



DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System
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<http://unispal.un.org>*

I. SECRETARY-GENERAL VISITS JORDAN, ISRAEL AND OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

On 1 February 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon travelled to Jerusalem where he met with Israel's President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (SG/T/2832). Later, the Secretary-General travelled to Ramallah, where he met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The Secretary-General discussed the situation in the Middle East with the Palestinian leaders, especially referring to the talks initiated in January by His Majesty the King of Jordan and Minister for Foreign Affairs Nasser Judeh, emphasizing that negotiations were the only path for a sustainable resolution of all final-status issues. While in Ramallah, the Secretary-General also met with the representatives of Palestinian civil society.

On 2 February, the Secretary-General travelled to Gaza, where he visited a girls' school and a housing project at Khan Younis, both developed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East,. He later travelled to Erez in Israel, where he visited Sapir College, and later to Herzliya, where he delivered the keynote address at the Herzliya 2012 Conference (SG/SM/14097). The following statement was circulated on 2 February 2012 by the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General (SG/SM/14090, PAL/2150):

Today the Secretary-General travelled to Gaza and visited a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) housing project and a school, where he joined girl students in their classroom. He also met with children who suffered serious injuries during the conflict. He was deeply moved by their stories.

Unfortunately, representatives of civil society cancelled a scheduled lunch to protest against the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The Secretary-

General regrets this missed opportunity for an important exchange with Gazan civil society representatives.

The Secretary-General is concerned about the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Last night, he met with the Palestinian Minister for Prisoners Affairs, Issa Karake, and received a letter outlining specific concerns.

The United Nations continues to call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law.

Excerpts from the Secretary-General's remarks at the Herzliya Conference (SG/SM/14097):

...

We all recognize that Israel has special security concerns. That is why as Secretary-General I have spoken out, loudly and repeatedly, against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel hate speech. Again and again, I have condemned those who would deny the Holocaust. I have stood firm against terrorist attacks and defended Israel strongly in world bodies where it has been singled out. And

that is why, tonight, I say that Israel's future is not in isolation. Israel's place is in this larger world, firmly anchored in a newly democratic Middle East.

Ultimately, the best way to survive and thrive amid change is to embrace it and help shape it. This brings me to the question of peace and Israel's responsibility to achieve it.

The United Nations helped bring the State of Israel into this world. It did so in the name of peace, not war. Yet the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is entering its seventh decade. The current peace process began in Madrid more than 20 years ago. It raised high hopes — but delivered two decades of delay, mistrust and missed opportunities. A succession of failed talks created a climate of mistrust. So-called “rejectionists” gained strength. Many have come to question the very basis of the peace process — land for peace.

And yet we have come close. Civil society initiatives have shown that the gaps can be bridged, that differences are not beyond the ability of people of good will to resolve. And recent years have brought another welcome and positive development — the emergence of a credible Palestinian partner, serving its people and, I suggest, challenging Israel to rethink some of its assumptions.

In some ways, the Palestinian Authority is ahead of the regional curve. In the West Bank, it is building the institutions for a functioning democracy and a future Palestinian state. Yesterday, I once again visited Ramallah. Every time I go, I am impressed by the pace of progress. I was also struck by the professionalism of the security forces, as well as the broader sense of economic and social progress. The creation of functioning and well-governed Palestinian institutions is clearly a strategic Israeli interest. Yet, these advances are at risk. Why? Because the politics is not keeping pace with developments on the ground.

Negotiations have bogged down. We see too many pointless provocations. Israel continues to erect settlements, some in the most sensitive areas for any future peace.

Meeting with Palestinians in the West Bank yesterday, I heard their deep frustration. The international community’s position is well known; these settlements are illegal. I strongly agree. For Palestinians, the borders of a future State based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps of territory, are the essence of its viability.

