

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

Monthly highlights

- In a speech at Cairo University, President Obama calls for settlements to stop. ([4 June](#))
- UN Asia and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine opens in Jakarta. ([8 June](#))
- Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu sets preconditions for a Palestinian State. ([14 June](#))
- Israel releases former PLC Speaker Abdel-Aziz Dweik. ([23 June](#))
- Arab Foreign Ministers say normalization with Israel contingent on complete halt to settlements. ([24 June](#))
- G-8 meeting in Trieste calls for direct peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians in 2009. ([26 June](#))
- The Quartet affirms its determination to seek a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. ([26 June](#))
- Fatah and Hamas begin sixth round of talks. ([28 June](#))

I

Commander of the US Central Command, Gen. David Petraeus, said that resolving the Palestinians' struggle for self-determination was "very central" to his work as commander of US forces in the Middle East and elsewhere, in an interview with the *Al-Hayat* newspaper. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Egypt rejected a US proposal for Arab States to gradually normalize ties with Israel, even before it withdrew from territory occupied in 1967, according to news reports. The US proposal, which would begin with allowing Israeli planes to fly through Arab airspace, came up during a White House meeting that included the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Ahmad Aboul Gheit, and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Mr. Aboul Gheit told the newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat* that Arab States insisted on concrete action on Israel's part before normalizing relations. (*Haaretz*, *Ma'an News Agency*)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had been considering easing Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip to allow in supplies for some Western-funded rebuilding projects, Israeli and Western officials said. As part of the review of the Gaza policy, Mr. Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak had been considering a United Nations proposal for the Organization to oversee projects that were given a green light from Israel to ensure that Hamas would not be able to seize rebuilding materials, diplomats said. "Instead of having a list of what can go in, is it possible to have a list of what can't go in?" one official quoted Mr. Netanyahu as asking. (*Reuters*)

The US would be more open to raising objections about Israel's settlement policies in the OPT than during previous administrations, President Barack Obama told *National Public Radio*: "I think there have been times where we are not as honest as we should be about the fact that the current direction, the current trajectory, in the region is profoundly negative, not only for Israeli interests but also US interests". He said that the US had a constant belief in the possibilities of negotiations that would lead to peace, adding "I've said that a freeze on settlements is part of that." (*Haaretz*)

Prime Minister Netanyahu briefed the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset about his recent meeting with President Obama at the White House. Mr. Netanyahu had said Israel could not "freeze life" in settlements, according to a participant who spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was closed. The Prime Minister was quoted as saying that "there are reasonable requests and unreasonable requests." (*AP*, *Ynetnews*)

The representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Ossama Kanaan, said that the Palestinian Authority (PA) so far had only received \$328 million of the \$1.5 billion in donor assistance needed to meet its budget in 2009. To offset the shortfall in donor funds, the PA had been forced to borrow from private banks, but now it was close to reaching its borrowing limit. "Donors have to act urgently to disburse the money, otherwise we'll have a big problem," said Mr. Kanaan. Donor assistance had surged in March to \$178.7 million, but had dropped to only \$25.7 million in May, the IMF said. PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said in a statement that his Government had taken out \$530 million worth of bank loans to meet its obligations. He said the PA faced a "suffocating financial crisis", but that he would still be able to pay public workers by 7 June thanks to the bank lending. (*Reuters*)

Settler violence had erupted near the settlement of "Yizhar", police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said. About 100 settlers had blocked a road to protest against Israel's recent removal of a handful of tiny, uninhabited outposts. Six settlers had later been arrested. Before dawn, near the "Kedumim" settlement, stone-throwing settlers had ambushed a minivan carrying Palestinian labourers to Israel, the workers said. Six of the 15 Palestinians on board had been hurt. Police said settlers threw rocks and burned tires in the area. The attackers fled and no arrests were made, they said. A few hours later, settlers had torched a wooded hilltop near Nablus and set trees and Palestinian agricultural land on fire near the village of Hawara, residents said. (*AP*)

Israeli settlers were waging court battles to evict dozens of Palestinians from homes in an East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. They were trying to reclaim plots of land in the neighbourhood which they said had been owned by Jews before Israel's creation. They had already won property rights to six Arab homes, whose residents had been subsequently evicted. Palestinians and an Israeli rights group said settlers had been

trying to evict a further 27 Arab families from 28 buildings. (Reuters)

Israeli settlers began to follow a new policy in defending their outposts, seeking out caves to replace trailers, which Prime Minister Netanyahu's Government said it would evacuate, according to a report aired on *Israeli TV*. (Ma'an News Agency)

"We have come here to see, to learn, to talk to people in all walks of life; ordinary people, governmental people, administrative people," Richard J. Goldstone, head of the independent fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict appointed by the Human Rights Council, told reporters after the team had entered Gaza via Egypt. Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said that the Israeli Government believed the mission had been told "to find Israel guilty even before the investigation begins". The UN team was scheduled to hold meetings and talks with Hamas officials and would also meet with all human rights groups based in Gaza. They would also listen to testimonies of victims and witnesses. (DPA, Reuters)

Hamas officials met with the independent fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict appointed by the Human Rights Council, handing over documents, photos and other materials. They said the materials were evidence of Israeli violations of the laws of war during the attack on Gaza in December and January. Hamas officials Bassem Na'im, Muhammad Al-Ghoul and Ahmad Yousef, as well as Taher Nunu, held talks with the team leader, Richard Goldstone in Gaza City. The mission then continued their work in Gaza, meeting with Gaza-based organizations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The mission was expected to leave Gaza on 5 June and to submit its findings to the Human Rights Council in August. (Ma'an News Agency)

2

Israel conducted the largest-ever military-civilian emergency exercise named "Turning Point 3", raising the public's preparedness for possible missile attacks. (Haaretz)

Israeli forces closed the Hawara checkpoint, the main entrance into Nablus, after a Palestinian teenager stabbed an Israeli soldier, wounding him moderately. The teenager was arrested. Earlier, the military said that a settler's car had come under gunfire from Palestinians in the village of Nabi Elias, east of Qalqilya. No injuries had been reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

US President Obama made a surprise appearance at a meeting between Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak and US National Security Adviser Gen. Jim Jones to discuss the settlements controversy. Mr. Obama intended to give Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu four to six weeks to provide an "updated position" regarding construction in the settlements and the two-State principle, an official Israeli source said. Mr. Obama wanted to complete the formulation of a preliminary six-month plan for progress towards a Middle East peace agreement and to present it in July. US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell was expected to arrive in Israel on 8 June, according to the source. He would meet with Mr. Netanyahu the next day in a bid to obtain clarifications regarding the US demand to stop construction in the settlements and on the principle of two States. Mr. Mitchell was expected to visit Ramallah on 10 June to meet with PA President Abbas. (Haaretz)

In an interview with the *BBC*, US President Barack Obama said he believed his country could help to get serious Middle East peace negotiations back on track. "Not only is it in the interest of the Palestinian people to have a State, it's in the interest of the Israeli people to stabilize the situation there," he said, adding, "And it's in the interest of the United States that we've got two States living side by side in peace and security." When asked about Israel's rejection of his call for a halt to settlements in the West Bank, the President urged patience, saying it was early in the conversation and "diplomacy is always a matter of a long hard slog. It's never a matter of quick results". (BBC)

Speaking after a meeting with Israel's Foreign Minister, Avigdor Liberman, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, said Hamas must help create the conditions for removal of the blockade of Gaza, adding, "We are sending the corresponding signals to Hamas and Mahmoud Abbas in terms of the necessity to cooperate in the most serious way." Mr. Liberman also met with President Dmitry Medvedev, telling him that Israel regarded the Russian Federation as a "fundamental partner" in efforts to resolve its disputes with the Palestinians and other neighbours. (AP)

Hamas said in a statement that it was considering withdrawing from upcoming reconciliation talks with Fatah in the wake of deadly clashes with PA forces in Qalqilya on 31 May. (Ma'an News Agency)

Roger Waters, a British rock singer and founder of Pink Floyd, said that he would give a concert if Israel's illegal West Bank wall were torn down. He made this pledge during a visit to Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, surrounded by the wall. Mr. Waters co-wrote Pink Floyd's iconic album *The Wall* and performed its title song in 1990 on the site where the Berlin Wall stood. He called Israel's wall a land grab and said he hoped "this thing, this awful thing, is destroyed soon." The day before, Mr. Waters had visited Jenin, where he was supporting a project to rebuild a movie theatre that had been inoperative for some 20 years. (Ma'an News Agency)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had renewed his call for Israel's cooperation with the team led by Justice Richard Goldstone, mandated by the Human Rights Council to probe alleged rights abuses and violations of international law during the recent conflict in Gaza, his spokesperson said. Mr. Ban had discussed the issue with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak at a meeting in New York. In addition, the two had also talked about the UN Board of Inquiry, which examined incidents involving death and damage at UN premises in Gaza during Israel's military operation. Mr. Ban had also instructed the UN Legal Counsel to start preparing and formulating claims to compensation for the losses sustained by the Organization in incidents investigated by the Board, she added. None of the \$11 million in assessed damages to the UN Gaza facilities had been received yet.

(UN News Centre)

3

"The Rimonim and Birzeit roadblocks [...] near Ramallah were removed," the Israeli army said. Another checkpoint, Assira al-Shamaliya, north of Nablus, would now be open 24 hours. Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) said, "The question here is not removing a roadblock here and a roadblock there." He added that the system of closures must end. (AP)

"We will judge this visit [by President Obama to the region] on the basis of what he will say and concrete measures that he will take," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum told *AFP*. "We hope to see concrete measures on the part of the American administration, such as real pressure against the Zionist enemy [Israel] so that it lifts the Gaza blockade, puts an end to aggression and to settlements." (AFP)

Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum told *Ma'an News Agency*, "We are so close to a decision to suspend the dialogue with Fatah. After what happened in Qalqilya [on 31 May], it became difficult to go back to the dialogue, especially if Fatah does not change its behaviour toward Hamas, release the political prisoners and present something new in the dialogue sessions." (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel's military buffer zone along the eastern and northern edge of the Gaza Strip took up 30 per cent of the territory's arable land, fieldworkers with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) told *The Christian Science Monitor*. "The war increased the amount of land destroyed, particularly in the border areas, and the farmers can't replant anything because it's too dangerous," they said. "The Israeli soldiers, they shoot at everything – dogs, sheep." (Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli Regional Planning and Building Committee was discussing a plan to build a new hotel in East Jerusalem, 100 metres from the Old City's walls. The plan would see the demolition of a wholesale market and a Palestinian kindergarten. Eliyahu Yishai, Israeli Minister of the Interior anticipated the approval of the plan. (Haaretz)

Israeli security forces dismantled two small settlement outposts, including one that was rebuilt after it had been taken down the previous week. (AP)

In a meeting with settler leaders of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea and Samaria, Israel's Interior Minister Eli Yishai said that he would

respond to President Obama's outreach to the Muslim world by expanding West Bank settlements. "The American policies are not coincidental and everyone must know that the bad situation will only get worse in the near future," Mr. Yishai told the settler leaders, adding, "I promise to use my ministry, all the resources at my disposal and the ministry's impact on local authorities for the good of expanding settlements". (*The Jerusalem Post*)

In the northern West Bank, a group of settlers set fire to Palestinian agricultural fields, destroying some 30 olive trees. (*AP*)

Gaza businessmen demanded of the independent fact-finding mission investigating events during the Israeli offensive on Gaza that Israel compensate them for the damage sustained by their businesses. Richard Goldstone, who headed the mission sent by the UN Human Rights Council, met with the group of businessmen while on a fact-finding visit in Gaza, during which he observed damaged Palestinian homes and visited Palestinians who had lost members of their families. (*Ynetnews*)

4

A PA security officer was killed by a grenade thrown by Hamas men, who were holed up in a building in Qalqilya. Later, PA security officers and Hamas gunmen fought, killing three more people identified as members of the armed wing of Hamas. Qalqilya Governor Rabi' Al-Khandaqji said that the PA had brought the mother and the brother of one of the Hamas members to the building to convince him to surrender peacefully. Mr. Al-Khandaqji accused Hamas of attempting to repeat its 2007 takeover of Gaza in the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In Cairo, after a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak, visiting US President Obama said: "We discussed the situation with Israel and the Palestinians. We discussed how we can move forward in a constructive way that brings about peace and prosperity for all people in the region. And I emphasized to him that America is committed to working in partnership with the countries in the region so that all people can meet their aspirations." (www.whitehouse.gov)

In a [speech](#) at Cairo University, US President Obama said there could be no denying of the right of a Palestinian State to exist and that he would "personally pursue" its realization, "with all the patience that the task requires". At the same time, Mr. Obama reaffirmed the United States' "unbreakable bond" with Israel. He went on to say, "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements," adding, "This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop". He said that the obligations that Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to under the Road Map were clear and for peace to come, it was time for them "and all of us to live up to our responsibilities". He said: "If we see this conflict only from one side or the other, then we will be blind to the truth [...] The only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two States, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security", adding, "That is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest". (www.whitehouse.gov)

According to the official spokesman of the PA Presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, PA President Abbas had said: "His [President Obama's] call for stopping settlement and for the establishment of a Palestinian State and his reference to the suffering of Palestinians ... is a clear message to Israel that a just peace is built on the foundations of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital," adding, "President Obama's speech is a good start and an important step towards a new American policy." (*Haaretz*)

In an [opinion piece](#) published in *The Times* online edition, Israel's President Shimon Peres said President Obama's journey to Saudi Arabia and Egypt reflected the need for an historic change in the Middle East and a unique chance of achieving it. With the support of the leadership in Egypt, it seemed the time was ripe to end the Israeli-Arab conflict once and for all. (www.timesonline.co.uk)

Mahmoud Ramahi, a former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council from Hamas, said, "I have followed the [Obama] speech closely. There are many positive points," adding, "There is a difference between his policy and Bush's policy. I see a change in the US foreign policy discourse. But the problem is still on the ground. Would they achieve a Palestinian independent State? If he does that, it would be a relief and good for all parties." (*Haaretz*)

A World Bank [report](#) for the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee underlined that budget support remained indispensable to allow the PA to continue to provide basic services, and it was also an appropriate instrument given the PA's good performance in public sector management. Improvements in security in the West Bank had not yet translated into increases in private sector activities and quick-impact projects had yet to deliver tangible results.

