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

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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL WELCOMES CAIRO SPEECH BY PRESIDENT OBAMA

The following statement was issued on 4 June 2009 by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (Press release SG/SM/12288).

The Secretary-General is strongly encouraged by the speech delivered today in Cairo by President Barack Obama of the United States of America. He strongly welcomes its message of peace, understanding and reconciliation.

The Secretary-General believes that President Obama's speech is a crucial step in bridging divides and promoting intercultural understanding, which is a major objective of the United Nations. His message reaffirms our shared commitment

“to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours”, as enshrined in the Preamble of the United Nations Charter.

The Secretary-General hopes that President Obama's message will herald the opening of a new chapter in relations between the United States and the Islamic world. He hopes that this speech will have a positive impact on the peace process in the Middle East and the resolution of a number of conflicts in the Middle East and beyond.

II. UNITED NATIONS ASIAN AND PACIFIC MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, AND PUBLIC FORUM HELD IN JAKARTA

The United Nations Asian and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Jakarta on 8 and 9 June 2009. The theme of the meeting was “Strengthening international consensus on the urgency of a two-State solution.” It was followed on 10 June 2009 by the United Nations Public Forum in Support of the Palestinian People. The objective of the two events was to encourage broad international action, including by Asian and Pacific States and societies, in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace and for achieving a negotiated solution to the conflict based on a shared vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Below is the concluding statement by the organizers.

1. The United Nations Asian and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine was convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Jakarta on 8 and 9 June 2009. Participants in the meeting included internationally renowned experts, including Israeli and Palestinian experts, representatives of United Nations Members States and Observers, parliamentarians,

representatives of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, representatives of civil society, academic institutions and the media.

2. The objective of the meeting was to encourage broad international action, including by Asian and Pacific States and societies, in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace and for achieving a negotiated

solution to the conflict based on a shared vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The meeting considered ways in which Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society could be instrumental in helping the parties resume and strengthen the political dialogue and in promoting and applying the principles of international law to efforts aimed at resolving the conflict. From the regional perspective, the meeting considered how Asian and Pacific States could effectively contribute to resolving the conflict through their action in national and intergovernmental mechanisms.

3. In the course of the meeting, the participants reviewed the current political efforts at advancing a two-State solution, the challenges to a resumption of a genuine peace process and the need to maintain international legitimacy in efforts aimed at achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace. They underlined the imperative of a just and viable political solution of the question of Jerusalem and examined the current situation in and around the city. They discussed the support of Asian and Pacific countries for a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people through the United Nations system and other intergovernmental mechanisms as well as through civil society initiatives in the region.

4. The participants expressed serious concern about the current halt in the peace process owing to recent political developments in the region. They deplored the lack of pronounced support by the current Government of Israel for a two-State solution, which boded ill for prospects of a genuine resumption of peace negotiations, and urged the new Israeli Government to join the international consensus for a two-State solution. Participants denounced the

acceleration of settlement construction, in particular in and around Jerusalem, and the rise in the number of demolition orders issued against Palestinian-owned houses in the city. Grave concern was voiced about the further deterioration of the already serious situation in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the unprecedented military assault by Israel in December 2008 and January 2009. The participants deplored the continued siege on Gaza that has prevented the delivery of humanitarian and other assistance. They also voiced concern about the situation in other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in particular the restrictions placed on the movement of persons and goods.

5. The participants noted that the Palestinian people continued to be deprived of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, as well as the right to their own independent State on all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The right of return of more than 4.6 million Palestinian refugees, in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 194, also remained unresolved, thus prolonging their plight. The participants expressed the firm view that, despite the current stalemate in the peace process, there was no alternative to continuing negotiations and no alternative to the two-State solution. The participants welcomed the level of engagement by major stakeholders, including those from Asian and Pacific countries, in finding a solution to the question of Palestine. They commended the Committee for organizing meetings, such as the one in Jakarta, that served to mobilize Governments and public opinion in different regions in support of a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Palestinian conflict, in conformity with the norms of international law. Participants emphasized

that a critical condition for achieving a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an end of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, occupied in June 1967.