It is not surprising, therefore, that growing numbers of Palestinians see what is happening elsewhere in the region and are coming to support popular, non-violent action — a “Palestinian Spring”, some call it. They can also be expected to take their case for statehood to the United Nations and its various funds and programmes, as they have already with UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization]. All of us here today understand Israel’s very real security concerns. I saw for myself the terrible effects of the rocket attacks out of Gaza at Sapir College, only 3 kilometres from the border.

We must work together to stop the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. We must strengthen the institutions of mutual security in the West Bank, and we must promote a culture of tolerance and mutual acceptance in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory.

And clearly, we must condemn all acts of violence. We must speak clearly for Israel’s right to exist, always bearing in mind that a negotiated peace must rest on accepted principles of self-determination in their own democratic States.

In these circumstances, Israel must think carefully about how to empower those on the other side who wish for peace. Now is the moment for a demonstration of good will by both sides.

There is much Israel can do. By opening Gaza to construction materials, for example,

Israel would give ordinary Gazans a chance for a normal life. For people to live normal lives, they have to have schools, decent housing and health care. There has to be an economy, with jobs and a free flow of commerce. Palestinian poverty is not Israel's friend.

Our highest priority must be to return to negotiations — not merely procedural talks, but genuine and substantive negotiations to resolve the core issues. And when those talks begin, both sides should understand the profound costs if they lead nowhere, particularly in terms of public alienation.

As you know, Israeli and Palestinian representatives are meeting in Jordan. That is why I travelled to Amman earlier this week. I commended King Abdullah [II Bin Al Hussein] for his stewardship, and I told him that I would do anything possible to push the negotiations forward.

That is also why I have visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. I have used this occasion to urge both the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to act constructively and refrain from provocations. Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu and President [Mahmoud] Abbas each reaffirmed their commitment to a negotiated solution. I told each, as well, that this is their moment. This is the moment to try to rebuild the confidence and momentum that has so sadly — and often so needlessly — been lost. The road is not easy, but every step counts.

Confidence demands that Palestinians and Israelis are able to live normal lives. It demands that both sides accept that each has

a legitimate narrative and legitimate needs and that neither demonize the other. A radicalization of societies would hurt Israel and Palestine alike. Negotiations will go nowhere without a shared sense of urgency and a genuine determination to succeed. The Palestinians must engage, seriously, on security. Israel must engage, seriously, on territory.

The elements of peace are what they have long been: an end of the 1967 occupation, a just resolution of all core issues including security, borders, Jerusalem and refugees, and the creation of a Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace with a secure Israel.

I have spoken frankly, today, because I believe that time is running out and because I am a true friend of Israel. If this chance is not seized, future conferences here at Herzliya will face even more difficult questions and challenges. The world is ready to help ensure Israel's security, just as it is ready to help Palestinians to establish a new nation — so long overdue.

You have my personal commitment as Secretary-General to spare no effort to help Israelis and Palestinians arrive at a new and brighter future — and to place at the centre of this profoundly changing region an historic peace whose benefits will be felt in every corner of the world.

That evening, the Secretary-General attended a dinner hosted by Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

He departed Israel after midnight on 3 February for New York, where he arrived early the same day.

II. UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO PALESTINIAN PEOPLE CONVENES IN CAIRO

The United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People was held by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Cairo on 6 and 7 February 2012. Under the theme “The economic cost of continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory: local, regional and international efforts towards mitigating it”, the Seminar reviewed the impact of Israeli policies and practices on the socioeconomic situation in the West Bank and Gaza. Seminar participants, among them prominent Palestinian and Israeli academicians, representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies and civil society organizations, discussed the impact of the occupation on various sectors of the Palestinian economy in the West Bank and Gaza, and considered how to sustain the recent economic and social progress achieved under the Palestinian State-building programme (GA/PAL/1216).

At the opening session on 6 February 2012, the statement of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was delivered by Maxwell Gaylard, United Nations Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The text of the statement is reproduced below (SG/SM/14094, GA/PAL/1218):

It is my pleasure to send greetings to the participants in the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this event.