The large sums of money pledged at the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza had not yet translated into tangible progress towards reconstruction due to the extreme closure regime. The Occupied Palestinian Territory's GNP per capita had declined 1 per cent in 2008. Its dependence on international aid kept growing, according to the report. (www.worldbank.org)

Organizers of the cultural and scientific gathering dedicated to Jerusalem as Arab Capital of Culture for 2009 announced that the event would take place in Amman instead of Jerusalem. "Jerusalem is an occupied city. [...] We hope that the festival will one day be held in Jerusalem when it is free," said Abdo Ballan, the festival's Secretary-General at a press conference. (*The Jordan Times*)

Israeli settlers had established a new outpost, "Oz Yehonatan," in the West Bank. They built a wooden structure called the "Obama Hut". The outpost was named "in recognition of the [US] President's actions, which have led to a dramatic increase in the number of outposts being built," said a report from Israel's *Arutz Sheva* news agency. (*Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post*)

After a 48-hour notice for clearing a "closed military area", the Israeli military began demolishing the Bedouin encampment of Ras Al-Ahmar, in the northern Jordan Valley, which was home to 180 people, according to UN officials monitoring events on the ground. Israeli officials had issued demolition orders for Bedouin homes belonging to 34 families, or a total of 304 people. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The newspaper *Al-Hayat* reported that the indirect talks for the release of the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit had resumed. The paper said that the head of Hamas' military wing, Ahmad Jabari, had visited Cairo to carry on with the negotiations. The newly appointed Israeli Special Representative on the Return of the Abducted IDF Soldier Gilad Shalit, Hagai Hadas, had met earlier this week with Mr. Shalit's father and said he would do his utmost to secure Mr. Shalit's release. (*Haaretz*)

5

A Palestinian was killed by Israeli troops in a weekly protest held by Palestinian and foreign activists against the separation wall in the village of Ni'tin.

Witnesses say troops had fired tear gas and rubber bullets at rock-throwing demonstrators. (*AP, Haaretz*)

A senior US Administration official told *The Jerusalem Post* that Washington and Israel "can find an arrangement that works" on the settlement issue. He went on to say that anonymous officials in Israel and the US had made "heated" and not always credible comments. "We're working this through, consistent with the relationship between strong allies," he added. Israeli officials, speaking on conditions of anonymity, said that Israel would not halt construction in settlements even after the US President's explicit call to do so, in order to accommodate growing families. (*AP, The Jerusalem Post*)

The IDF announced that Israel had lifted restrictions at two checkpoints in the West Bank. Crossing number 422, east of Qalqilya, and the Hableh

roadblock, had been opened to allow Palestinians' travel to and from surrounding villages, according to the military's statement. (Reuters, *The Jerusalem Post*)

Head of the independent fact-finding mission sent by the Human Rights Council, Justice Richard Goldstone, declared. "We had hoped to have public hearings ... in southern Israel and in the West Bank but because of the refusal by Israel to cooperate with the mission, we are not able to fulfil that hope." Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh met with Mr. Goldstone and insisted on "the importance of sending these war criminals to court and judging them for their crimes". (AFP, *Ma'an News Agency*)

7

At a news conference at the Huwwara checkpoint, Israel's military liaison commander in Nablus, Faris Atiyya, said that he would ease restrictions for the city's shopping festival scheduled for mid-July. The facilitation would include increasing the opening hours at the Huwwara, Chavi Shomron and Awarta checkpoints, in addition to the complete removal of checkpoint 17 near Assira Ash-Shamaliyya. (Ma'an News Agency)

Al-Hayat newspaper said that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had urged US President Obama to impose a solution on the Arab-Israeli conflict if necessary. King Abdullah told Mr. Obama during his visit to Riyadh last week that Arab patience was wearing thin and that a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict would be the "magic key" to all issues in the region, the newspaper said quoting informed sources. (Haaretz)

8

IDF soldiers killed at least four Palestinian militants who were, according to the IDF, trying to cross into Israel to launch an attack on an Israeli community bordering the Strip and abduct IDF soldiers once inside Israel. A dozen Palestinian fighters on horses and in booby-trapped cars attacked Israeli patrols near the Karni crossing east of Gaza City. Initial reports said the fighters had captured an Israeli soldier before Israeli forces shelled them from the air. According to eyewitnesses, Israeli helicopters and artillery had fired on the area. Palestinian medical sources confirmed four dead and two injured. The killed men were identified as Hani Tarabein, Tahir Issa, and Muhannad Al-Minawi, all from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. (BBC, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

In Ramallah, PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki discussed plans for a proposed Moscow Middle East conference with the Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department of the Russian Federation Foreign Ministry, Sergei Vershin. Mr. Vershin said preparations for the conference were ongoing and reiterated the Russia Federation's support for the two-State solution as the basis of a permanent peace agreement. (Ma'an News Agency)

At a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee on Assistance to the Palestinian people (AHLC) in Oslo, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell said President Barack Obama wanted "immediate" talks between the Palestinians and Israel to forge a comprehensive Middle East peace agreement, adding, "The President has told me to exert all efforts to create the circumstance when the parties can begin immediate discussions." Mr. Mitchell, who was en route to the Middle East, said the aim of such talks was "a comprehensive peace and normalization of relations" between Israel and its neighbours, which would also serve "the security interests of the United States". (Haaretz)

The AHLC group of donors was meeting in Oslo to discuss measures aimed at counteracting the budget crisis of the PA. The meeting would also discuss ways of removing obstacles hindering development and reconstruction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza. The meeting was chaired by Norway's Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Store, who warned that the PA was on the brink of bankruptcy. (The Norway Post)

Israel had opened the Kerem Shalom crossing in Gaza for the transfer of humanitarian aid, allowing the delivery of 141 truck loads of supplies, including chlorine for the Palestinian Water Authority, said Palestinian border official Raed Fattouh. (Ma'an News Agency)

The World Bank sent a memo to donors explaining that the \$75 million Gaza Strip sewage treatment project funded by the EU and other donors, and initiated by Quartet Representative Tony Blair, could collapse because of Israeli restrictions on delivering critical equipment. (Reuters)

Seventy-three Palestinian children left the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, destined for Warsaw where they would receive trauma counselling after the recent Israeli attacks. The project coordinator of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program said that Poland's President would send a plane to Al-Arish in Egypt to transport the children to Poland. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel's Interior Minister Eli Yishai had instructed officials at the Interior Ministry to come up with ways of helping settlers, by allowing continued construction within the major settlement blocks where building had stopped as a result of US pressure, Haaretz reported. Mr. Yishai wanted to include additional built-up areas within the major settlement blocks, potentially expanding their boundaries by as much as several square kilometres. (Haaretz)

The United Nations Asian and Pacific [Meeting](#) on the Question of Palestine, organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, opened in Jakarta. The theme of the meeting was "Strengthening international consensus on the urgency of achieving a two-State solution". Statements during the opening session were made by Triyono Wibowo, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia; Noleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), who delivered a [message](#) on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Fariz Mehdawi, Ambassador of Palestine to Indonesia; and Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, among others. The two-day meeting would be followed on 10 June by the United Nations Public Forum in Support of the Palestinian People. (UN press releases SG/SM/12294-GA/PAL/1127 and GA/PAL/1128)

9

US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell was visiting Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He had met Israel's President Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Ehud Barak and would meet Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman and also hold talks with PA President Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad later that day. Mr. Mitchell reasserted that a two-State solution was the "only viable political solution." He said that "Israelis and Palestinians have a responsibility to meet their obligations under the Road Map," stressing the need for a settlement freeze in the West Bank. (BBC, *aljazeera.net*)

Asharq Al-Awsat reported that during the Egyptian delegation's visit to Washington on 26 May, the US had briefed Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman and Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit on what Egyptian sources described as "a plan to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within two years on the basis of a two-State solution." Washington then called for a swift response from the Arab side. The source informed *Asharq Al-Awsat* that "the US officials also informed the Egyptian delegation that they had notified Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu of the plan during his recent visit to Washington and they had called on him to provide a response within six weeks". The source added that the Egyptian political leadership sensed that US President Obama was extremely serious about achieving peace in the Middle East and that the only obstacle to this was the inter-Palestinian division. Egypt had therefore decided to consult with a number of Arab leaders in order to heal the Palestinian rift as soon as possible. (Asharq Al-Awsat)

Forty-one Members of the European Parliament from 15 countries entered Gaza to foster dialogue with the residents of the area and observe the destruction and devastation from the Israeli war in Gaza. Palestinian spokesperson at the Rafah crossing Adel Zu'rub said a Qatari delegation and a UN Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development were due in Gaza later today. (Ma'an News Agency)

Egyptian mediators held talks with a Hamas delegation headed by Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal about national dialogue. "Egypt and Arab countries believe the Palestinian internal division has to end in order to get a stronger US involvement in the peacemaking with Israel," a Palestinian

official said. (AFP DPA, Reuters)

Israeli security forces ordered a Palestinian to demolish his own home in the Old City of Jerusalem. Muhammad Ghosheh said the Israeli police threatened him with a NIS 100,000 (\$25,125) fine if he did not comply. PA Minister of Jerusalem Affairs, Hatem Abdul Qader, denounced the demolition as a crime in defiance of US and international pressure. He said that the "occupation municipality" rejected all Palestinian applications for building permits in the Old City but granted permits to Israeli settlers. (Ma'an News Agency)

The French company Veolia, which was supposed to operate the rail project to connect Jerusalem with settlements in the West Bank, decided to withdraw from the project. According to Omar Barghouti of the global boycott divestment and sanctions campaign, the withdrawal was the result of years of hard work, causing Veolia to lose around \$7 billion in contracts in Europe. Veolia also faced a French lawsuit, filed by a pro-Palestinian group demanding that the court annul the business agreement as it violated international law. (IMEMC)

Israel banned a top PLO official from travelling to the United Nations Asia and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine that began in Indonesia on 8 June. Abdul Rahim Mallouh, a member of the PLO Executive Committee and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was to represent PA President Abbas. "I denounced in the most definite terms the Israeli practices of which you were a victim as yet another example of the arbitrary policies of the occupying Power in the Palestinian Territory under its control," wrote Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. (Ma'an News Agency)

Justice Richard Goldstone, Head of the Human Rights Council-mandated independent fact-finding mission to probe alleged rights abuses and violations of international law during the recent conflict in Gaza, said the UN investigation was unlikely to lead to prosecutions because of the lack of a court to hear cases. Mr. Goldstone said he hoped the publication of the mission's report would trigger other UN bodies' action. (AP, BBC, The Jerusalem Post)

10

Israel's Security-Diplomatic Cabinet convened to discuss the international pressure to open border crossings into the Gaza Strip. The Cabinet agreed that the IDF must respond to any attacks from Gaza. In a statement, Prime Minister Netanyahu's Office said that it held Hamas responsible for any attacks against Israel from Gaza, while underlining that Israel was considering more ways to ease the restrictions on the Palestinians in Gaza within the requirements of Israel's security interests. (AFP, Haaretz, www.pmo.gov.il)

After meeting with PA President Abbas in Ramallah, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell said the US must create the conditions for the speedy resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, reassuring Palestinians that the United States would never abandon its legitimate aspirations. "The only viable solution for this conflict is for the aspirations of both sides to be met in two States," Mr. Mitchell said. (Haaretz)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak urged Prime Minister Netanyahu to accept the two-State solution. Mr. Barak stated that Israel must be committed to the Road Map. He declared that if the two-State solution failed, "There will be only one political entity from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean — the State of Israel." He added that, "Under such a scenario, if the Palestinians had the right to vote, it would no longer be a Jewish State, but a bi-national State. And if they don't have the right to vote, it would be an apartheid regime." (Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post)

During a visit to Jerusalem, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana urged Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to commit to a two-State solution. "I would like to hear a speech in which there's a commitment [...] of the [Israeli] Government on the question of settlements and a commitment to re-initiate relations with the Palestinians," Mr. Solana said, according to AFP. Israeli President Shimon Peres told Mr. Solana that Israel and the Palestinians must move onto the second stage of the Road Map, which stipulates the establishment of a Palestinian State with provisional borders, which "will in a short span of time become permanent borders." Opposition Leader Tzipi Livni told Mr. Solana that "Even someone who supports two States for two peoples expects that the world in general and Europe specifically will support Israel's stance in the negotiations." She addressed the need to ensure that "there won't be a terror State or an extreme Muslim State alongside [Israel] to guarantee that refugees won't be allowed into Israel, [and] to consider the reality of the settlement blocks." (AFP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Clashes erupted between Israeli forces and Palestinian residents in the neighbourhood of Al-Bustan in Jerusalem when massive numbers of IDF soldiers and border police gave hundreds of demolition orders to Palestinian residents. Under Israeli law, Palestinian homes were allowed to be demolished or evacuated without any formal legal charges being brought forth or any party convicted of a violation of the Israeli Planning and Building Law. Residents clashed fiercely with police, who were said to have been forced to retreat to the entrance of the neighbourhood. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) urged Israel to lift the two-year ban on visits to Palestinian prisoners by their Gaza families. Some 900 Palestinians, held by Israeli security forces, had been deprived of seeing their relatives since the Israeli authorities ended ICRC-supervised visits in June 2007, according to the ICRC. "This is a humanitarian issue of utmost importance," said the ICRC's chief representative in Israel, Pierre Wettach. (AFP)

In Jakarta, the United Nations Asian and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine concluded two days of deliberations. According to the concluding statement issued by the organizers, participants stressed that the creation of two States could only be based on international law, Security Council and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. A negotiated solution to the question of Jerusalem, based on international law, was essential not only for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also for lasting peace in the region as a whole. Participants deplored the lack of pronounced support by the current Government of Israel for a two-State solution and denounced the acceleration of settlement construction, particularly in and around Jerusalem. Grave concern was voiced about the further deterioration of the situation in Gaza and the continued siege of the enclave. Participants were heartened by the recent remarks of US President Obama regarding the need for Israel to cease settlement activity. (UN press release GA/PAL/1131)

Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that he would be attending the general debate of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly in New York on 23 September. He said that Israel would be better served if he attended the debate and presented Jerusalem's diplomatic positions instead of Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman. (Haaretz)

Palestinians from the village of Tuqu' in the West Bank rescued an Israeli resident of the "Tekoa" settlement and her four-month-old son after their car overturned on the road and then called an Israeli ambulance. "The human concern overcame any other feeling, as well as the feelings of enmity and hatred that the settlers arouse in the area," said one of the men who had helped extract the two Israelis from the car. (The Jerusalem Post)

