite the peace process and jump-start the Palestinian economy, while calling

on the donors to give priority to the refugees' critical needs in that context.

The participants expressed appreciation to Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, for extending assistance in the preparations for the Conference, as well as for making available the conference facilities for this occasion.