I have just returned from a trip to the Middle East, including the Occupied Palestinian Territory. I was there to see for myself the challenges we face on the road to peace, and to underline my personal commitment to reaching that long-sought destination. During my visit, I clearly saw the high economic cost of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory. I reiterated my long-standing call for an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and an end to the conflict.

The issue of settlements, which are illegal and hurt prospects for a negotiated solution, clearly has an economic dimension. Settlements and their infrastructure severely restrict access to land and natural resources by the Palestinian people. This is further compounded by settler violence. Israeli restrictions on free movement remain another

vast impediment to Palestinian economic viability in the West Bank.

This situation is unacceptable. As I said during my visit, notwithstanding Israeli steps to facilitate economic growth, occupation measures which stifle Palestinian life must be rolled back. This is especially important as the Palestinian Authority has built the institutions essential for a functioning democracy and a future Palestinian State. Now is the time to build on that progress. Israel can make a critical contribution to consolidating these achievements, preparing the ground for a negotiated, two-State solution.

I am concerned about the fragile financial situation of the Palestinian Authority. Continued shortfalls could challenge the impressive progress in institution-building. I call on donors to deliver their 2012 contributions to the Authority as soon as possible.

I continue calling for immediate action on the closure of the Gaza Strip in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The full opening of legitimate crossings for the

import of construction materials is critical for Gaza's economic recovery, and would enable badly needed reconstruction activities. Exports, a critical component of any economy, should be allowed to resume at scale, including transfers to the West Bank and Israel. All these policy changes can be implemented with due consideration for Israel's legitimate security concerns, while making a significant difference in the lives of many ordinary Gazans.

All parties must respect international humanitarian law. I condemn the continued firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israeli civilian areas. Militants must stop their indiscriminate attacks. I also call on Israel to show maximum restraint.

Economic progress cannot be reached and sustained absent a credible political solution on the horizon. A month ago, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators engaged in direct talks in Amman. In Jordan recently, I had the opportunity to personally congratulate King Abdullah for breaking the impasse. I remain

hopeful that these meetings will soon lead to substantive negotiations aimed at reaching an agreement for a two-State solution by the end of this year, as envisaged by the Middle East Quartet. Both Israeli and Palestinian leaders must show the vision, courage and determination necessary to overcome the current mistrust and reach an historic peace agreement that meets the legitimate aspirations of both sides.

A two-State solution is long overdue. The status quo is unacceptable; it only guarantees continued conflict and suffering. A just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on relevant Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the Madrid framework, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative is critical and urgent.

For my part, I pledge to continue to pursue peace and stability across the Middle East with all the means in my power. Your deliberations can help advance this cause. In that spirit, I wish you a most productive session.

III. SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR MIDDLE EAST PROCESS ISSUES STATEMENT ON PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

The following statement was issued on 10 February 2012 by Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process:

The Special Coordinator follows with concern reports about the deteriorating conditions of one Palestinian in administrative detention who is on hunger strike. He calls on the Government of Israel to do everything in its power to preserve the health of the prisoner and resolve this case, while abiding by all legal obligations under international law.

During his recent visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the

Secretary-General discussed the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody with the Palestinian Minister of Prisoners Affairs Issa Karake.

UNSCO is following up on some of the issues related to the question of prisoners, particularly on the use of administrative detention, which should only be employed in exceptional circumstances, for as short a period as possible and without prejudice to the rights guaranteed to prisoners.

IV. SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSES 2012 OPENING SESSION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

On 13 February 2012, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held its 2012 opening session in New York, during which the Committee adopted its programme of work for 2012, unanimously re-elected its Chair (Senegal) and Vice-Chairs (Afghanistan and Cuba) and approved a request by Ecuador to upgrade its status in the Committee from that of observer to full member (GA/PAL/1222).