At the biannual meeting in Amman of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, the US delegation announced a contribution of \$55.3 million to the Agency's General Fund, bringing the total US contribution to UNRWA thus far in 2009 to \$154.5 million. (www.unrwa.org)

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Hamas fighters opened fire on Israeli forces near Kibbutz Bi'iri, along the northern border of Gaza. The IDF responded with shellfire. No injuries were reported from the Israeli or the Palestinian side. (*Ma'an News Agency, Haaretz*)

In Cairo, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell urged Arab States to take "meaningful steps and important actions" to make peace with Israel. At a press conference after meeting Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Mr. Mitchell said, "We are working hard to achieve our objective, a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, including a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel." Mr. Mitchell also visited Amman, meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II, who told Mr. Mitchell: "The US role is crucial in the efforts to reach peace and attain stability in the region," adding that Mr. Obama's address on 4 June to the Muslim world from Cairo "embodied important messages," including the endorsement of a two-State solution. (*Haaretz*)

Canada is hosting a two-day meeting in Ottawa on the Gaza Counter-Arms Smuggling Initiative. The event brings together Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and the US. The meeting would coordinate efforts to stop the flow of arms and ammunition into Gaza and work towards the implementation of the programme of action developed when the group met in London on 13 March. Canada is committed to "bring about a durable ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, one consistent with United Nations Security Council resolution 1860," said Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs. (*international.gc.ca*)

Former US President Jimmy Carter said that there could not be any Palestinian-Israeli peace "unless Hamas is involved directly, with Fatah," after meeting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, according to *AFP*. Mr. Carter declared that he expected US President Obama to engage with Hamas if it formed a unity Government with Fatah under PA President Abbas, according to *DPA*. Mr. Carter was expected to meet Osama Hamdan, one of the deputies of Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal. (*DPA, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

Khaled Mashaal, Hamas Political Bureau Chief, urged US President Obama to drop conditions for talks *Al-sharq Al-Awsat* reported. Mr. Mashaal pointed out that Mr. Obama had launched a dialogue with Iran and Syria but set conditions for Hamas. Even if the Hamas leader was encouraged by "new, wise language" from the US President, the latter's "perception regarding the Palestinian State is still vague, due to the fact that he did not address the issue of territory, borders, the capital, the right of return and the timetables for its establishment. These are essential points," Mr. Mashaal declared. He would present his own policy speech after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's address, *Al Quds Al-Arabi* reported. (*Ma'an News Agency, Haaretz*)

Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman urged Khaled Mashaal to release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit *Al-Jarida* reported. Mr. Suleiman told Mr. Mashaal that Israel was willing to resume negotiations for a prisoner exchange. The Hamas leader welcomed the offer and agreed to resume talks, according to the newspaper. Mr. Suleiman told Mr. Mashaal his country was determined to have the Palestinian factions sign a reconciliation agreement by the end of the month and that Egypt would not accept an "endless chain of negotiations." (*Ynetnews*)

Dozens of settlers, development investors, Israeli municipality workers and Israeli police attempted to confiscate seven dunums of Palestinian land on the Mount of Olives, in East Jerusalem. Thirty young men rallied to drive the settlers away. The settlers said they would be back the following week. They had first tried to appropriate the land through the courts, by fabricating ownership documents and attempting to have land rights transferred away from the Palestinians residents, according to local experts. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Hatem Abdul Qader told residents of the Al-Bustan area they would be protected from the latest round of Israeli-issued demolition orders by a legal committee. "The recent issuance of demolition orders to Al-Bustan and Silwan area residents," he said, shows there "is no possibility for peace or for signing any agreement and that Israel will continue with its policies against the Palestinian people and will not be influenced by the US pressure." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Findings indicated that Israel had heavily used uranium materials in its war in Gaza, Haitham Manna of the International Coalition for Trying Israeli War Criminals, told a news conference in Gaza City. (*Xinhua*)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [said](#) that he would take part in the Quartet meeting later that month in Italy. He also said that the UN Legal Counsel was preparing a detailed evaluation and proposals regarding the \$11.2 million in damage done to UN facilities during the recent Israeli attacks in Gaza. (*UN News Centre*)

12

Israeli warships opened fire on Palestinian fishermen off the coast of Khan Yunis in Gaza, damaging several fishing boats. No injuries were reported, according to Dr. Mu'awiyah Hassanain, Head of Emergency and Ambulance Services in Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Dozens of Israeli troops set up road barriers at the southern entrance of the "Ariel" settlement, in the West Bank during prayers at ancient shrines in the area. Vehicles were detained and identity cards checked. A curfew would be imposed in the nearby villages starting at 10 p.m., Israeli troops told a local resident. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A telephone [poll](#) conducted by Maagar Mohot Survey Institute said 56 per cent of Israelis thought Prime Minister Netanyahu should not consent to the US demand to halt all settlement construction, as opposed to 37 per cent who said he should. Fifty per cent said failure to comply would not provoke a crisis with the US, while 32 per cent said they thought the settlement freeze was a make or break issue for Washington. The majority of the surveyed Israelis (69 per cent) said Mr. Netanyahu should not agree to rescind Israeli sovereignty over the Old City and other parts of Jerusalem. (*Haaretz, www.imra.org*)

The Kerem Shalom crossing would be the only open point for the transfer of goods into Gaza until 14 June, according to crossings official Raed Fattuh. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas security forces reportedly confiscated aid being distributed in Gaza by the international organization At-Ta'awon, attacking the organization's Director, Ibtisam Az-Za'anin, when she attempted to intervene. Officials of the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights said police distributed the aid to a list of recipients different from that prepared by At-Ta'awon. The center denounced in a statement the police's intervention in the work of non-governmental organizations. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Tayseer Khaled, Director of Expatriate Affairs of the PLO, called on Palestinians and Arabs to show their solidarity with the imprisoned Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmad Sa'adat, who had begun a hunger strike because of prison conditions at an Israeli jail in Beersheba. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

13

A homemade projectile was fired by an unknown group from the Gaza Strip, landing in a field in the western Negev region of Israel. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli warplanes had fired missiles at the tunnel area in Rafah, injuring four Palestinians, sources said. An Israeli military spokesperson's statement said the strikes were "in response to the continuous firing of rockets and mortar shells at Israeli southern communities from the Gaza Strip". (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu met with Defense Minister Barak and President Peres for consultations about his address at Bar-Ilan University. During the consultations, Mr Barak and Mr. Peres pressed the Prime Minister to announce his acceptance of the Road Map and his willingness to recognize a Palestinian State with security limitations. (*Haaretz*)

Prime Minister Salam Fayyad awarded former US President Jimmy Carter the Palestine International Award for Excellence and Innovation 2009. Mr. Fayyad said, "President Jimmy Carter, who deserves all the honour, is a good man who knows the question of Palestine and its history. I thank Mr. Jimmy Carter for what he said and which affirms his humanity, which we celebrate today". (Wafa)

14

An explosive device planted by Palestinian fighters exploded while an Israeli military jeep was patrolling the area of As-Sureij Gate, east of Al-Qarara, near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. According to witnesses, several Israeli military vehicles had hurried to the scene and two helicopters had been seen flying over the area. Clashes had then erupted between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces swept the Tulkarm area; a number of Palestinian residents were summoned for interrogation by the Israeli intelligence services. Israeli forces also searched a mosque and raided several shops. No arrests or injuries were reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

A homemade projectile fired from Gaza landed south of the Israeli city of Ashkelon. According to Israeli news reports, the projectile had not caused any damage or injuries. (Ma'an News Agency)

In a [speech](#) at the Begin-Sadat Center of Bar-Ilan University [in Ramat Gan], Prime Minister Netanyahu, among other things, called on Palestinian leaders to "begin [Israeli-Palestinian] negotiations immediately, without preconditions", adding that "Israel is obligated by its international commitments and expects all parties to keep their commitments." He said that "[...] a fundamental prerequisite for ending the conflict is a public, binding and unequivocal Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation State of the Jewish people. To vest this declaration with practical meaning, there must also be a clear understanding that the Palestinian refugee problem will be resolved outside Israel's borders. For it is clear that any demand for resettling Palestinian refugees within Israel undermines Israel's continued existence as the state of the Jewish people." Mr. Netanyahu stated, "[...] today we ask our friends in the international community, led by the United States, for what is critical to the security of Israel: clear commitments that in a future peace agreement, the territory controlled by the Palestinians will be demilitarized: namely, without an army, without control of its airspace and with effective security measures to prevent weapons smuggling into the territory – real monitoring, and not what occurs in Gaza today.

And obviously, the Palestinians will not be able to forge military pacts." ... "If we receive this guarantee regarding demilitarization and Israel's security needs and if the Palestinians recognize Israel as the State of the Jewish people, then we will be ready in a future peace agreement to reach a solution where a demilitarized Palestinian State exists alongside the Jewish State. Regarding Jerusalem, the Prime Minister said: "Jerusalem must remain the united capital of Israel with continued religious freedom for all faiths". On the settlements issue, he said, "the territorial question will be discussed as part of the final peace agreement. In the meantime, we have no intention of building new settlements or of expropriating additional land for existing settlements. But there is a need to enable the residents to live normal lives, to allow mothers and fathers to raise their children like families elsewhere." (www.pmo.gov.il)

In a [statement](#), US Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said that US President Obama welcomed the important step forward in Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech. The President was committed to two States, a Jewish State of Israel and an independent Palestine, in the historic homeland of both peoples. (www.whitehouse.gov)

PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that Mr. Netanyahu's speech at Bar-Ilan University set further preconditions for negotiations and announced Israel's intention to unilaterally dictate a solution, rather than negotiate a peace. "[Mr.] Benjamin Netanyahu spoke about negotiations but left us with nothing to negotiate as he systematically took nearly every permanent status issue off the table. Nor did he accept a Palestinian State; instead, he announced a series of conditions and qualifications that render a viable, independent and sovereign Palestinian state impossible," Mr. Erakat said, adding, "He failed to engage with the Arab Peace Initiative and its promise of regional peace. In this sense, his call to meet with Arab leaders was vacuous". "This speech fell far short of every single one of the benchmarks required of Israel in line with international law and existing agreements, including the Road Map. Palestinians will not be alone in their disappointment over Benjamin Netanyahu's failure to show himself to be a genuine partner for peace," Mr. Erakat added. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas and Fatah officials held reconciliation committees' meetings in the West Bank and Gaza, three weeks before another formal round of unity talks. Top issue on the agenda was to find ways of calming the situation after a recent flare-up in intra-Palestinian violence in the West Bank. In Ramallah, Fatah was represented by Parliament leader Azzam Al-Ahmad and Hamas by former minister Omar Abd Ar-Raziq. In Gaza, Ibrahim Abu An-Naja represented Fatah and Jamal Abu Hashem represented Hamas. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Free Gaza Movement announced that preparations were under way to receive two solidarity vessels as part of the group's Summer of Hope campaign. The two vessels would set sail from Larnaca port in Cyprus on 25 June and were expected to dock at Gaza's port on 26 June around 5 p.m. Several international dignitaries from 17 countries were expected to be on board the two ships, including Máiread Corrigan-Maguire, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and former US Congresswoman Cynthia Ann McKinney. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmad Sa'adat, ended a nine-day hunger strike inside an Israeli jail, according to PA Minister of Prisoners Affairs Issa Qaraqe. The Israeli army had seized Mr. Sa'adat in a raid on a PA prison in Jericho in 2006, where he had been held since 2001 for the assassination of Israel's Minister of Tourism, Rehavam Ze'evi. (Ma'an News Agency)

15

A Palestinian man was severely beaten by Israeli soldiers at the entrance to the West Bank village of Beit Ummar, north of Hebron. The unidentified man was subsequently hospitalized in Hebron. It was also reported that a Palestinian youth had been shot and injured by the Israeli army while driving his motorcycle in the same village. Witnesses stated that soldiers had also beaten up both his parents after they had shot him. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Islamic Jihad said in a statement that Israeli soldiers had seized two of the group's members from their homes in Jenin. (Ma'an News Agency)

A joint group of Palestinian fighters affiliated to three militant wings claimed responsibility for detonating an explosive device near an Israeli military jeep in northern Gaza. The groups, Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Martyrs Brigades said they worked together on the operation east of Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

A Palestinian military court jailed a woman for 20 years for giving Israel information about militants in the occupied West Bank. Taghrid Abu Taybeh, 22, from Balata refugee camp near Nablus, had pleaded guilty to charges of treason and contact with the "enemy", a court statement said. (Reuters)

A Russian Federation Foreign Ministry source was quoted as saying that Mr. Netanyahu's conditional backing for a Palestinian State did not open the way to solving the Middle East conflict. "This certainly shows a readiness for dialogue but it does not open the way for solving the Israeli-Palestinian problem," the RIA Novosti news agency quoted the source as saying. (AP)

Hamas dismissed Mr. Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians "recognize Palestine [Israel] as pure Jewish land, denying the Palestinian people any rights on their land." In a statement, Hamas said all that Mr. Netanyahu had offered in his speech was a Palestinian State without identity and sovereignty, without [East] Jerusalem as its capital and without the right of return for the Palestinian refugees, insisting on keeping settlements and offering the Arab world only economic peace in return for normalization and recognition of Israel. (Ma'an News Agency)

In its discussion on the Middle East on 15 and 16 June 2009, the Council of the European Union called on the Government of Israel to commit unequivocally to the two-State solution and welcomed the initial step, following the Israeli policy review, announced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of commitment to a peace that would include a Palestinian State. It urged both parties to take immediate steps to resume peace negotiations and called on both parties to implement their obligations under the Road Map. The Council, however, remained deeply concerned by settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including in East Jerusalem. (www.consilium.europa.eu)

The European Union Foreign Ministers welcomed Mr. Netanyahu's conditional endorsement of a future Palestinian State but said it was not enough to raise EU-Israel ties to a higher level. The ministers, who were due to meet Israel's Foreign Minister later in the day, questioned Mr. Netanyahu's conditions for statehood and his defence of the settlements. "That's good but it's only a first step," Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said before the talks in Luxembourg. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner also said it was "not sufficient," adding "nothing was said on the settlements [...] but this stopping of the settlements is essential" said Kouchner, who in an earlier statement had rejected any preconditions to peace negotiations. (AP)

In an interview from Jerusalem on *NBC's Today* show, Prime Minister Netanyahu repeated his statement saying he would accept a Palestinian State but, at the same time, it would have to be a demilitarized State. On the issue of further Jewish settlements, Mr. Netanyahu said that he would not build new settlements. He said that he and President Obama were trying to reach a common understanding on this issue. (Haaretz)