6. Participants expressed their preoccupation concerning recent policy statements by the Government of Israel with regard to Jerusalem. They voiced serious concern over Israel's ongoing settlement activity in and around the city and deplored continuing land confiscation and the issuance of thousands of tenders for the construction of new housing units in and around East Jerusalem, as well as in settlements in the West Bank. The participants reiterated the illegality of the presence of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, under international law. They called on Israel to immediately cease settlement construction, including that related to so-called "natural growth" and to dismantle settlement outposts. Participants were heartened by the recent remarks of United States President Barack Obama regarding the need for Israel to cease settlement activity. Of particular concern was the expansion and consolidation of large settlement blocks in and around East Jerusalem, especially in the so-called E-1 area, which cut off the city from the rest of the West Bank, thereby undermining and prejudging the outcome of the permanent status negotiations. The participants were particularly alarmed by the continuing demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and of the rise in the number of demolition orders issued to Palestinians since the new Israeli Government took office. They agreed that a negotiated

solution of the issue of Jerusalem, based on international law, was absolutely essential to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and crucial for a durable peace in the whole region. Participants also denounced the continued construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land, in contravention of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

7. The participants expressed their conviction that international support for the peace process, including from the countries of Asia and the Pacific, needed to be strengthened, in particular at a time when it faced unprecedented challenges. They reiterated the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine, until it was resolved in all its aspects based on relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The participants commended Asian and Pacific countries with regard to their engagement concerning the question of Palestine.

8. The participants were appalled by the lack of any tangible improvement of the situation in the Gaza Strip which was sinking into an even deeper economic, social and humanitarian crisis. They deplored in particular the wilful blockage of materials for humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts and the obstacles faced by patients trying to leave the Gaza Strip in search of treatment for serious and chronic illnesses. This was all the more appalling as it came in the wake of the Israeli military offensive in December and January which resulted in some 1,440 Palestinian deaths and more than 5,300 injuries and massive destruction

of homes, property and infrastructure. As a result, despite the \$4.5 billion pledged by the international community following the military assault, the population of Gaza still faced severe shortages of all basic and essential supplies, including materials badly needed to commence reconstruction. The participants reminded Israel, the occupying Power, that it has to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law, and in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates that Israel, as a High Contracting Party, is obliged to protect the Palestinian civilian population under its occupation and to act within the ambit of international law. The applicability of the Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had been repeatedly confirmed by the Conference of the High Contracting Parties, as well as by the United Nations General Assembly, Security Council and the International Court of Justice. The participants noted that all efforts ought to be made to achieve a sustainable ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which should lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities. They condemned strongly the killing of innocent civilians by either side. The participants called for an immediate lifting of the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the opening of all crossings in accordance with the Agreement on Access and Movement of 15 November 2005. They also called for the release of all prisoners, including Palestinian parliamentarians.

9. The participants expressed their appreciation for the immediate and continued engagement of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, Governments, national parliaments, regional and international organizations, and many civil society organizations, including those from the Asian and Pacific region, to

achieve a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They urged the Government of Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law and lift its restrictions on the freedom of movement and other measures stifling the economic life of Palestinians and undermining their social fabric. They urged the United Nations, in cooperation with the parties, to establish a general mechanism to protect civilians on the ground. The participants also urged the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to strive for national reconciliation as an essential condition for achieving a viable solution of the question of Palestine and the establishment of a viable, contiguous, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State. The creation of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, could be based only on international law and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. The participants were of the opinion that 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 bringing lasting peace to the whole region.

10. The participants commended the action of Governments of Asia and the Pacific, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society representatives in supporting Israelis and Palestinians in their quest for a just, lasting and peaceful settlement of the conflict. The participants also urged them to continue their moral, political and material support of the Palestinian people. They encouraged the countries of Asia and the Pacific to continue to support action on these issues at the regional and international levels.

11. The participants voiced their appreciation for the active and constructive role played by Indonesia, a Member of the Committee, for its tireless efforts to assist the Palestinian people achieve their inalienable rights. They also commended the Government of Indonesia for its training programmes for Palestinians in infrastructure rehabilitation and capacity-

building. The participants expressed their deep gratitude to the Government of Indonesia and its Department of Foreign Affairs for hosting the meeting, for the assistance and support extended to the Committee and the United Nations Secretariat in its preparation, and for the generous hospitality extended to them.

III. QUARTET URGES SETTLEMENT FREEZE

The following statement was issued on 26 June 2009 by the Quartet following its meeting in Trieste (United Nations Press Release SG/2152).