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed the meeting with the following remarks (SG/SM/14105, GA/PAL/1223):

Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and your distinguished colleagues on your election to the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I have recently returned from Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. I vowed to spare no effort to help Israelis and Palestinians arrive at a new and better future. I encouraged the parties to re-engage in earnest towards the resumption of permanent status negotiations. I remain hopeful by the start of direct contacts facilitated by His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, under the framework of the Quartet. This can pave the way for serious negotiations towards an agreement for a two-State solution.

Concrete steps on the ground are required to restore confidence and trust. The parties have a particular responsibility to cease provocations and create a conducive environment for direct talks. Israel's continued settlement activity is a major obstacle and prejudices final status issues. Settlement activity is contrary to international law and the Road Map. It must cease. Unilateral actions on the ground will not be accepted by the international community. I am also troubled by the increase in settler violence.

I continue to follow with concern the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli

jails and the use of administrative detentions, including prolonged detentions without charges.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority should also find ways to de-escalate the situation, improve the divisive climate, including by combating incitement, and engage directly in the search for a negotiated solution. During my visit, I was encouraged by the impressive development of institutions fundamental to the functioning of a future Palestinian State. It is crucial to build on this progress and expand the reach of these institutions.

I call on the donor community to continue to assist this important process, especially when these advances are at risk due to the persistence of the conflict, fiscal challenges facing the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian divide.

The United Nations has consistently supported Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization and under the leadership of President [Mahmoud] Abbas, as well as the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. Palestinian reconciliation and negotiations with Israel need not be mutually exclusive.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains a priority for the United Nations. Ordinary Gazans, particularly

young people, deserve better living conditions and freer movement. I reiterate my call for immediate steps towards lifting the closure of the Gaza Strip, in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The full opening of legitimate crossings for the import of construction materials is critical for Gaza's economic recovery and would enable badly needed reconstruction activities. Exports, a critical component of any economy, should be allowed to resume at scale, including transfers to the West Bank and Israel.

All of these policy changes can be implemented with due consideration for Israel's legitimate security concerns, while making a significant difference in the lives of ordinary people in Gaza. I also must reiterate my condemnation of the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Militants must stop their indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians. At the same

time, I call on Israel to show maximum restraint. All must respect international humanitarian law.

The status quo is unsustainable. All efforts must be made towards a positive change. The parties should do their utmost to resolve all permanent status issues, end the conflict and establish an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel. This should be done in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid framework, previous agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

It is time to realize the legitimate rights and aspirations of the people of Palestine and the people of Israel. For my part, I will continue to do everything in my power to help the parties achieve this goal. I encourage this Committee to do likewise.

V. SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESTATES CONCERN FOR PALESTINIAN PRISONER ON HUNGER STRIKE

The following press release was circulated on 21 February 2012 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (HR12/032):

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, Richard Falk, reiterated today his urgent appeal to the Government of Israel to release Palestinian prisoner Khader Adnan. Mr. Adnan is now on the 66th day of a hunger strike, protesting his humiliating detention and treatment by Israeli security forces, and his objection to Israel's use of detention without charges.

"I am informed that Mr. Adnan's health has already suffered irreparable damage, he is in jeopardy of dying at any moment." Mr. Falk said at the end of a 10-day fact-finding

mission* to the region. "I reiterate my call on the Government of Israel to uphold Mr. Adnan's rights, taking full account of the extreme urgency of the situation."

"In addition to his release," the independent expert stressed that "allegations of torture and other mistreatment should be promptly, independently and impartially investigated." Mr. Falk added that torture and cruel and degrading treatment "is not only a grave violation of human rights and a war crime; it may also be subject to

* See the full end-of-mission statement, available from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11846&LangID=E>.

international criminal accountability, including through universal jurisdiction.”

For the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Adnan’s case is emblematic of the Israeli practice of detaining Palestinians without charges. “The Government of Israel calls this ‘administrative detention,’ but it is more honestly termed detention without charges, or arbitrary detention,” he said.