Commenting on Mr. Netanyahu's speech, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the PLO said: "The international community should confront this policy, through which Netanyahu wants to kill off any chance for peace [...] and exert pressure on him so that he adheres to international legitimacy and the Road Map". (Reuters)

Former US President Jimmy Carter, commenting on Mr. Netanyahu's speech, said that it created new obstacles to peace. "In my opinion, Netanyahu brought up several obstacles to peace in his speech that others before him have not placed," Carter told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, adding, "he insists on settlement expansion, demands that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish State even though 20 per cent of Israel's citizens are not Jews". (Haaretz)

In the wake of Mr. Netanyahu's speech, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned that demands for recognition of Israel as a Jewish State risked "aborting" the peace process. Mubarak warned that the Middle East would remain mired in "chaos and instability" without "a just peace" between Israelis and Palestinians, *MENA* news agency reported. (DPA)

The German Government called Mr. Netanyahu's speech "a step in the right direction," at a press conference on Monday. "It is a positive move that the Israeli Prime Minister agreed in principle to a two-State solution," said Government spokesman Thomas Steg, adding that it was crucial for talks to resume. "Further advances in this key region of the Mideast conflict can only be achieved if both sides are prepared to speak intensively with each other," Mr. Steg added. (DPA)

Syrian state media such as *Al-Watan*, *Al-Baath* and *Ath-Thawra* criticized Mr. Netanyahu for "torpedoing peace" in a speech accepting a Palestinian State but shackled by unacceptable conditions. (AFP)

Israeli authorities partially opened the Kerem Shalom and Nahal Oz crossing points between Israel and the Gaza Strip, while the Karni crossing remain closed, said Raed Fattouh, a Palestinian border crossing official. Mr. Fattouh said that 110 trucks loaded with humanitarian aid, commercial goods and agricultural requirements would pass through Kerem Shalom. A limited quantity of cooking gas and industrial diesel fuel for Gaza's only power plant was to be shipped through the Nahal Oz, he said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair arrived in the Gaza Strip for a second visit since Hamas had taken control of Gaza. Mr. Blair's office said that he planned to hold talks with local NGOs, businessmen and UNRWA. In a statement, Mr. Blair said: "I have returned to Gaza today to hear directly from local Palestinians about the tough situation they continue to face here. It is vitally important to maintain our focus on the genuine humanitarian concerns that still exist here in Gaza." Mr. Blair's visit came a day before a visit by former US President Carter, who was expected to meet with Hamas leaders. (Ma'an News Agency)

A delegation representing the Organization of the Islamic Conference and headed by Fuad Al-Muzma'i, Director of Humanitarian Affairs, was scheduled to arrive in the Gaza Strip on 17 June to inaugurate a new ophthalmologic hospital, which the organization had funded. The delegation would also assess the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, hoping to complete a comprehensive plan for humanitarian support. (Ma'an News Agency)

Former US President Jimmy Carter stated, after meeting with settler leaders, that he did not believe Israel would withdraw from the "Gush Etzion" settlement block. Mr. Carter said that as the West Bank settlement block was situated close to the 1967 borders, he imagined that it would stay under Israeli control forever. Mr. Carter said that his visit to the settlements had given him a fresh perspective on the issue. "Gush Etzion" Council leader Shaul Goldstein, who hosted Mr. Carter at his home, called the visit significant and said that he believed it had indeed contributed to a change in the former president's views. (Haaretz)

Hamas and Fatah agreed to free political prisoners after the reconciliation committees held meetings in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Senior Fatah leader in Gaza, Ibrahim Abu An-Naja, announced that both movements had agreed to both prisoner lists in preparation for release. (Ma'an News Agency)

During a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay urged Israel to cooperate with the Independent fact-finding mission investigating war crimes during the recent assault by Israel on Gaza. She also called on Israel to end its economic blockade of Gaza, saying this was driving the people of the Strip deeper into extreme poverty. (AP, Reuters)

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The Israeli army indicated that it had arrested 10 Palestinians during raids in the West Bank. According to Israeli sources, a weapons cache, including three guns and ammunition, were discovered in a house in Qalqilya. Israeli warplanes airdropped soldiers into the West Bank, south of Jenin, in the area between the town of Qabatiya and the village of Al-Kufeir. In addition, Israeli soldiers raided the village of Salilat Al-Harthiyeh, roaming the streets and launching stun grenades. No injuries or arrests had been reported there. A raid had been reported in the village of Silah, west of Nablus. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces closed the second main entrance to the village of Al-Majdal, located south of Nablus in the northern West Bank, with piles of earth and stones, thereby preventing all traffic from entering or exiting the area. Palestinian officials monitoring settler activity in the West Bank indicated that Israeli forces had completely closed the main road joining the villages of Osarin and Aqraba with Al-Majdal and Qabalan, located near the Israeli settlement of "Magdalen". (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told the *CBS* news network that he had opened the door to peace by declaring Israel's readiness to see a Palestinian State created alongside a Jewish State and that he hoped that the Palestinians and the Arab world would respond to it. He said that he was disappointed by the negative Arab response to the foreign policy address which he delivered on 14 June at Bar-Ilan University. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said that Israel was ready to hold direct peace talks without preconditions with the Palestinians, Syria and Saudi Arabia, while reiterating the Government's position that West Bank settlement construction should be allowed to accommodate natural growth.

Mr. Liberman stated: "We have no intention of changing the demographic balance in the West Bank and establishing facts on the ground." During his visit to the United States the following day, it was reported that the definition of what constitutes a demilitarized Palestinian State and the settlement freeze mentioned in Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech on 14 June were expected to be high on the agenda of his talks with US officials.

(*Haaretz, IMEMC, The Jerusalem Post*)

Former US President Carter toured war-torn areas of the Gaza Strip and held talks with Hamas officials. He visited the American International School, which was levelled in an Israeli air strike in January. Mr. Carter stated that he was "very affected" and added, "it's not good to see such destruction but neither is it to see rockets falling on Sderot. All this violence must stop." Mr. Carter had stated earlier that he did not believe there was any possibility to have peace between Palestinians and Israel unless Hamas was involved, directly, with Fatah. He criticized Israel's blockade of Gaza while encouraging Hamas to accept international conditions for ending the boycott. Mr. Carter said that he was waiting for Hamas to determine what it could agree to, adding that "when they make their decision on the exact language, they'll be back in touch with me and I'll relay that commitment to the Government officials in my country." (*AP, DPA, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh stated at a joint news conference in Gaza City with former US President Carter that the movement would be "prepared to accept a State in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967". Mr. Haniyeh stated that: "We are pushing towards the dream of having our independent State with Jerusalem as its capital," adding, "if there is a real project that aims to resolve the Palestinian cause on establishing a Palestinian State on 1967 borders, under full Palestinian sovereignty, we will support it." Mr. Carter stated that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the joint capital of the two States, was the best method of achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace. A senior Hamas official stated that, although no longer an American official, Mr. Carter represented the policy of the current US Administration. Hamas officials said that the fact that European Parliament members had been meeting with them during the previous months showed that the world and the US Administration understood that there is no longer any use in the political siege on Hamas.

Quartet Representative Tony Blair had called the previous day for an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews*)

Ahmed Yussef, a senior adviser to former Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, said: "We are ready to do anything that will lead to stability and the establishment of a Palestinian State. We work positively with the American Administration. It is a more serious Administration than its predecessor, a more realistic one, and one more sensitive to Palestinian pain". (*Haaretz*)

Former US President Carter delivered to Hamas officials in Gaza a letter given to him by the father of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Hamas officials indicated that they would pass the letter on to Shalit but refused to say whether they would give Mr. Carter a letter from Gilad Shalit. Mr. Carter stated that he got the impression that Gilad Shalit was alive and well after meeting with his father. After meeting with Mr. Carter, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh stated that "the organization welcomed all efforts to finalize the Shalit affair" and that Hamas supported achieving a dignified solution to the Shalit case on a "human and political basis". Hours after visiting the Gaza Strip, Mr. Carter met with Gilad Shalit's father, confirming that he had handed over the letter addressed to his son to Hamas. Today, it was reported that Hamas was still considering whether to hand the letter to Shalit. (*AP, Aljazeera, BBC, Haaretz, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

A Palestinian source told news agencies that Hamas had foiled an attempt by militants linked with Al-Qaeda to attack former US President Carter during his visit to the Gaza Strip. The militants had planted two roadside bombs at a border crossing between Gaza and Israel with the intention of striking Mr. Carter's vehicle on his way out of Gaza. (*AP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

Four Palestinian fishermen from Gaza petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice for the return of their boats, which had been confiscated by the IDF.

The fishermen said that their livelihood had been gravely undermined by Israel's Defense Ministry actions and demanded compensation in addition to the return of the boats. (*Ynetnews*)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair, who was visiting the Gaza Strip, stated: "Unless there's a real change on the ground, where people are being offered some prospect of hope and the chance to lead a different life – then the politics, two-State solution or not, is not going to work", adding that "the opportunity is there, but it won't remain if not seized. As President Obama has recognized, this is the right time to seize it." Mr. Blair welcomed the speech of Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu and considered it a step in the right direction but added that what was needed now was a real change on the ground. He also called on Hamas to change its policies and stated that he would act to "change the situation in Gaza". Mr. Blair also criticized Israel's delay in releasing radio frequencies for a second West Bank mobile phone network, stating that it was holding up Palestinian economic development. (*Reuters, Ynetnews*)

Israeli human rights groups Gisha and Hamoked said that Israel had imposed new restrictions barring Palestinians living in Gaza from moving to the West Bank. The groups stated that "Israel was systematically taking action to further isolate the Gaza Strip, while increasing the geographic and political separation between Gaza and the West Bank". (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Two Palestinian families in Jerusalem were given orders by the municipality to demolish part of their homes because they did not have a building permit. One of the homes was located in the Old City, while the other was in the nearby neighbourhood of Silwan. It was reported that since 12 June, five such orders had been issued to families living within the walls of the Old City. (*IMEMC*)

It was reported that Israel was negotiating a deal with the United States under which Israeli building in existing settlements could go forward in certain cases. The breakthrough was said to have come about in talks with the US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell, when the Israel Prime Minister and Defense Minister asserted that the Government did not have the legal authority to stop building in cases in which tenders for new structures had already been awarded or when homes under construction had already been sold. The newly appointed Ambassador of Israel to the United States, Michael Oren, stated that he was confident that the countries would be able to reach an agreement in the near future that would enable them to put the settlement issue aside and move forward to what he regarded as far more substantive issues in the peace process. A senior White House source did not deny that progress had been made on the matter. Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat stated that: "It's not about tenders. It's not about technicalities. Any kind of settlement activity undermines the two-State solution." PA President Abbas had demanded a halt to all building, including "natural growth", as a condition for the resumption of stalled peace negotiations with Israel. State Department spokesman Ian Kelly had [stated](#) the previous day that the US position was that Israel had an obligation under the Road Map to freeze all settlement activity. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Israeli peace activists expressed shock at the report that the US Administration had been convinced that it was impossible to freeze Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank. They handed to US officials documents containing rulings of the Israeli High Court of Justice in which the judges had rejected petitions filed by settler organizations in an attempt to prevent a settlement freeze. Two panels of judges had ruled that there was no legal reason to prevent the freezing of the construction. Attorney Talia Sasson, who had represented the State in these hearings, told *Haaretz* that the Government and the Army had full authority to issue orders instructing companies to halt construction in settlements in accordance with government policy. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces destroyed the "Mitze Aviha" outpost near the settlement of "Kiryat Arba" in the West Bank. The settlers not only vowed to reconstruct the outpost but also to build new ones in the same area. (*IMEMC*)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair told *Sky News* that the return of Palestine refugees to Israel should not be ruled out as a subject for negotiation, in response to Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent policy speech on 14 June. (*IMEMC, Ynetnews*)

It was announced that the Israeli authorities would pardon 25 members of the Al-Aqsa Brigades in the West Bank who were currently in the

protective custody of the Palestinian Authority. Most of the men had been listed by Israel as “wanted” and had given themselves up to the PA after signing a statement that they would give up resistance activity in exchange for Israeli assurances that they would stop pursuing them. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas announced the launching of *Wafa* 's Hebrew page in accordance with “our belief in the inevitability of peace and coexistence of two peoples”. He added that *Wafa* 's Hebrew page was meant to be a means of communication and direct dialogue with Israeli public opinion. (*Wafa*)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged Israel and the Palestinians to immediately resume peace negotiations aimed at securing a separate Palestinian State. The Secretary-General said: “We have been wasting too long a time on the peace and security in the Middle East. I sincerely hope that, on the basis of a two-State vision, Israel and the Palestinians will immediately begin their negotiations.” He urged the two sides to stick to the 2003 Middle East Road Map. The Secretary-General welcomed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's conditional endorsement of the goal of Palestinian statehood. He announced that he would attend a meeting of the Quartet in Italy later that month. (*Reuters*)

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The Israeli army said that it had detained seven Palestinians during overnight raids in the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

It was announced that the Israeli army would remove the Vered Yericho checkpoint south of Jericho in order to allow free movement of vehicles and pedestrians from the city to the Jordan Valley. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

In remarks after meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the United States commitment to Israel's security was, and would remain, a cornerstone of its foreign policy. She said, “We want to see a stop to the settlements. We think that is an important and essential part of pursuing the efforts leading to a comprehensive peace agreement and the creation of a Palestinian State next to an Israeli-Jewish State that is secure in its borders and future”. Mr. Lieberman said Israel could not accept to “completely” halt settlement activity in the West Bank. “We have no intention to change the demographic balance in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]. We have to keep the natural growth,” Mr. Lieberman said. (www.state.gov)

It was noted that in a statement issued on 15 June, the EU Foreign Ministers had not called, as they had in the past, for Hamas to accept the Quartet's “three conditions”. It was reported that France had led the efforts to keep the three conditions from being included in the European Council's conclusions on the Middle East peace process. The upgrade of relations between the EU and Israel, which had essentially been frozen during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, did not take place. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

United States Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell stated that he hoped that Palestinian-Israeli peace talks would be resumed in a matter of weeks, adding that he was “encouraged” by the speech of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at Bar-Ilan University. Mr. Mitchell said that Prime Minister Netanyahu's recognition placed both the Palestinians and Israel on the same path of the two-State solution. He would be holding a meeting with Mr. Netanyahu in Paris the following week. (*IMEMC*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan flew to Brussels at the beginning of a European tour aimed at discussing the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations on the basis of a two-State vision. The King was also scheduled to visit the United Kingdom and Sweden. (*DPA*)