The Quartet, represented by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov, High Representative of the European Union for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic Jan Kohout, United States Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns, and United States Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell, met in Trieste, Italy, on 26 June 2009. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

The Quartet affirmed its determination to actively and vigorously seek a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515 and 1850, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, 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 would end the occupation that began in 1967 and fulfil 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 welcomed the commitment of Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu and President [Mahmoud] Abbas to the two-State solution and reiterated that lasting peace throughout the region could be based only on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations. The Quartet underscored the importance of fostering peaceful coexistence throughout the region through the conclusion of peace agreements between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon, in a manner that would be mutually reinforcing with efforts to establish the state of Palestine, and through the full normalization of relations between all States based on the Arab Peace Initiative.

The United States briefed the Quartet on its intensive, ongoing discussions with all parties in the region to create the conditions for the prompt resumption and early conclusion of negotiations to resolve all permanent status issues, without preconditions. The Quartet affirmed that

these negotiations must result in an end to all claims. It agreed that Arab-Israeli peace and the establishment of a State of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza in which the Palestinian people could determine their own destiny, was in the fundamental interests of the international community. The Quartet called on all parties concerned to take meaningful steps to support that objective.

In that context, the Quartet called on Israel and the Palestinians to implement their obligations under the Road Map and affirmed that unilateral actions taken by either party could not prejudice the outcome of negotiations and would not be recognized by the international community. 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 demolition and evictions. The Quartet acknowledged progress made by the Palestinian Authority to reform the Palestinian security sector and called on the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order and to fight violent extremism. It encouraged further Israeli cooperation for the success of Palestinian security reform. It also urged the Palestinian Government to enhance its efforts to build the institutions of the future Palestinian State. Both sides had to stop incitement and violence against civilians. Taking note of the 24 June meeting of the Arab League ministers and underscoring its commitment to comprehensive peace on all tracks, the Quartet expressed support for dialogue among all States in the region in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative and called on Arab States to take steps to recognize Israel's rightful place in the region; to affirm that violence could not achieve regional peace and security; and to

assist the Palestinian people in building their future State through consistent support for the Palestinian Authority.

Noting the detrimental effect of Palestinian divisions and underscoring its desire for those divisions to be overcome, the Quartet called on all Palestinians to commit themselves to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations. Restoring Palestinian unity based on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commitments would be an important factor in this process, while facilitating reconstruction of Gaza and the organization of elections. The Quartet expressed support, on that basis, for the ongoing mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League for Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas and appealed to all States in the region to play a constructive role in supporting the reconciliation process.

The Quartet discussed Gaza and agreed that the current situation was unsustainable and not in the interests of any of those concerned. The Quartet expressed serious concern at the humanitarian and human rights situation of the civilian population. It reiterated the urgency of reaching a durable solution through the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1860. The Quartet called for the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment. The Quartet called for a complete halt to all violence, as well as an intensification of efforts to prevent illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition into Gaza and for a sustained reopening of all crossing points to ensure regular flow of people and humanitarian and commercial goods. The Quartet offered its support in this regard for the proposals of the United

Nations to resume early recovery construction activities in Gaza. The Quartet called on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay.

The Quartet welcomed plans by the Government of Israel to promote Palestinian economic development. The Quartet declared its readiness to work closely with Israel, the Palestinian Government and international donors in order to achieve sustainable economic development on the basis of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access of 2005 and in the broader perspective of the two-State solution. In recalling the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Assistance to Palestinians, the Quartet called for robust and sustained financial support for the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet welcomed recent steps by Israel, which if expanded and sustained, could have a significant impact on Palestinian freedom of movement. The Quartet recognized that Israel had legitimate security concerns that must continue to be safeguarded, and believed efforts to maintain security while

enabling movement and access for Palestinian people and goods were critical. Noting that delivering transformative change on the ground should form an integral and essential part of the agenda for peace, the Quartet encouraged cooperation of the parties with the Quartet Representative in order to deliver such change and in particular to improve the movement of goods and people in the West Bank and Gaza, concurrently with security and broader rule of law efforts.

The Quartet expressed its determination to support the parties and regional and international partners to successfully pursue negotiations and to implement agreements on all tracks of the process. The Quartet tasked the envoys to meet regularly and actively follow up with the parties to promote implementation of Quartet positions and formulate recommendations for Quartet action.

The Quartet reaffirmed its previous statements and supports, in consultation with the parties, on convening an international conference in Moscow in 2009.

IV. UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COORDINATOR BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL

On 23 June 2009, the Security Council met to consider “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, briefed the Council on the latest developments in the region. The following are excerpts of the briefing (S/PV.6150).