“I was reliably informed that Israel currently has approximately 300 Palestinians detained without charges,” Mr. Falk said. “I have requested information regarding each of these persons, and I intend to follow up on each case and address this matter in my forthcoming report to the Human Rights Council,” due in June 2012. There are also an estimated 4,400 Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons.

Several experts on prison conditions consulted by the independent expert raised concerns regarding physical, verbal and psychological abuse; lack of access to proper medical treatment; medical neglect; widespread use of solitary confinement for extended periods; overcrowding and decrepit cells; and the lack of family visits.

“It is dismaying to note that these concerns have been raised for many years without producing reforms or well

evidenced responses to the charges,” the Special Rapporteur stressed. “I will continue to investigate and report on the situation of Palestinian prisoners. And I would add that the violation of the rights of thousands of prisoners, Palestinian or otherwise, should be given the utmost priority by the international community.”

During this regional visit, which included Egypt and Jordan, Mr. Falk was unable to travel to the Gaza Strip, as he had planned, due to the current situation in the Northern Sinai. He was also unable to hear from Palestinian refugees elsewhere than Jordan, due to the prevailing situation in Syria and unwillingness of the Government of Lebanon to receive his mission. The Special Rapporteur added “It is unfortunate the Government of Israel refuses to cooperate with this mandate from the United Nations Human Rights Council.”

“One encouraging aspect of my mission was the prioritizing sense of purpose and of encouragement I witnessed at the League of Arab States,” the independent expert said. “On the basis of discussion with the leadership of the Arab League there seemed to be a strong willingness and interest to work together with this mandate to help realize Palestinian rights under international law as a high priority.”

VI. SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS ISSUES STATEMENT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT APPROVALS

The following statement was issued on 22 February 2012 by Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process:

During his recent visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Secretary-General reiterated the United Nations’ well known position that settlement activity is illegal, contrary to Israel’s obligations under the Road Map and will not be recognized by the international community.

Today’s announcement by Israel to approve a large number of new units deep inside the occupied Palestinian territory in the settlement of Shilo and retroactively legitimize hundreds in a nearby outpost is deplorable and moves us further away from the goal of a two-state solution.

VII. BUREAU OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ISSUES STATEMENT ON ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT ACTIVITIES

On 24 February 2012, the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following statement (GA/PAL/1224):

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is alarmed by the Israeli authorities' recent decision to construct more than 500 new homes in the "Shilo" settlement and the attempt to retroactively "legalize" some 200 settlement units built without permit in the West Bank.

The Committee notes with concern that the move is described by the Israeli settlement watchdog organization Peace Now as the "biggest construction plan to date" under the current Israeli Government. By this decision, Israel continues to ignore calls by the international community for halting its illegal settlement activity, further diminishing already fading prospects for resuming Israeli-Palestinian talks and for realizing the two-State solution.

It should be noted that the retroactive "legalization" of settler units is being carried out at the same time as Israel accelerates the pace of the demolition of Palestinian homes allegedly built without permits in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that, in 2011, some 622 homes and livelihood structures belonging to Palestinian families were destroyed, forcibly displacing almost 1,100 people, over half of them children. This constitutes yet another breach by Israel of its obligation as the occupying Power to protect the civilian population under its control in addition to violating the right to property, to adequate housing and to livelihoods of the Palestinian families affected by such illegal policies.

The international community firmly maintains that settlement activity is illegal under international law, a view that was reiterated by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during his visit to the region. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: "The occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." The Committee calls upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to live up to their responsibilities in accordance with article 1 of the Convention to "undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances".

Also, the Security Council, by its resolution 446 of 22 March 1979, determined that settlements were both contrary to international law and an impediment to peace. The Bureau of the Committee calls upon the Council, as the genuine guarantor of international peace and security, to act decisively against the continuing disregard by Israel for its resolutions and the continuing obstruction of a peaceful settlement on the basis of those resolutions and international law.