Twenty-six Egyptian and other international protesters continued to gather on the Egyptian side of the border with the Gaza Strip at Rafah, calling on officials to open it and allow aid and family members through the border crossing. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

At least a dozen Palestinian families living in various parts of East Jerusalem received demolition orders for their homes that cited lack of building permits. Four families had been forced to demolish their homes for the same reasons since the previous week. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli Supreme Court ruled to demolish the home of the Shawamreh family in the Anata neighbourhood of East Jerusalem for the fourth time. (*IMEMC*)

A right-wing group called “The Land of Israel Faithful” planned to construct 30 new settlement outposts in the West Bank in response to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech on 14 June. The planned outposts would be set up between the settlements of “Ofrah” and “Shilo”, in the “Gush Etzion” settlement block, near Hebron and near the settlements of “Elon Moreh” and “Bracha”. (*IMEMC, The Jerusalem Post*)

Incoming Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren stated that he expected the ongoing dispute between the Israeli and US Governments over West Bank settlement construction to be resolved soon. He added that the issue was still on the table but that there had been some progress on the issue over the previous few days. Mr. Oren said that the Palestinians would have to relinquish their request for a complete freeze of construction in settlements, which they formulated for the first time as a precondition for peace talks. (*Haaretz, Reuters*)

Israeli bulldozers demolished 15 animal barns and 3 shacks owned by Palestinians from Ein Al-Hilwa located near the “Massua” settlement in the Jordan Valley. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli human rights group Yesh Din began to track the increasing spread of vineyards in West Bank settlements. Dror Etkes, the group's Land Projects Coordinator, indicated that settler vineyards were spreading to Palestinian-owned land beyond what even Israel said were the authorized boundaries of settlements. (*BBC*)

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert contradicted recent statements by PA President Abbas that he had agreed in principle to the right of Palestinian refugees to resettle in Israel. Mr. Olmert said that he had only offered the Palestinians to take in a “very, very limited number” of returnees, while rejecting the principle of a comprehensive “right of return”. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli prison authorities had decided to strip the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmad Sa'adat, of his rights, in retaliation for his nine-day hunger strike in protest against an earlier decision to remand him to solitary confinement. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A group of 38 aid agencies, which included United Nations and non-governmental organizations, issued a statement denouncing Israel's ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip and indicated that the amount of goods now allowed into Gaza was still a quarter of what it was before the imposition of the blockade in 2007. (*AFP, Ma'an News Agency, www.un.org*)

18

The Israeli army arrested 15 Palestinians in Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus and Tulkarm. (*IMEMC*)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs confirmed that most of the infrastructure at the checkpoint at the southern entrance to Jericho City had been removed on 15 June. Military personnel remained at the site, monitoring the checkpoint. The IDF announced that the removal of the checkpoint was part of the “goodwill measures authorized by the [Israeli] Minister of Defense”. (*Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor said that Prime Minister Netanyahu would not offer PA President Abbas what his predecessor, Ehud Olmert, had agreed to give him in concessions. He said that maintaining the status quo in the Palestinian territories was “not an option” for Israel. “The Palestinians must show that they are undergoing a change that will lead to an accord. A Likud prime minister has said he accepts a demilitarized Palestinian state and the question is now about which way Abu Mazen [President Abbas] will choose to take,” he added. (*Haaretz*)

A Middle East peace deal would be possible “within the year” if all sides agreed to peaceful negotiations, Quartet Representative Tony Blair declared in comments on *Al Jazeera* 's English Service aired on 19 June. He added that there was a “great sense of hope and expectation” in the Middle East. (*AFP*)

PA President Abbas would be visiting Syria and Saudi Arabia to brief those countries on his meetings with US President Obama and to have a united Arab position, the official spokesman of the PA Presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, said. (Wafa)

The International Committee of the Red Cross said in a [statement](#) that it welcomed former US President Jimmy Carter's handing of a letter from Gilad Shalit's family to Hamas. The ICRC's head of operations for the Middle East and North Africa said: "However, this cannot replace the regular and unconditional contacts with his family that Gilad Shalit is entitled to under international humanitarian law". The statement said it regretted Hamas' refusal to allow ICRC representatives to visit Mr. Shalit. (www.icrc.org)

A group of extremist Israeli settlers attacked a 30-year-old Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem near Road No. 1, which separated East and West Jerusalem. He suffered a broken arm and several cuts and bruises. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Jerusalem municipality workers were stoned as they distributed 33 home demolition orders in the Bustan neighbourhood of Silwan, in East Jerusalem. The Israeli workers were forced to leave the neighbourhood. (Ma'an News Agency)

The PA would release 20 detained Hamas members in the West Bank and dozens of others in the coming days in a bid to create a positive atmosphere before the unity talks in Cairo, a senior Fatah official, Ibrahim Abu An-Najjah, said. (Ma'an News Agency)

In an affidavit to the Military Court, Israeli Kfir Brigade Commander Col. Itai Virob said the IDF might use force against Palestinian detainees only when suspected of holding information crucial to the thwarting of a terrorist attack against Israel. Col. Virob had been previously reprimanded for testifying that the use of violence was acceptable against Palestinian detainees not directly involved in terrorism themselves. He outlined what seemed to be an ethical code for Israeli security forces in the West Bank. (Ynetnews)

19

Israeli troops arrested an 18-year-old high school student from the Ertah neighbourhood south of Tulkarm. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli troops attacked the weekly protest against the construction of the separation wall in Bil'in village near Ramallah. Dozens of protesters suffered from gas inhalation. Troops set fire to olive groves on the Palestinian side of the wall gate. Israeli soldiers also attacked with batons and tear gas Palestinian and international peace activists during the weekly protest against the separation wall in the village of Ni'lin, in the vicinity of Ramallah. Numerous protesters had to be treated for tear gas inhalation. (IMEMC)

An 11-year-old child died in the Gaza Strip as a result of wounds sustained on 6 January 2009 during Israeli military Operation Cast Lead. (IMEMC)

Israeli border guards posted videos online in which they humiliated Palestinians, including one in which they ordered a young man to sing and slap himself. The captions on one video indicated that it was made in November 2007. Haaretz quoted an unnamed border police officer who said that such behaviour was common among police serving in Jerusalem and along Israel's separation wall. In an interview with a number of border policemen, Haaretz found that they viewed such issues as "humorous". A border police spokesman stated that the high command of the border police had known about the videos since 2008 and that they were trying to find those who filmed them in order to call them for clarifications. (AFP, Haaretz, IMEMC)

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman outlined his vision for the first stage of peace talks with the Palestinians, saying that the parties must begin negotiations with points "where there were no disputes". He said that "we can begin with roadblocks, the outposts, the establishment of a single security apparatus, the smuggling of illegal weapons, a [security and governance] pilot project like in Jenin, which we would like to expand". Mr. Liberman said: "If we begin with sensitive issues, like Jerusalem, the whole thing will break down". He added that he believed that Israelis and Palestinians must develop a "positive dynamic" and then engage in direct talks. (Haaretz)

The Government of Israel had sent messages to several Arab States recently, seeking to counter negative reactions to Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech on 14 June, asking them to pressure PA President Abbas to resume negotiations with Israel. (Haaretz)

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stated in an [editorial](#) published in *The Wall Street Journal*, entitled "How to Achieve Israeli-Palestinian Peace", that US President Obama's seminal address in Cairo marked a turning point in America's relations with the Muslim world. He said that the Palestinian issue required the greatest urgency, given the precarious state of the peace process after years of stalemate. Mr. Mubarak also stated that despite the setbacks of the previous few years, it was important to remember that many of the elements of a solution had already been negotiated, adding that the Arab Peace Initiative provided a regional framework for such a settlement. He said that the road to a final settlement would require leadership and concerted effort from all sides and that there should be a serious process to negotiate a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Mubarak said that Israel's relentless settlement expansion, which had seriously eroded the prospects for a two-State solution, and the closure of Gaza must cease. The priority should be to resolve the permanent borders of a sovereign and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, based on the 1967 lines, as this would unlock most of the other permanent status issues, including settlement, security, water and Jerusalem. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, The Wall Street Journal, Ynetnews)

King Abdullah II of Jordan arrived in London for talks with UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown on efforts to start serious and direct negotiations to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-State solution and within a regional context. During a meeting the day before with King Albert II of Belgium, both Kings underlined the need to intensify efforts to realize peace in the region, which was of global interest and a basic pillar for international security and stability. While in Brussels, King Abdullah also met with the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to discuss efforts to bring about peace in the region. (The Jordan Times)

The United States stepped up pressure on Israel regarding the Gaza Strip by sending a diplomatic note three weeks earlier in which it officially protested the Gaza policy and demanded a more liberal opening of the border crossings to facilitate reconstruction. The note was followed by a verbal communication clarifying that the Obama Administration thought that Israel's linkage of the case of abducted soldier Gilad Shalit and the opening of the crossings was not constructive. The first task was to allow food and medicine into the territory; another issue was the transfer of cash to banks in the Gaza Strip; the third issue was the expansion of the system for opening the border crossings and permission to import a variety of goods that would enable imports and exports and encourage economic growth. (Haaretz)

It was announced that Israel would open the Kerem Shalom crossing into the Gaza Strip to allow in 350 cows and approximately 40 truckloads of electrical equipment, for the first time in eight months. The equipment would be used to repair the Gaza power station and grid. The Karni and Nahal Oz crossing points would be closed. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas indicated that there had been no change in positions over requirements for a prisoner swap. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum stated that there was "nothing new in the exchange deal and the ball is in Israel's court". (AFP, Ma'an News Agency)

20

Two Palestinians and an Israeli peace activist were injured in an attack by the IDF and extremist settlers in Beit Ummar, north of Hebron.

Palestinian Solidarity Movement activist Mohammad Awad said seven international and Israeli activists had also been arrested by the IDF, who had prevented demonstrators from reaching lands threatened to be seized. (Wafa)

PA President Abbas met with Syria's President Al-Assad in Damascus. President Abbas also met with the Secretary-General of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Nayef Hawatmeh, and reiterated that he would not negotiate with Israel until all settlement activity had been

halted. After the meeting, they issued a statement saying that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's policy speech had failed to respond to international resolutions or to Palestinian, Arab and international calls to end settlements, adding that it had ignored Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights and Sheba'a farms. They also reaffirmed that national dialogue and new parliamentary and presidential elections based on proportional representation were the way to build Palestinian national unity, both in Palestine and in the diaspora, pointing to the upcoming Palestinian national dialogue session on 7 July as a key step toward unity. (*Ma'an News Agency, WAFA*)

Israeli authorities decided to postpone the release from prison of Fatah lawmaker Jamal Hwiel, who had completed a seven-and-a-half-year sentence. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

21

The armed wing of the Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for launching two mortar shells at an Israeli position east of Al-Bureij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces launched an incursion deep into the camp, located in the central Gaza Strip. There were no immediate reports of casualties in the incursion. The Israeli military also said that it had defused four explosive devices along the border.

(*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces had raided the Nur Shams refugee camp and other areas in and around Tulkarm, handing over written orders summoning five Palestinians from the camp and another from the town of Dubanah for interrogation by the Israeli intelligence agencies, Palestinian sources said.

(*Ma'an News Agency*)

After meeting with President Mubarak in Cairo, Israeli Defense Minister Barak said at a press conference that regional talks would be better for Israel than bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians on establishing a peace accord. He said that in negotiations with the Palestinians, Israel was the only party that could give. Given that the Palestinians were the underdog, the talks would be asymmetrical. But in regional talks, Mr. Barak said it would become clear that Israel was the isolated party. He said topics could include the struggle against radical Islamic terrorism and economic projects. Mr. Barak's office released a transcript of his remarks, which included the observation: "The Arab side has much to give in the form of confidence-building measures and steps toward normalization." (*AP*)

At the weekly Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed the diplomatic speech that he had made at Bar-Ilan University the previous week. Mr. Netanyahu, among other things, said the following: "The two main points that I sought to emphasize were: first of all, that we are talking about two States for two peoples and one of these is the Jewish People and the Jewish People are entitled to a national State of their own. [...] It was important to me to emphasize that the Palestinian side must recognize Israel as the national State of the Jewish People just as we are being asked to recognize the Palestinian State as the national State of the Palestinian people. Moreover, a peace agreement must put an end to their claims in this regard and to all claims and put an end to the conflict. [...] The second issue, of course, is demilitarization because security will not be achieved except by demilitarization and demilitarization does not detract from the Palestinian self-determination. I do not understand why, for the purpose of Palestinian self-determination, they need Kassam and Grad missiles. I can understand that they need a strong police force and security services; we are encouraging this but they do not need tanks, artillery or missiles. [...] Therefore, on these principles – recognition of Israel as the national State of the Jewish People and an end to claims, and the clear demand that the international community guarantee effective demilitarization measures – I think that we have thereby covered the areas of a very broad consensus among the Israeli public". (www.pmo.gov.il)

Israel's coordinator for activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Amos Gilad, had allowed a 350 head-of-cattle shipment into the Gaza Strip after US pressure on Israel to lift restrictions on food going into Gaza. The preparations were also ongoing for the import of more cattle the following week and for nearly 4,000 during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. (*Haaretz*)

During a workshop in Cairo, Hamas official and former PA Minister of Health Bassam Naim said that 22 per cent of medicines donated to the Gaza Strip had either expired or been recycled and were therefore unfit for consumption. He said that some medicines had become abundant, while others remained scarce due to inappropriate selection. He also said the Union of Arab Physicians began a distance training programme for Gazans who worked in the health sector. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Settlers from the settlement of "Sasia" set fire to a large tent. Three Palestinians inside it, who hailed from a small hamlet near Yatta, south of Hebron, had narrowly escaped death, local residents said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Defence Minister Barak met in Cairo with Egyptian President Mubarak, Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Intelligence Chief General Omar Suleiman. After the meeting, Mr. Barak said that a new negotiating team was examining ways to move forward in the case of IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit. Egyptian sources said Mr. Barak's visit was to hear about Cairo's plan to advance a broader deal for a ceasefire and a rapprochement between the Palestinian factions. (*Haaretz*)

22

Nizar Ayyash, head of the Palestinian fishermen's union, said that Israeli warships had obstructed two fishing boats, taking four fishermen who were sailing off the Gaza City coast, to Israel's Ashdod port. He said Israeli navy officers beat the fishermen and also confiscated their boats.