The Quartet principals will meet on 26 June in Trieste, Italy, where the Quartet will also meet with members of the Arab League Follow-up Committee. In advance of the Quartet, Arab foreign ministers will meet in Cairo and Prime Minister Netanyahu will

meet United States envoy Mitchell in Paris. These meetings are part of a concerted push to secure the required commitments and actions from the parties to create conditions for relaunching efforts for a two-State solution.

United States President Obama's 4 June speech in Cairo reiterated his commitment to the creation of a Palestinian State and the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. On 14 June 2009, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the Government of Israel would accept a Palestinian State, but under stringent conditions related to territory, security, refugees, Jerusalem and the character of the State of Israel. The speech represented a step forward given the previous positions of the current Government. I reiterate what the Secretary-General told the Council last month:

Action on the ground, together with a genuine readiness to negotiate on all core issues, including Jerusalem, borders and refugees, based on Israel's existing commitments, will be the true tests of Israel's commitment to the two-State solution. (*S/PV.6123, p. 3*)

In this regard, the Israeli Government failed to commit to or announce measures to begin to implement a freeze on all settlement activity, including natural growth. Despite efforts to remove three minor outposts during the reporting period, illegal settlement construction continued across the West Bank in contravention of the Road Map. Reports that processes to approve new construction in settlements continue as before are extremely concerning.

During the reporting period, settlers injured seven Palestinians in violent attacks, burned several fields and uprooted hundreds of olive trees. Settlers tried to take over seven dunums (1 dunum = 1,000 sq. metres) of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem, leading to violent clashes with local Palestinian residents. There continues to be inadequate enforcement of the rule of law

against violent settlers. However, I welcome the decision of the Israeli Government to offer financial compensation to 50 Palestinian plaintiffs affected by settler violence in Hebron in November 2008.

Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order and demolition orders continue to be issued against Palestinian homeowners in East Jerusalem and in the remainder of the West Bank, with approximately 4,500 orders outstanding. We reiterate our call for an end to unilateral Israeli measures in Jerusalem and an end to house demolitions.

I welcome the concrete steps taken by the Israeli Government to ease movement restrictions on key access routes into the cities of Nablus, Jericho, Qalqiliya and Ramallah. However, over 600 obstacles remain in place, as does the stringent permit system for Palestinian movement. The construction of the barrier within the occupied Palestinian territory continues, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. Fundamental alterations in Israel's policies will be required to facilitate a transformative change in the West Bank, which is the Israeli Government's stated and welcome intention.

Citing security concerns, Israeli forces continued search-and-arrest operations throughout the West Bank. One Palestinian was killed and another 96, including 33 children, were injured. Five Israelis were injured by Palestinians. Today, Israel released the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas member Aziz Dweik, after 34 months in prison.

Turning to the Palestinian side, President Mahmoud Abbas responded to the speech of Prime Minister Netanyahu by

insisting that Israel freeze settlement activity before negotiations can resume. In a speech on 22 June, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad outlined the intention, despite the continuing conditions of occupation, to build the institutions of a Palestinian State in two years. In this regard, I am glad to report that the United Nations has finalized a medium-term response plan to guide all United Nations efforts to support a Palestinian-led process of State-building.

An immediate challenge facing the Palestinian Authority is financial. When the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met in Oslo on 8 June, Prime Minister Fayyad reported that the Palestinian Authority faced a critical budget crisis. It is essential that Member States act swiftly to fulfil pledges and commit to additional budget support for the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, the only sustainable way to revive the Palestinian economy and for the Palestinian Authority to receive sufficient finances from tax revenues is for Israel to ease closure measures and create an enabling environment for economic growth.

The Palestinian Authority continues efforts to reform its security services and criminal justice system, with considerable international assistance. It also continues to take action against militants in accordance with its Road Map commitments. These efforts resulted in violent confrontations with Hamas in the West Bank during the reporting period, in the most intense internal Palestinian clashes since June 2007. Four members of the security forces were killed in gun battles with Hamas militants in Qalqiliya on 31 May and 3 June, in a security operation which also claimed the lives of four members of Hamas and one civilian.

Palestinian security forces also seized arms, explosives and funds from militant groups, and reportedly foiled plans to attack security infrastructure in Nablus. A Hamas-affiliated detainee died on 15 June while in the custody of Palestinian intelligence in Hebron, in circumstances which are disputed.

This leads me to a further challenge facing Palestinian State-building: reuniting Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The urgency and scale of this challenge is clear from developments on the ground. In response to developments in the West Bank, Hamas arrested dozens of Fatah members in Gaza, ransacking homes, confiscating belongings and placing movement restrictions on Fatah political figures. Demonstrations and media campaigns in Gaza denounced the Palestinian Authority security campaigns and security coordination with Israel. The Hamas military wing warned of an eruption of violence in the West Bank.