The Bureau of the Committee reiterates its call on the Israeli Government to immediately cease all settlement activity as called for by the international community, including the Quartet, and to refrain from any acts that undermine international efforts to bring Israeli-Palestinian talks back on track. The international community must not lose sight of the important goal set by the Quartet last September to reach an agreement by the end of this year. Such agreement should lead to the end of the

Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and an end to the conflict with the just resolution of all permanent status issues, and the independence of a contiguous, viable and

democratic State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

VIII. SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSES JERUSALEM INTERNATIONAL FORUM IN DOHA

The following message, issued by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Jerusalem International Forum held in Doha on 26 February 2012, was delivered by Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (SG/SM/14130):

I am pleased to send my greetings to all those participating in this important international forum. Your presence today underscores the centrality and deep significance of Jerusalem to peoples around the world.

For Muslims, Jews and Christians, Jerusalem is a place of faith and longing, as well as the symbol of intertwined national aspirations. It is a sacred space that must not be confined to one creed or community and must be open and accessible to all. Precisely because actions in Jerusalem are felt throughout the world, it must stand as a symbol of peace and opportunity for the region and beyond.

I hope this forum will inspire us to continue our work for a just and lasting peace in which the status of Jerusalem and other core issues are resolved through negotiations.

I visited Jerusalem earlier this month. While there, as well as in Ramallah and Tel Aviv, I stressed how important it is for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to continue direct talks aimed at reaching an agreement for a two-State solution by the end of this year, as called for by the Quartet. I have encouraged them to resume bilateral negotiations without delay and preconditions.

Only through negotiations can Jerusalem emerge as the capital of two states, living side-by-side in peace and security, with arrangements for the holy sites that are acceptable to all. This is the road to fulfilling the vision put forward by Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and the hopes of all those yearning for peace. Both sides have a particular responsibility to create a conducive environment for meaningful negotiations. Palestinians should remain constructively engaged.

Unfortunately, Israel's continued settlement activity in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as in the rest of the West Bank, undermines that effort and prejudices final status issues, often with tragic human consequences. Home demolitions and forced evictions are also cause for continued deep concern. So, too, is the Government of Israel's recent forcible transfer of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council from East Jerusalem to Ramallah. I repeat the calls of the Quartet and the wider international community for Israel to freeze settlement activity and end the demolition of Palestinian homes. Settlement construction is contrary to international law, as is the forcible transfer of residents from East Jerusalem. The international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the

occupied Palestinian territory subject to the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Access into East Jerusalem remains severely restricted by checkpoints, permits and the barrier, whose route is contrary to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. Day after day, Palestinians are cut off from economic opportunity, family contact, and basic services.

The United Nations is present in East Jerusalem and will continue to support the human security of the Palestinian population there through health, education, employment and social protection initiatives. United Nations agencies, to the greatest extent possible, are working with Palestinian grassroots organizations and civil society to achieve these goals.

IX. UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 28 February 2012, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The following are excerpts from the briefing (S/PV.6725):

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On 8 February, the Secretary-General briefed the Council on his trip to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and his efforts to encourage the parties to sustain the talks that started on 3 January in Amman. Unfortunately, these talks have stalled. Since the last meeting of the negotiators on 25 January, President Abbas has been consulting internally and with the Arab League. So far, prospects for the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations remain dim.

During the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-Up Committee meeting on 12 February and the meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee on 20 February, the Palestinians reiterated

The quest for a just and lasting Middle East peace once again confronts significant challenges. All members of the Quartet, along with His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, are working to ensure that direct talks continue in an environment favourable to reaching an agreement on all final status issues. Your help will be critical. Only through the achievement of a negotiated two-State solution, and a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, will Jerusalem be fully restored to its rightful place as a symbol of sanctity, fraternity and peace for the entire world. For my part, I pledge to continue pursuing my efforts with all the means available to me.

their position that direct talks should not resume unless all settlement activity was halted. Israel committed to a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines and the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to insist that Israel wants to continue the talks, but without preconditions.