(*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli soldiers had checked the identities of a number of workers and residents in the Ash-Shuhada area of Jenin but no one had been detained, according to local sources. Meanwhile, the IDF erected a military checkpoint in the area but soon removed it. Israeli forces seized 12 Palestinians from the villages of Safa and Deir Al-Asal Al-Fouqa in the West Bank after ransacking several homes. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces restored the Atara checkpoint north of Ramallah in the central West Bank, which had been removed earlier that month. Regardless, Palestinians were free to cross the checkpoint in both directions. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Minister for Regional Development Silvan Shalom met with 20 European Union ambassadors and asked them to urge the Palestinians to resume the peace process. He told the EU representatives that "if Europe wishes to be a key player in the political process it cannot categorically side with the Palestinians". According to Mr. Shalom, there was nothing standing in the way of renewing the peace process after Prime Minister Netanyahu had accepted the two-State solution. He told the ambassadors that they had the ability to pressure the Palestinians into resuming political and economic negotiations. Mr. Shalom also discussed Israel's blockade on Gaza, saying Israel continued to ease restrictions on the transfer of goods to Gaza for humanitarian concerns. "Imagine that 5,000 rockets would have been fired on your countries and you would still have to provide food and other goods" the Minister said, adding: "we will not allow the transfer of iron and cement because these materials are later used against us in the form of fortification and producing weapons." (*Ynetnews*)

Israeli authorities decided to partially open the Kerem Shalom and Nahal Oz crossing points into the Gaza Strip, while the Karni crossing would remain closed, according to Raed Fattouh, the Palestinian border crossings official. He said that 60 to 79 trucks loaded with humanitarian aid and commercial goods would pass through Kerem Shalom, while limited quantities of cooking gas and industrial diesel for Gaza's only power plant would be shipped through Nahal Oz. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a press release, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference announced the completion of the first stage of its humanitarian programme aimed at assisting the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. This included the inauguration on 19 June of the first specialized eye hospital in the Gaza Strip which would provide eye treatment and surgery services. The OIC delegation visiting the Gaza Strip had also distributed medical equipment worth \$1.2 million to hospitals. (*WAFA*)

A document before Israel's Supreme Court showed that the World Zionist Organization (WZO), acting as an agent of the Israeli Government, took private Palestinian land in the West Bank and gave it to Jewish settlers, even though the State itself had declared the property off-limits to settlement.

The contract reviewed by the court authorized a Jewish couple to lease land in the settlement of "Ofra" where their home and eight others were in contention. When Israeli human rights groups and Palestinian owners of the land went to the court to get the houses torn down, the court gave the Government two weeks to explain the situation, during which time the couple hastily completed construction of the homes. Then, in another reversal, the Defence Ministry froze the demolition plan and left the case no closer to resolution. The affair also threw a spotlight on the WZO, an international body that promoted Jewish education and immigration to Israel. (AP)

Under the protection of the IDF, Israeli settlers uprooted more than 150 olive and grape vines and set fires to Palestinian land in Wadi Abu Ar-Rish, near the settlement of "Bat Ayin," south of Bethlehem, according to witnesses. The municipal government of Beit Ummar, within whose jurisdiction the land is located, issued a condemnation of the assault and called for an investigation. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel's *Army Radio* said the Government had plans to allocate \$250 million over the following two years for settlements in the West Bank. The figure had been factored into the 2009-2010 budget, which had passed its first reading in the Knesset the previous week. Some \$125 million was to be used for various security expenses, with most of the rest destined for housing construction, the Radio said. The Peace Now anti-settlement watchdog group said that the settlement spending in the two-year budget was likely to be higher and "spread over several sections of the budget." (AFP)

On behalf of detained IDF Cpl. Shalit, a group of activists held demonstrations at crossings into the Gaza Strip as part of a commemoration of the three-year anniversary of the soldier's capture by Hamas. (Haaretz)

In an interview with *Al-Jazeera* TV, Azzam Al-Ahmed, Head of the PLC Fatah bloc said that PA President Abbas had ordered the release of all Hamas prisoners, including those held on security charges. Mr. Al-Ahmed, who was charged with holding reconciliation talks with Hamas said the release would get under way in the coming days. (DPA)

In a speech at Al-Quds University, PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said: "I call on all our people to unite around the project of establishing a State and to strengthen its institutions [...] so that the Palestinian State becomes, by the end of next year or within two years at most, a reality." He said his priority was Palestinian unity between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In line with President Abbas' policy, he also said there would be no resumption of peace talks until Israel froze Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank. (Reuters)

Israel had sold Palestinian refugees' properties, according to the Adalah legal centre, a human rights group. The organization said this was against Israeli and international law. The ownership of the properties had been transferred to the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property which governed land and property issues, until a political solution was reached to the refugee issue. "The sale of Palestinian refugees' properties (also) contradicts international humanitarian law, which stipulates the need to respect the right of private property and explicitly prohibits the final expropriation of private property following the termination of warfare," Adalah stated, adding: "Selling these properties constitutes the final expropriation of the right to property of Palestinian refugees, despite the special legal, historical and political status of these properties". (www.adalah.org, AFP)

23

The IDF said it had detained six Palestinians overnight in the area of Qalqilya, in the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu arrived in Italy on his first trip to Europe since being elected. Any new Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories would be an obstacle to peace in the Middle East, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said after meeting with Mr. Netanyahu. Speaking at a joint press conference with the Israeli leader, Mr. Berlusconi said he had "stressed the need to send significant signals on stopping settlements, which represent an obstacle to peace". He said Italy approved of Mr. Netanyahu's vision of a demilitarized Palestinian State, saying that "we think this [State] should exist, just as we think Israel should be recognized" by Arab countries. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said Italy would ask Mr. Netanyahu to quickly open talks with PA President Abbas and would appreciate the "gesture" of a moratorium on expanding existing settlements. (www.ansa.it, AP, Haaretz)

After talks with Egypt's President Mubarak in Cairo, Russian Federation President Medvedev said that Moscow aimed to hold a Middle East peace conference before the end of 2009. Mr. Mubarak said, "I affirmed Egypt's support for holding the proposed international conference in Moscow to push peace efforts and our support for everything that contributes towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the region". Mr. Medvedev asked: "What is the basis for a solution to this problem? Those are international legal norms and certain principles including the principle of two States, discussions on [Israeli] settlements and the future capital. [...] These are difficult questions but Russia is ready to help solve them". (Reuters)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said in Brussels that the international community and the European Union "cannot afford to fail" in their search for peace in the Middle East. In a wide-ranging speech, Mr. Solana reiterated his position that the Israeli Prime Minister's recent acknowledgment of the notion of a Palestinian State was a first step but insisted that continued settlement activity in the Palestinian territories remained a stumbling block. (www.euromedinfo.eu)

In an [interview](#) with *Bild* newspaper, Prime Minister Netanyahu said: "I think they [Arab States] should have embraced my proposal. What's wrong with the idea that the Arab world recognize Israel as the nation-State of the Jewish people with full and equal citizenship for its minority populations? What's wrong with the idea that the Palestinian State next to Israel not be a militarized one that could threaten Israel? Whoever really wants peace has no reason to reject my proposals." (www.pmo.gov)

The Fatah Revolutionary Council met in Ramallah to schedule its Sixth General Conference on 4 August in Bethlehem. It would be the first Fatah leadership meeting in 20 years, congregating 1,550 active Fatah members from the West Bank, Gaza and the Diaspora. (Palestine Press Agency) Dozens of Israeli demonstrators formed a human chain to block the roads leading to the "Karni", "Erez" and "Kerem Shalom" crossings to disrupt UN aid deliveries into Gaza, in a protest demanding the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Raed Fattouh, a Palestinian border crossings official, said that the demonstrators had forced most of the trucks to turn back from the crossing. Out of more than 60 truck loads of goods, only 4 had been able to make deliveries through the "Kerem Shalom" crossing. Limited quantities of cooking gas and industrial diesel for Gaza's sole power plant were to be shipped through the "Nahal Oz" crossing. On the Gaza side of the Erez crossing, 100 Palestinians held a demonstration against the Israeli blockade and demanded the release of the roughly 8,000 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. (AP, Ma'an News Agency)

A USAID \$1.1 million renovation project had improved conditions in eight public schools in Jenin, including additional school classrooms, improved sanitary facilities, new computer labs and libraries, painted and fixed infrastructure, and improved student safety. This project was part of the US Government's \$17 million development assistance package for Jenin aimed at improving Palestinians' quality of life. A hospital had been renovated and road and water projects in the Jenin Governorate, as well as sports facilities and community infrastructure, had been developed. (Wafa)

The PA Ministry of Social Affairs and the EU would launch a social allowance payment funded by Italy and Austria, which would be disbursed every

three months for 49,600 needy families across the West Bank and Gaza. The EU had announced that it would double the social allowance to the poorest families in Gaza. (Wafa)

Israel's Minister of Public Security Yitzhak Aharonovitch visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem under heavy guard, accompanied by Police Commissioner Dudi Cohen and Jerusalem District Police Chief Aharon Franco. Mr. Aharonovitch and his delegation then moved to the Dome of the Rock, where the Islamic Waqf was currently performing maintenance work. "His purpose was to incense the Muslims and try to show them who's in charge," said MK Taleb A-Sanaa (United Arab List). According to Mr. Aharonovitch's media adviser, Tal Harel, the visit was routine and the purpose was "to see how the police would deploy in case of an emergency," and had been coordinated in advance with the Waqf. Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa denounced Mr. Aharonovitch's visit as "provocative" and "childish." (DPA, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

In an interview with Italy's RAI TV, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that international "arguing" over Israel's stance on settlements was impeding progress in the Middle East peace process. He also said that Israel had been forthcoming with its intentions to halt construction while still allowing for natural growth in existing communities, which he called "an equitable position which reflects our willingness to enter immediately in peace negotiations and get on with peace", adding: "I think that the more we spend time arguing about this, the more we waste time instead of moving towards peace." Mr. Netanyahu called his endorsement of a Palestinian State without military capabilities a "winning formula for peace". (Haaretz)

Activists for Bimkom Association discovered that Israel's Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, had recently authorized the Civil Administration to submit a plan for the construction of 300 housing units in the unauthorized outpost of "Givat Habrecha", near the settlement of "Talmon". The new construction was located about 13 kilometres east of the Green Line, on the Palestinian side of the wall. The Bimkom Association objected to the fact that adjacent to the area on the ground covered by the plan, which even according to the Civil Administration was private Palestinian land, several permanent structures had been put up by residents. (Haaretz)

The Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign said 304 Palestinians faced house demolition in the Jordan Valley. Demolition and eviction orders had been given to the communities in Al-Hadidiya and Khirbet ar-Ras al-Ahmar on 31 May. (Wafa)

Israel released former PLC Speaker Abdel-Aziz Dweik after three years of detention. Mr. Dweik was received by a large delegation of Fatah and Hamas political supporters, including Hamas leaders Omar Abdul-Raziq, Mahmoud al-Ramahi, Fathi Qar'awi and Abdul-Rahman Zeidan. PA President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad called Mr. Dweik as he arrived at the At-Tayba military checkpoint to congratulate him on his release. It was not clear whether Mr. Dweik would resume his duties as PLC speaker. "My body is free but my soul is still in jail with the other prisoners," he declared. Hamas' spokesman in Gaza, Sami Abu Zuhri, said 35 more of their parliamentarians were still in Israeli prisons. (AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

A second member of the PLC, Jamal Hweil, from Hebron, had been released after serving a seven-year prison sentence. He was elected to the PLC while in Israeli custody. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs Issa Qaraqe said Palestinian prisoners were waiting for Israeli prison authorities to allow them to take the Tawjihi high school matriculation exams. In 2009, a total of 1,821 Palestinian prisoners had registered to take the exams. Mr. Qaraqe said that any attempt to prevent the prisoners from taking the exam would be "in contravention of the Geneva convention." (Ma'an News Agency)

United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry briefed the Security Council about the situation in the Middle East. He said that the unresolved crisis in the Gaza Strip had negative repercussions on all efforts to advance the peace process and wreaked unacceptable havoc on the fabric of civilian life in Gaza. Mr. Serry said that a commitment by Israel and the Palestinians to change the dynamics in Gaza was vital and announced that the situation there could be among the issues to be discussed at the 26 June Quartet meeting in Italy. He said that what was needed was for both the Israeli and Palestinian Governments to be clearly committed to a two-State solution achieved peacefully through negotiations on all core issues. Mr. Serry deemed it completely unacceptable that no reconstruction materials were allowed into Gaza, where an entire civilian population was trapped in a war zone, given the scale of damage caused by Israel's military operation earlier that year. (www.un.org, Ma'an News Agency)

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sent letters of commendation to two UNRWA field officers, Scott Anderson and Jodie Clark, praising their "prompt and courageous action" during Israel's 22-day offensive in Gaza. (UN News Centre, Wafa)

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The Israeli army damaged three houses during a large-scale predawn incursion into the village of Awarta, near Nablus. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Arab Foreign Ministers, meeting in Cairo at the headquarters of the League of Arab States, vowed to support US President Obama's Middle East peace initiatives but said that normalization with Israel was contingent on a "complete stop to settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem". They said that Arab countries "were prepared to deal positively with the proposals of President Obama to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict and take the necessary steps to support the American effort, based on achieving comprehensive peace and the creation of a sovereign, independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital". Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that Arabs were prepared to reconsider dealing with Israel "because there is now an American Administration which has, since day one, expressed its seriousness in ending the Arab-Israeli conflict". They added that they "give importance to the serious and balanced proposal put forward by President Obama", although "we consider statements by [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu as unacceptable". The Cairo meeting preceded the meeting between the Arab Peace Initiative Committee and the Quartet to review means and ways of pushing the Middle East peace process forward. (AFP, Petra News Agency, Qatar News Agency)

Speaking to reporters after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi gave his backing to Israel's plan for a demilitarized Palestinian State as part of a solution to the Middle East conflict. He also supported the requirement that the new State should recognize Israel as a Jewish State, a move that would implicitly renounce claims to any return of refugees to land lost at the founding of Israel in 1948.