Likewise, Hamas continues to assert its control over institutions and organizations in Gaza. On 14 June, a demonstration by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Gaza calling for Palestinian unity was violently disrupted by Hamas security forces. On 17 June, Hamas took over an independent medical non-governmental organization, the Patient's Friends Society, which runs a hospital and a number of clinics in the Strip.

Building Palestinian statehood on the basis of divided societies, separate institutions and competing legitimacies is unsustainable. Hamas must re-evaluate its stance towards a two-State solution and the

resort to violence against civilians, and commit to genuine political pluralism. Fatah needs to face the challenge of internal reform. I welcome President Abbas' extensive personal engagement as efforts continue to finalize arrangements for the holding of the sixth Fatah congress. Above all, the factions need to conclude an agreement to reunite within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009) and by the Quartet.

Fatah and Hamas delegations met in Cairo on 8 June and are scheduled to meet again on 28 June, and efforts continue towards reaching an agreement by 7 July in Cairo. Egypt has also facilitated meetings of reconciliation committees in both Gaza and the West Bank in an effort to calm tensions and address issues such as politically motivated detentions and denials of movement. The Secretary-General strongly supports Egypt's efforts, and it is crucial that they be supported by the international community and by all regional parties.

The unresolved crisis in Gaza has negative repercussions on all efforts to advance the peace process and wreaks unacceptable havoc on the fabric of civilian life in Gaza. Resolution 1860 (2009) specified the key challenges that must be met if a different and more positive strategy on Gaza is to emerge. I believe that there is now an emerging opportunity to begin shifting the dynamics.

There has been a notable and welcome drop in violence during the reporting period. Since 11 May, there have been two rockets and seven mortars launched into Israel from the Gaza Strip, resulting in one injury. Six Palestinians were killed and 10 were injured in clashes with the Israel Defense Forces

and as a result of Israeli air strikes. Among those killed were four radical militants who tried to attack an Israeli post on 8 June. There have been efforts on the part of the de facto authorities in Gaza to enforce a cessation of rocket fire.

Likewise, efforts continue in order to prevent the resupply of illicit weapons to militants in Gaza, including Egyptian efforts to close down tunnels and confiscate explosives. I commend the serious Egyptian efforts under way, on which I was briefed during a recent visit to Cairo. The Israeli Mission has informed the Secretariat of Israel's assessment that at least 330 mortars, 37 rockets, 40 anti-tank weapons, 46 anti-aircraft missiles and 17 tons of explosives have entered the Gaza Strip since Operation Cast Lead — information that the Secretariat cannot independently verify.

Conditions for the civilian population remain of grave concern. Food and medicines are entering Gaza, and the first shipment of livestock in nine months entered Gaza on 19 June in the form of 350 cattle. However, the overall quantity and range of goods remain grossly insufficient to support normal economic and social activity. About 70 trucks per day have entered Gaza in the past month, which is 15 per cent less than the daily average last month and compares with 392 trucks per day in May 2007, when there was a functioning import-export system. Right before Operation Cast Lead, the daily average of trucks was 18. The quantities of cooking gas and industrial fuel allowed into Gaza met only 70 per cent and 80 per cent of the respective monthly needs.

As the Secretary-General said on 11 May (see S/PV.6123), it is completely unacceptable that no reconstruction materials were allowed into Gaza when an

entire civilian population was trapped in a war zone and in view of the scale of damage caused by Operation Cast Lead. The Secretary-General has presented to Defense Minister Barak a United Nations proposal to kick-start early recovery in Gaza by opening the crossings for materials to complete United Nations construction work on housing, health and educational facilities, which have been suspended since June 2007. The United Nations has existing mechanisms in place to ensure the integrity of the programming. That proposal was developed in close consultation with the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza business community, and Prime Minister Fayyad confirmed his full support to the Secretary-General today. Intensive consultations with the Israeli Government have taken place, and we await Israel's reaction.

The Israeli Government has appointed a new negotiator on the question of Corporal Gilad Shalit, whose third anniversary in captivity was yesterday and to whom the International Committee of the Red Cross has not been granted access. Hamas continues to state its readiness to resume negotiations on that file in exchange for the release of a number of the more than 11,000 prisoners held in Israeli jails. Egyptian efforts are continuing to resolve that crucial issue.