We believe that the framework set by the Quartet in its statement of 23 September 2011, with the aim of reaching an agreement before the end of the year, remains relevant. Quartet envoys regularly assess developments and remain engaged with the parties. I hope that the parties will use the coming period to refocus on the need to exchange proposals on territory and security.

In this regard, the Secretary-General fully supports the efforts initiated by King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein of Jordan. There must be improvements on the ground to complement these efforts.

In another notable development, President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Mashal agreed on 5 February to form a transitional Government of technocrats with Abbas as Prime Minister. President Abbas has emphasized that this Government would adhere to his political programme and to all previous PLO commitments. However, opposition to the agreement within Hamas in Gaza has so far prevented concrete results. A date for elections has not been set, and voter registration in Gaza has yet to be allowed by the de facto authorities.

As the Secretary-General has repeatedly affirmed, the United Nations supports Palestinian unity within the framework of the PLO commitments, the Quartet principles, and the Arab Peace Initiative. Reconciliation on this basis and Israeli-Palestinian peace talks need not be mutually exclusive in any way.

The situation on the ground in both Gaza and the West Bank remains dangerous and ultimately unsustainable. Further settlement expansion was authorized in several locations in the West Bank, including in two outposts and in the settlement of Shiloh deep inside the occupied Palestinian territory. Such steps move us further away from the goal of a two-State solution and are in violation of Israel's Road Map obligations. In addition, on 13 February, the Jerusalem municipality granted permission for a new archaeological visitors' centre in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and Israeli police demolished a structure that had served as a Palestinian community centre.

Incidents of settler violence against Palestinians and their property, as well as

violence by Palestinians against settlers, continued in the West Bank. Demolitions of Palestinian property resulted in 138 people, more than half of them children, being left homeless in East Jerusalem and Area C. We called for a halt in those demolitions and for a fair planning and zoning system to meet Palestinian needs for growth.

On 10 February, Palestinian security forces, for the first time in 15 years, enforced law and order in the H2 area of Hebron, which is under full Israeli control. At the same time, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted 463 operations in the West Bank. Overall, 251 Palestinians, including 11 children, were injured in the West Bank by the IDF and 358 were arrested. Twelve IDF soldiers were injured by Palestinians.

The reporting period also witnessed increased tensions and violence between Palestinians and Israeli security forces around holy sites. Clashes erupted in the compound of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif between Israeli police and Palestinians on 19 and 24 February. Renewed clashes erupted on 25 February as thousands of Palestinians participated in the funeral in Al-Ram of a Palestinian resident who had died the previous day after being shot by an IDF soldier. That series of violent incidents resulted in a number of Palestinians, as well as one Israeli police officer, being injured.

On 24 February, Palestinians also threw stones towards Rachel's Tomb, a site of Jewish worship in the West Bank. On 20 February, for the third time this month graffiti was sprayed on a church in Jerusalem, including a reference to settler involvement. I call on all parties to safeguard the peace and sanctity of religious sites. We also remind both parties that hate speech from anyone is unacceptable.

On 21 February, following an arrangement with the Israeli authorities for his release, Palestinian administrative detainee and Islamic Jihad affiliate Khader Adnan ended his hunger strike of 66 days. The holding of another 300 Palestinians under administrative detention remains a matter of concern. We believe that the use of administrative detentions must be exceptional. Those detained must be charged and face trial with judicial guarantees or released without delay.

Sixty-one rockets and one mortar shell that were fired this month from Gaza landed

in Israel without resulting in injuries or damage. This is significantly more than what we reported last month, underscoring the continued risk of escalation. The IDF conducted one incursion and 28 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in one Palestinian civilian being killed and 20 injured. We reiterate our condemnation of indiscriminate rocket attacks out of Gaza against Israel. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint. All should fully observe their obligations regarding the protection of civilians.

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