



## Security Council

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### **NEARLY ONE YEAR AFTER ANNAPOLIS, MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS STILL AT CROSSROADS**

#### **WITH NO AGREEMENT ON CORE ISSUES, SECURITY COUNCIL HEARS IN MONTHLY BRIEFING**

Ten months after negotiations were relaunched at Annapolis, the Middle East peace process was still at a crossroads, Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, said during this month's regular briefing to the Security Council on the Middle East.

"The important period ahead must see decisive advances toward peace", Mr. Serry said, noting that just over three months remained until the end of the year, the deadline set by Israeli and Palestinian leaders to end the enduring conflict.

However, no agreement had been reached on core issues, although there had been substantive discussions between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, he said. With yesterday's election of Tzipi Livni as the new leader of Israel's Kadima party, he looked forward to an urgent continuation of the talks and for all parties to honour their Annapolis and [Road Map](#) commitments.

A largely unsung success story concerned the gradual but systematic process of Palestinian self-empowerment, which had taken place in the West Bank under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, he said. In addition, the Palestinian Authority continued to make real strides in the implementation of its security plan, including action against militants and smugglers. That had greatly restored stability and law in Nablus and elsewhere. Donors were supporting the efforts; a joint agreement with Germany would establish 55 new police stations in the West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority had also made notable gains in economic areas, he said, which would be highlighted when the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met on 22 September. Significant hurdles remained, however, with a stagnant economic climate and a looming liquidity crisis, and he urged donors to fulfil their pledges.

He noted that the casualty rate from violent clashes was one of the lowest in recent years. Still, several incidents had killed two Palestinians, including one child, and injured 128 others, 84 of them children. Eleven Israelis had been injured, including one child. He was pleased to report that the Government of Israel had released 198 Palestinian prisoners. An important checkpoint had also been dismantled, but more than 600 obstacles to movement remained across the West Bank, hampering economic recovery and impacting the health and welfare of the population. Settler violence had also intensified and credible action to bring perpetrators of those crimes to justice was essential.

Construction in the majority of about 120 settlements on both sides of the barrier continued, with 32 more units announced for Beitar Illit near Bethlehem, he reported. Today, Israeli forces had reportedly evacuated settlers from the outpost of Yad Yair, but otherwise, the Quartet's calls to end settlement activity had not resulted in significant action. Rectifying that unacceptable situation should be the urgent priority of the new Israeli Government. In addition, Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remained closed and barrier construction continued, contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Regarding the Maghrabi Gate in Jerusalem, the Secretary-General encouraged all parties to cooperate under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and to refrain from unilateral measures.

Turning to Gaza, Mr. Serry said there was positive news on security, as the ceasefire had continued to hold. Hamas had tried to prevent the launching of rockets and mortars into Israel — only two rockets and one mortar had been launched during the reporting period — and no Israeli Defense Forces incursion or air strike had been reported. The Israel Defense Forces had responded to isolated rocket fire by closing crossings for a period.

"On all other fronts, there is little positive to report," he said. The humanitarian situation was "extremely grim", given continued closure. During the reporting period, imports had decreased by 21 per cent and the import of all types of fuel remained below previous levels. United Nations priority projects remained stalled. The shortage of raw materials, combined with the total ban on exports, had kept more than 95 per cent of Gaza's local industry closed.

He said that Hamas' actions were compounding the problems as they increasingly separated Palestinian institutions from the Palestinian Authority, itself. Teachers had started a strike because of Hamas' decision to replace some teachers with Hamas-affiliated staff. Health workers had joined the strike after the

dismissal of several employees. There were reports of Hamas marching doctors to their hospitals at gunpoint. Hamas' unwillingness to restore the status quo ante was blocking a resolution. Inter-factional violence had resulted in the death of 14 people, including 2 children, and the injury of another 52.

The only way to address the overall crisis and to lay the basis for a two-State solution was for Gaza to be peacefully reunited with the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestine Authority, he said. Egypt had started a consultation process with the Palestinian factions to formulate a proposal that could serve as a common national platform. Those efforts had been strongly supported by the 9 September foreign ministers' meeting of the League of Arab States, and the United Nations strongly supported the initiative. The Organization also continued to support Egypt's efforts to secure the release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit and a number of Palestinian prisoners.

The United Nations also continued to support efforts to further negotiations between Israel and Syria. Noting with interest the four-way summit held in Damascus on 4 September among Syria, France, Turkey and Qatar, he said he hoped indirect talks would be resumed as soon as possible. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained quiet, although Israeli settlement activity was ongoing there.

In Lebanon, where some security incidents had occurred, efforts to establish dialogue had continued. President Michel Suleiman had chaired the first session of the national dialogue on 16 September to discuss a national defence strategy. The next session was scheduled for 5 November. In the presence of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, representatives of the Sunni and Alawite communities in the northern city of Tripoli had signed a reconciliation agreement on 8 September. Despite those positive developments, the security situation remained precarious. Army First Lieutenant Samer Hanna had been killed on 28 August, and on 10 September, a member of the Lebanese Democratic Party, Saleh Aridi, had been killed by an explosion. There were also clashes in the Bekaa valley and renewed fighting in the Palestinian refugee camp Ain el-Helweh.

The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) area of operations remained generally quiet, but Israel's air violations continued on a daily basis, he said. President Abbas had visited Lebanon on 28 and 29 August for the first time since 2005 and had met with President Suleiman and Prime Minister Siniora, as well as members of all Lebanese factions and religious leaders, in a positive and important step forward in Palestinian-Lebanese relations.

He said that, in the coming days, a number of important meetings hosted by the Secretary-General would take place to review the peace process. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee would meet on 22 September and the Quartet would meet on 26 September. Quartet members would also attend an *iftar* with Arab partners. The Secretary-General would be doing all he could to ensure that those meetings would consolidate gains and address areas where more must be done. He would continue to work to secure the implementation of international law and Security Council resolutions, in order to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, and a just and lasting comprehensive regional peace in the Middle East.

Following the briefing, Council members went into consultations on the item. The formal meeting began at 10:12 a.m. and closed at 10:35 a.m.

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