After a two-hour meeting, the Italian Prime Minister said that he had "drawn the [Israeli] Prime Minister's attention to the need to send signals about stopping the establishment of settlements, which would otherwise be a hindrance to peace". Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini told reporters that Italy "would very much appreciate a gesture on the Israeli side announcing a moratorium on the expansion of existing settlements", adding that it was not a problem for Italy if Israeli settlements expanded internally, but "expanding settlements like wildfire, that is a problem." Mr. Netanyahu was said to have emerged upbeat from his meeting with Mr. Berlusconi, saying that the Italian leader had accepted the conditions he had laid out in his speech at Bar-Ilan University on 14 June regarding any final status agreement and that "it would be hard to find a better friend". (AP, euobserver.com, The Jerusalem Post)

US Middle East Envoy George Mitchell had decided to cancel a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, scheduled to take place in Paris the following day, reportedly because of a serious dispute over West Bank settlements. The Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot quoted an unnamed Israeli official as saying that Washington had issued a "stern" message to Mr. Netanyahu to halt all settlement activity on occupied Palestinian land. An

aide to Mr. Netanyahu claimed it was Israel that had called off the meeting to allow staff to work on issues, including the collecting of data, and to present it to Mr. Mitchell in an organized manner. US State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said that the meeting had been cancelled in order to allow Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Barak to meet first during the following week to straighten out diverging views on settlements. "I'll reiterate our – what we always say or what I always say and what others say: We oppose continued settlement activity. All parties have the responsibility to help create the context that will support renewed, meaningful negotiations that can be concluded quickly", adding that "the bottom line is that we expect all parties to honour their commitments. Our position is that settlement activity has to stop consistent with the Road Map." A senior official travelling with Mr. Netanyahu said that "a lot of hard work was needed to reach common ground". (AP, AFP, Haaretz, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews)

During a visit to the region, Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen said that the fact that Israel and the Palestinians were exploring a two-State solution mere months after the Gaza crisis was an "unpredictable" occurrence and that speeches by the Israeli and Palestinian Authority Prime Ministers and US President Obama had created a momentum for peace. He said that it was important that the European Union should not only play a role in supporting the Palestinians but should also hold round-table discussions with Israel. (Haaretz)

Former Israeli negotiator Ron Pundak and current director of The Peres Center for Peace in Tel Aviv said that documents accepted by Israeli leaders during the peace talks with the Palestinians that resulted in the 1993 Oslo accords had said nothing about their country's status as a Jewish State or homeland, a concept also absent from other accords negotiated by the two sides as recently as 2007. Mr. Pundak said that "it had never been an Israeli demand". The issue was seen as a proxy for discussion of the status of millions of Palestinian refugees in the region or as an effort to influence future debate over refugees. (The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post)

Ninety Palestinians, who had finished receiving medical treatment in Egypt, returned to the Gaza Strip through the Rafah border crossing. (Ma'an News Agency)

Two Gaza border terminals had been opened partially for transit of supplies. The Karni crossing remained closed while 100-116 trucks carrying humanitarian aid and commercial goods had been allowed through the Kerem Shalom crossing and limited quantities of cooking gas and industrial diesel for the Gaza power plant had been shipped through the Nahal Oz crossing. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli settlers from the "Halamish" settlement near Ramallah set fire to olive trees near the village of Deir Nidham. According to the villagers, the fire had burned 120 olive trees on 15 dunums of land. (Ma'an News Agency)

Settlers from the "Yizhar" settlement, located south of Nablus, raided a Palestinian construction staging area for the third time. The settlers destroyed water wells and smashed wood and other materials at the site. (Ma'an News Agency)

Villagers from Nahhalin, near Bethlehem, managed to stop workers from the Jerusalem Electric Company from destroying their lands in order to build high-voltage electric poles that would supply a nearby settlement with electricity. (IMEMC)

Israeli Government sources told Haaretz that Israel was considering enacting a temporary freeze in the construction of settlements, excluding projects already under way, if the United States were to agree for Israel to continue the expansion of existing settlements for "natural growth" purposes. The report was made public after US Middle East Envoy George Mitchell cancelled a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu that was to have taken place that week. According to Haaretz, Israel and the United States had agreed that, for the time being, no new settlements would be built and no Palestinian land would be confiscated. The parameters of the settlement construction freeze continued to be negotiated.

However, the two countries disagreed on the duration of the purported settlement freeze: Israel said that it would be for six months, while the US wanted the freeze to last for a longer period. (Haaretz, IMEMC, The Jerusalem Post)

Official Israeli media sources and the offices of the Prime Minister and Defense Minister denied reports that captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who had spent three years in captivity, had been moved to Egypt in preparation for a prisoner swap deal. The Israeli Prime Minister's office said that progress had been made but that no deal had been reached. The previous day, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he would not rule out the renewal of negotiations with Hamas in an attempt to secure Shalit's release but denied Arab media reports about a transfer to Egypt. According to earlier Palestinian reports, Israel had conveyed a message to Hamas through former US President Jimmy Carter, expressing willingness to release most of the prisoners Hamas had been demanding in exchange for Shalit. (DPA, Haaretz, IMEMC, The Jerusalem Post)

The Jerusalem Magistrate's Court acquitted four border guard officers accused of assaulting a Palestinian detainee during an incident in 2004. (Ynetnews)

The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel human rights group released a [report](#) entitled Shackling as a Form of Torture and Abuse, which was based on 547 cases and described the "pain and humiliation" suffered by Palestinian detainees at the hands of different authorities in Israel, led by the Shin Bet security service and the IDF. The group said that these figures were "surely only the tip of the iceberg". (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

The Amin Media Network launched the Amin Blogging site in partnership with UNESCO. The head of the UNESCO office in Palestine, Louise Haxthausen, said that the project was aimed at encouraging journalism in Palestine and helping create an interactive environment between the Palestinian public and Palestinian decision makers. (Wafa)

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Israeli troops seized more than seven "wanted" Palestinians in Nablus and the village of Bil'in, near Ramallah. Palestinian security services confirmed the detention of four young men, all from the Balata refugee camp. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian militants opened fire on an IDF patrol near the Nahal Oz crossing into the Gaza Strip. There were no casualties among the Israeli troops, who returned fire. Israel subsequently closed the crossing. (Haaretz)

Israeli and Western sources said that the IDF would refrain from entering Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho and Qalqilya, except in cases where the army believed Palestinian militants were poised to attack Israelis. "The IDF will act as little as possible to allow the Palestinians to take more initiative and responsibilities over their own security," an Israeli security source said, referring to Palestinian forces that received US and European-funded training and equipment. The source said: "As long as they take a step forward in responsibility, we will take a step back in controlling the area", adding, "But in circumstances of 'ticking bombs', or a planned attack, Israel will not hesitate to enter and thwart the attack." (Haaretz)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu reiterated his demands that the future Palestinian State should be disarmed and that Israel had the right to continue construction and expansion of existing settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He claimed that this issue did not cause any demographic changes in the region. (IMEMC)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal dismissed the terms for a demilitarized State laid out by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu by saying that he had offered "mere self-governance under the name of a country", while hailing what he described as "new language" towards Hamas by US President Obama which he described as the first step towards direct talks without preconditions. He also said that President Obama remained too sympathetic toward Israel, despite his pledge to work hard for the establishment of a Palestinian State and that Gen. Dayton's force was the main obstacle to the success of Palestinian reconciliation talks. Mr. Mashaal added that the movement would cooperate with any international effort that would end the Israeli occupation but that the Palestinians would never accept any future recognition of Israel as a Jewish State and would not accept Jerusalem as a united capital under Israeli sovereignty. (BBC, Haaretz, IMEMC, Middle East Online, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

US President Obama decided to name veteran Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross as his special adviser on the Middle East, the Arab Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan and South Asia. (IMEMC, Ynetnews)

Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu met France's Prime Minister, Francois Fillon, and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner. The latter reminded Mr. Netanyahu "of France's expectations concerning the peace process, which we want quickly restarted", according to a statement from Mr. Kouchner's office ahead of the meeting. During the meeting, Mr. Netanyahu pressed his bid for a demilitarized Palestinian State. (AP)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said in an interview with *Al-Ahram* that the European Union and the United States were on the same wavelength and working together to help relaunch the Middle East peace process but that Israel and the Palestinians had to take decisive steps to make a solution possible. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini also hailed the new unity between the Obama Administration and the EU on the Middle East peace process, saying that the two powers were closer together than ever before on the issue.

(DPA, *Al-Ahram*)

Israel opened three crossing points into the Gaza Strip for limited shipments of goods and fuel, according to Palestinian border official Raed Fattouh. He said that approximately 117 truckloads of supplies would be allowed through the Kerem Shalom crossing and an unspecified amount of cooking gas and industrial fuel had been transferred through the Nahal Oz crossing. Truckloads of wheat and animal feed would also be allowed through the Karni crossing, he said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA Minister for Public Works and Housing Mohammad Shtayyeh denounced "the systematic policy Israel is carrying out inside Jerusalem, including expelling its Palestinian residents", the latest of which were home demolition orders in the Al-Bustan neighbourhood. He added that "we as Palestinians are facing Israel's dangerous policies carried out inside Jerusalem and expressing denunciation of this escalation against the city".

(*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinians blocked Israeli settlers' attempts to take control of a house in East Jerusalem. PA Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Hatem Abdul Qader said that he and a group of local residents, including a Fatah youth group, stood vigil in a house owned by Darwish Hjazi in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, blocking two attempts by the settlers to overrun the house. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

IDF bulldozers had destroyed large areas of agricultural lands belonging to residents of Nahalin village near Bethlehem, since 23 June. Some 35 acres planted with grapes and almond trees belonging to Palestinian farmers had been destroyed. (*Palestine Press Agency*)

Christian Peacemaker Teams in the south Hebron hills reported that Israeli settlers from the "Havat Ma'on" outpost had called in Israeli police, who had arrested two young Palestinian shepherds tending their sheep near the village of Tuba. They had later been released. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A European diplomatic source indicated that Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who also held French citizenship, might be transferred to Egypt very soon as a first step towards a prisoner-swap deal arranged by Egyptian mediators, who were said to still be working on a package of measures that could combine exchanges of prisoners, ceasefire arrangements, the easing of Israel's blockade on Gaza and rapprochement between rival Palestinian factions. Shalit would remain in Egypt until the prisoner swap was carried out. The same day, UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband once again called on Hamas to release Shalit, on the third anniversary of his capture. He also repeated UK's calls on Israel to reduce further the current restrictions on the Gaza crossings, to allow in aid, reconstruction materials and commercial goods and to permit the legitimate flow of people through the crossings. Mr. Miliband said that it was imperative to start a new cycle of hope in Gaza, so that all residents could turn their back on violence and focus on building a safe and secure future. Also on 25 June, the International Committee of the Red Cross said it had approached Hamas a number of times in order to visit Shalit but that the result had been unsatisfactory. Israeli officials played down reports that they were close to agreeing on a deal with Hamas that would include the release of Shalit. (www.fco.gov.uk, *Haaretz*, IMEMC, *Reuters*)

Palestinian prisoners at the Ramon facility in Israel's southern Negev signed an "accord of honour" in which they pledged to reject the "Israeli decision of wearing the orange costume that negatively affects the prisoners." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Member of Knesset Mohammad Barakeh met with jailed Palestinian Legislative Council Member Marwan Barghouti, who informed him of the hard conditions of at least 17 Palestinians who were in solitary confinement and urged him to work on their cases. They also discussed the cases of thousands of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prison facilities and, in particular, the case of detained leaders. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Spanish legislators voted to change a law that allowed judges to indict foreigners, narrowing its scope to cases with a clear link to Spain. The reform would not be retroactive, allowing the continued prosecution of a dozen or so cases, including those against Israeli officials, under universal jurisdiction. Human Rights Watch said that it was "deplorable for the Spanish Government to capitulate to diplomatic pressure". (*The Jerusalem Post*)

A team of Free Gaza activists, who had planned to set sail to Gaza, postponed their journey after Cypriot authorities did not give them permission to leave. Cypriot shipping officials cited inspection requirements as the reason for stopping the two vessels. The two ships carried construction materials and toys for children. (*Reuters*)

The Human Rights Council independent fact-finding mission would hold hearings in Gaza on 28 and 29 June and in Geneva on 6 and 7 July. "As it stands, we have not been given permission to hold the hearings in Israel," a spokeswoman of the mission said. Though the hearings would be broadcast live to the public, she said that the mission would also accept testimonies of people affected by the conflict in southern Israel and Gaza in private settings, if they preferred to remain anonymous. The mission would fly Israelis to Geneva to hold another round of public hearings. Palestinians from the West Bank would also be able to go to Europe to testify. "This mandate is completely balanced. We will be looking at all sides," the spokeswoman added. (DPA)

International music legend Leonard Cohen would perform in Ramallah two days after his upcoming performance in Israel. About 1,000 fans were expected to attend the concert, to be held on 26 September in the Palestinian city's Cultural Palace. (*Haaretz*)

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One Palestinian was killed and four others were injured when a tunnel collapsed in the Al-Salaam neighbourhood of Rafah on the Egypt-Gaza border. (IMEMC, *Ma'an News Agency*, *Ynetnews*)

The United States praised Israel for what it described as "actions taken to ease the daily life of the Palestinians in the West Bank", after the Israeli army removed some roadblocks. State Department spokesman Ian Kelly added that the US "recognized Israel's security concerns that must remain protected". Mr. Kelly said that efforts to "maintain security while maximizing movement of Palestinian people and goods were critical and of course our ultimate goal is a comprehensive peace based on a two-State solution. This is our objective and we're pursuing it vigorously". In a report issued that week, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicated that there were currently 613 obstacles in the West Bank, five fewer than the previous month, including 68 permanently manned checkpoints. It indicated that other restrictions on Palestinians included the West Bank separation wall, restricted roads, the permit regime, closed military zones, nature reserves and settlements. (*The Guardian*, *Haaretz*, IMEMC, *Ynetnews*)

Meeting in Trieste, Italy, the Group of Eight (G-8) leaders said that they wanted to revive direct peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians that year. The Chairman's statement reiterated the G-8's full support for the two-State solution, with the establishment of an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living in peace with Israel and its other neighbours within secure and recognized borders. It called on all parties to re-enter direct negotiations on all standing issues consistent with the Road Map, the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the

Madrid principles, and called on all parties to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map, including a freeze in settlement activity (as well as their “natural growth”) and an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism. US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell said that they hoped that they would be able to move into real and productive negotiations between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world in the near future. Russia Federation Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that “we the world, we the Arab League, we the parties, we the UN Security Council ... want to achieve full-fledged resumption of direct negotiations on the peace process between the parties themselves”. (AP, DPA, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters, Ynetnews)