On 1 June, I met former South African Justice Richard Goldstone when he arrived in Gaza, through Rafah, to conduct the first phase of fact-finding, pursuant to the mandate given to him by the Human Rights Council. The mission is expected to return to the Strip at the end of this month. Regrettably, the Government of Israel has not extended cooperation to the mission.

We continue to believe strongly in the potential for activating the regional tracks of the peace process alongside a rejuvenated Palestinian track. United States envoy Mitchell visited Lebanon and Syria on 12 and 13 June for discussions on the revitalization of regional peace efforts. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan was quiet during the reporting period, although Israeli settlement activity continues.

We continue to support the Arab Peace Initiative as a key framework for comprehensive peace, and welcome and encourage the active engagement of Arab countries in the efforts under way to create the conditions for resumed negotiations. We also continue to support the convening of an international conference in Moscow.

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As concerns the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp, much work remains to be done. Complications due to the discovery of archaeological artifacts at the old camp site during the removal of rubble have recently caused new delays in the reconstruction schedule.

...

Let me now conclude. As we prepare for Friday's Quartet meeting, we will be looking for a strong affirmation of the international framework for peace, as embodied in the resolutions of this Council, existing agreements and the Arab Peace Initiative. I urge Israelis and Palestinians alike to carefully assess the opportunity before them to serve the legitimate interests of their peoples. Israelis have an opportunity to achieve lasting peace and recognition

within secure and recognized borders. Palestinians have an opportunity to see the occupation end and a Palestinian State emerge. We need both the Israeli and Palestinian Governments to be clearly committed to (a) a two-State solution, achieved peacefully through negotiations on

all core issues; (b) implementing their road map commitments; and (c) changing the dynamics in Gaza. International determination is stronger than ever before to ensure that commitments made are commitments monitored and commitments kept.

V. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL FACT-FINDING MISSION CONDUCTS HEARINGS IN GAZA

The Human Rights Council, by its resolution S-9/1 adopted on 12 January 2009 during its ninth emergency session, decided to dispatch an urgent, independent international fact-finding mission to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by the occupying Power, Israel, against the Palestinian people, during the Gaza conflict. On 28 and 29 June 2009 the Mission held the first round of public hearings in the Gaza Strip (UNOG Press release HR0996E).

After hearing two days of sometimes harrowing testimony – from witnesses, victims and experts – the United Nations Fact-finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict has completed its first round of public hearings, which are part of its ongoing investigations. “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 Head of the Mission, Justice Richard Goldstone, as he concluded the hearings.

The mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission is to provide an independent and impartial investigation into all alleged violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law in the context of the 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009 military operations, whether they took place before, during or after those dates. Justice Goldstone noted that he and his team would consider all information received by the Mission, whether it be

during the public hearings or as part of the continuing investigations, before compiling its report in August.

However, he said: “As fellow human beings we would like to put on record how deeply moved we were by many of the accounts of profound suffering and grief we have heard in the last two days”. He also remarked on the dignity and composure of so many witnesses in very difficult circumstances.

During the two-day public hearings, the first to be held in such a United Nations inquiry, Mission members heard from victims, witnesses and experts on the death and destruction in the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead and of the effects of the Israeli Blockade and Siege on the people of Gaza. The testimony included accounts from people who had been badly injured in attacks and from victims who had lost many members of their families, as well as from

people who had lost their livelihoods. Experts gave testimonies on the psychosocial effects, in particular on health, children and education, and on women.

Justice Goldstone noted that there were several people who would have liked to have spoken at the public hearings but who had declined because they felt there was too high a risk in doing so.

He underlined that the hearings form a part of the United Nations activities in promoting and defending human rights and that the Mission members “fully expect and require that all of those who have participated in the hearings are afforded the full protection due to them as recognized in the United Nations Declaration on human rights defenders”.

Appearing at the public hearings had not been without cost to the victims, he said. “Every retelling of their ordeals and

tragedies carries a heavy emotional toll as well as personal security risk. We are fully aware of this. We express our deep gratitude for their willingness to share their painful testimonies with us as we endeavour to identify the truth of allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law”.

Members of the Mission had wished to hold hearings in southern Israel, where the population has been on the receiving end of rocket attacks launched from the Gaza Strip, and to hold hearings on the West Bank. That is not possible, as the Government of Israel is so far not cooperating with the Mission. The Mission members will therefore hold public hearings in Geneva, on July 6 and 7, where they will hear from victims of the alleged violations in Israel and on the West Bank, where there are also allegations of violations in the context of Operation Cast Lead.