Meeting in the margins of the G-8 summit in Trieste, the Quartet issued a [statement](#) reaffirming its determination to actively and vigorously seek a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), the Madrid principles, the land for peace proposal, the Road Map and the agreements previously reached between the parties. The Quartet underscored that the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was one that ended the occupation that had begun in 1967 and fulfilled the aspirations of both parties for independent homelands through two States for two peoples, Israel and an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Quartet urged the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth; to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001; and to refrain from provocative actions in East Jerusalem, including home demolitions and evictions. The Quartet expressed serious concern at the humanitarian and human rights situation of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip and reiterated the urgency of reaching a durable solution through the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). (AP, DPA, Haaretz, www.un.org)

Speaking in Trieste after a formal meeting of the Quartet, its Special Envoy Tony Blair said that the only way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was to help ordinary Palestinians rebuild their economy, especially in Gaza. Mr. Blair said that “we are all worried that we support Gaza and then there’s a further outbreak of conflict, but the best way of preventing that ... is to help the people, because that is the way of preventing extremism gaining ground”. He added that “the one thing that I’ve learned in the last two years is that you can never separate politics and security and economics – they go together, and the West Bank and Gaza are going to be one Palestinian State, not two”. (DPA)

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Israeli security forces had detained 22 Israeli activists as they dispersed a protest against settlements, protest organisers said. Two foreign activists were also detained at the protest south of Bethlehem after they and the Israelis had refused to obey orders to evacuate a “closed military zone.” Two people had been wounded, organizers said. (AFP)

The PA said in a statement that it “welcomes the Quartet call on the Israeli authorities to halt construction in the settlements, including expansion for reasons of natural growth, as well as removing checkpoints and opening crossings.” It called on the international community “to put pressure on Israel to implement its obligations, particularly those in the Road Map.” These obligations included halting all settlement activities and turning over the Palestinian cities to full PA control. (DPA)

Egypt had temporarily reopened its border crossing with the Gaza Strip for three days to allow Gazans to cross into Egypt, Hamas authorities said. (DPA)

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said that settlements should be left to future negotiations. “The best way to solve this problem is to resume at once bilateral Israeli-Palestinian talks,” he said. (AP)

The World Bank had approved a pilot plan for a canal linking the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, Israeli Regional Development Minister Sylvan Shalom announced. *Israeli Public Radio* said that the bank would provide \$1.25 billion to finance the project. The initial proposal was for a 180-km channel to transport water, half of which would run into the Dead Sea and half would feed a giant desalination plant jointly run by Israel, Jordan and the PA, Mr. Shalom's ministry said. (AFP)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared in an interview with *Al-Hayat* that he was “disappointed by the peace process in the Middle East in general, and between the Palestinians and the Israelis in particular. It has not gone well, even though we have seen improvement in the situation in Lebanon, including the relations between Lebanon and Syria.” He reasserted his commitment to Middle East peace and said that “when Israel launched its war on Gaza, I spoke of the issue more than anybody else. I condemned Israel, I demanded protection for the Palestinian civilians and I criticized the humanitarian situation in Gaza.” (The Financial Times)

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Fatah and Hamas had begun a sixth round of talks in Cairo, *MENA* news agency reported. Senior Fatah official Nabil Sha’ath said disagreements arose with Hamas insisting on making the political prisoners issue a priority on the agenda. Mr. Sha’ath added that a special committee was working on resolving the problem. Fatah and Hamas would also meet with Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman ahead of a 7 July target date to sign an agreement that would lay out an electoral law, define the make-up of security forces and of a committee that would liaise between Gaza and the West Bank ahead of an election in 2010. Smaller Palestinian factions would join the talks on 5 July, Mr. Sha’ath told *AFP*. (AFP)

Chinese Ambassador to the PA Yang Weiguo visited Tulkarm in the West Bank to witness the impact of Israeli restrictions. He met the Governor of Tulkarm, Talal Dweikat, who thanked China for its continuous support to the Palestinian people and the PA and updated him on the Israeli separation wall, the settlements and the presence of 16 Israeli chemical factories to the west of Tulkarm, which posed a major health hazard for residents. (Ma’an News Agency)

The independent fact-finding mission headed by South African Judge Richard Goldstone, sent by the Human Rights Council to inquire into alleged war crimes in Gaza, started public hearings in Gaza to collect testimonials from war victims. The first testimony heard was from the Director of the World Health Organization operations in Gaza, who underlined the shortage of equipment and medicines in hospitals, which prevented them from providing appropriate services for the large numbers of injuries. A testimony from Dr. Iyad Sarraj, a child psychologist, stressed that about 20 per cent of children in Gaza suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by witnessing violent acts. Other sessions would be held in Geneva on 6 and 7 July. (AFP, BBC, Ma’an News Agency)

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When laying the cornerstone of the Al-Rayhan residential suburb, north of Ramallah, PA President Abbas declared that the resumption of negotiations with Israel was conditioned on freezing all settlement activities and accepting the two-State solution. “We declared to the Israeli side the consent of the Arab and Islamic countries to normalize relations, provided it withdraws from the Palestinian Territory and the Golan Heights and Sheba [Farms],” Mr. Abbas said, calling on each party to adhere to the Road Map and the agreements signed. (Wafa)

An opinion [survey](#) conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC) pointed to a decline in Hamas' popularity. According to the poll, public support for Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza stood at 18.8 per cent, compared with 27.7 per cent in January 2009. Khader Khader, head of the media unit at JMCC, said that Hamas popularity had suffered from discontent in Gaza over Israel's ban on reconstruction aid and over the slow-moving Palestinian unity talks. (Haaretz, Reuters, www.jmcc.org, Ynetnews)

ICRC released a [report](#) describing the 1.5 million Gazans as people “trapped in despair”, mainly owing to the continuing Israeli blockade after its recent military offensive. Gazans lacked adequate housing and “the poorest residents in particular have exhausted their coping mechanisms and often have to sell off their belongings to be able to buy enough to eat,” said Antoine Grand, head of the ICRC subdelegation in Gaza. Construction materials, such as cement or steel, were urgently needed to rebuild neighbourhoods hit by Israeli strikes. Basic hospital equipment was in short supply because hospitals and health clinics depended on the PA Ministry of Health in the West Bank and the supply chain often broke down owing to poor cooperation. The ICRC stressed that the collapse of Gaza's economy had caused poverty to soar. (*Haaretz*, *BBC*, www.icrc.org) Israel would build 50 new homes in the “Adam” settlement to absorb Israeli settlers to be evicted from the unauthorized outpost of “Migron”. The plan, which had been approved by Defense Minister Ehud Barak in May, called for the eventual construction of 1,450 homes in the “Adam” settlement. These 50 units had received final approval by senior Government officials but Peace Now Secretary-General Yariv Oppenheimer viewed the report as confirming that all 1,450 units had received final approval. This plan “invalidates Barak's visit to the United States and it would be better if he spared himself the disgrace,” MK Ophir Paz-Pines (Labour) said in a statement. (*AFP*, *AP*, *Haaretz*, *Reuters*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Wafa*)

Israel would be open to a complete freeze on settlement building in the West Bank for three to six months as part of a broad Middle East peace initiative, *The New York Times* reported. Citing unnamed senior Israeli officials, the newspaper said the proposals also included a Palestinian agreement to negotiate an end to the conflict and confidence-building steps by major Arab nations. The newspaper reported the proposal would be taken to Washington by Israel's Defense Minister Barak, who planned to meet the following day with US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell. (*The New York Times*)

Israel's Jerusalem Municipality demolished a house on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Israeli police, who came to protect the bulldozers, clashed with the inhabitants of the house, bruising nine of them. Two women were hospitalized. The owner of the house, Samir Jum'a, said the demolition of the building housing 15 people came without any warning. (*Palestine Press News Agency*)

Dozens of Israeli settlers attacked the villages of Asira Al-Qibliya and Far'ata, south-west of Nablus, according to Ghassan Dughlus, the Palestinian official in charge of monitoring settlement activity. Settlers injured two Palestinians and destroyed agricultural fields. The IDF fired tear gas canisters towards Palestinian civilians. Settlers also ransacked two homes. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Wastewater in the West Bank – from settlements, Jerusalem and Palestinian communities – amounted to 91 million cubic meters a year, according to a [report](#) entitled Foul Play: Neglect of Wastewater Treatment in the West Bank, by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem. Only 5-10 per cent of the sewage was treated, causing serious damage to the water supply and the environment. Most of the untreated sewage ended up in the Dead Sea. (*Wafa*, www.btselem.org)

Some 21 activists from 11 countries left Cyprus to sail to Gaza in defiance of the Israeli blockade. These human rights and solidarity workers from the Free Gaza Group were carrying on the small ferry Spirit of Humanity three tons of medical aid, children's toys, school materials, a water purifier, and rehabilitation and reconstruction kits for 20 family homes to pressure Governments and international relief groups to do more to rebuild Gaza. The group's organizer, Ramzi Kysia, said that each passenger was also carrying a kilogram of cement and an olive tree sapling as a gesture of solidarity with the Palestinians. The ferry was expected to reach Gaza the following day. (*AFP*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Palestine Press News Agency*)

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Speaking before a group of over 20 European ambassadors at Jerusalem's King David hotel, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he had complete confidence in Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, who was fully committed to peace and security, a day after it had been reported that French President Nicolas Sarkozy had told him to “get rid” of Mr. Liberman during his visit to Paris the previous week. The Foreign Ministry responded to the report by criticizing the French President for his “intolerable intervention in internal Israeli affairs”. (*Haaretz*)

Missile-firing Israeli drones unlawfully killed at least 29 Palestinian civilians during the Gaza war, according to a [report](#) issued by Human Rights Watch, citing six alleged strikes by remote-controlled aircraft. The human rights organization based its findings primarily on debris from Israeli-made “Spike” missiles. Marc Garlasco, Human Rights Watch senior military analyst, cited Palestinian witnesses who said they had seen or heard the unmanned aircraft. Despite having advanced surveillance equipment, drone operators had failed to exercise the proper caution required by the laws of war to verify that their targets were combatants, said the report. In response, the IDF asserted that all Israeli combat actions “conform to international law, as do the weapons and munitions used”. (www.hrw.org)

Egypt closed the Rafah crossing with Gaza after a three-day opening, according to a Hamas source. Reports from the International Movement to Open the Rafah Border, which had dozens of Palestinian and international activists camped out for at least 18 days at the crossing protesting its closure, said they had witnessed hundreds of Gazans being turned away despite holding valid documents. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Defense Minister Barak would be meeting in New York with US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell in an effort to find an appropriate solution to the issue of settlement construction. Prime Minister Netanyahu, Mr. Barak, Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman and Ministers Dan Meridor, Benny Begin and Moshe Ya'alon had met in Jerusalem the previous day to agree on a position to be presented to Mr. Mitchell. Israel would reportedly freeze all settlement construction, except for projects that had already started and would require US guarantees on the future of the peace process. (*Haaretz*)

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband deplored Israel's decision to approve the construction of 50 new homes in the “Adam” settlement. “Settlements are illegal under international law and they are a major blockage to peace in the Middle East on the basis of a two-State solution,” Mr. Miliband told Parliament. “This is the worst possible time for new settlements to be initiated or for construction to be started,” he added. (*Ma'an News Agency*, *Reuters*)

PA Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Hatem Abdul Qader confirmed that he had tendered his resignation. Mr. Qader told *Reuters* that his Ministry typically needed \$5,000-\$15,000 in legal costs to fight an Israeli demolition order and “homes are being demolished because we cannot pay for court appeals”. Prime Minister Fayyad had refused to accept Mr. Qader's resignation. (*Ma'an News Agency*, *Reuters*)

In Ramallah, PA President Abbas met with PLC speaker Abdel-Aziz Dweik, recently released from prison by Israel, making him the highest-ranking Hamas official he had publicly met with since the 2007 takeover of Gaza. At the meeting, Mr. Abbas discussed the 11,000 Palestinians in Israel's jails, stressing this issue was a top priority. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

It was revealed that at least 1,000 Palestinian male and female prisoners in Israeli jails who were ill suffered from chronic and serious illnesses and that their health had been deteriorating as a result of negligence by the Israeli prison authorities. (www.ppsmo.org)

Spain's National Court decided to drop an investigation launched by one of its judges into a July 2002 IDF air strike on the apartment of a suspected Hamas militant, Saleh Shehadeh, in Gaza. The explosion destroyed the building and killed 14 other people, most of them women and children. The majority of the panel of 18 judges opposed the probe on the grounds that Israel was already investigating the attack. (*AP*)

The Independent fact-finding mission sent by the Human Rights Council and to investigate alleged abuses during the Israeli war against Gaza completed its first round of public hearings, after two days of testimonies from witnesses, victims and experts. “The aim of the public hearings was to let the face of human suffering be seen and to let the voices of the victims be heard,” said Justice Richard Goldstone, the head of the mission. He would compile the report in August. (Wafa, www.unog.org)

Activists from the Free Gaza Group, who were sailing from Cyprus to Gaza on the Spirit of Humanity boat carrying humanitarian aid, were intercepted 60 km from Gaza by at least five Israeli warships. The group said in a press release that the Israel Navy had threatened to open fire and began blocking their GPS, radar and navigation systems, unless they turned back. “This is an outrageous violation of international law against us. Our boat was not in Israeli waters and we were on a human rights mission to the Gaza Strip,” declared Cynthia McKinney, a former US Congresswoman, who was on the boat.

Yigal Palmor, Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said that the boat's declared destination was Port Said in Egypt and that “if it changes course and tries to go to Gaza or declares that it intends to do so, the Navy can take action”. (DPA)

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gabriela Shalev filed a harsh complaint with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon over a report on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, describing it as “selective and political” and alleging that it “completely ignores the context in which Israel’s defensive actions were taken, while it made no mention of Israel’s extraordinary efforts to avoid civilian casualties”. Ms. Shalev wrote that she sincerely hoped that future reports in the name of the Secretary-General would avoid politically-charged semantics, accusations and omissions. (Haaretz, Ynetnews)

Former Deputy National Security Adviser and currently senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations Elliot Abrams said that “despite fervent denials by Obama Administration officials, there were indeed agreements between Israel and the United States regarding the growth of Israeli settlements in the West Bank”. Mr. Abrams validated the Israeli Government’s claim that then-Prime Minister Sharon and former President Bush had come to an agreement that would allow for some degree of growth within existing settlements. However, former US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer said that there were no understandings on settlement growth between the US and Israel. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)
