



DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

April 2013
Volume XXXVI, Bulletin No. 4

Bulletin

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

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<http://unispal.un.org>

I. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ISSUES STATEMENT ON INCREASED TENSION IN THE GAZA STRIP

The following message was issued on 3 April 2013 by the office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry on the situation in the Gaza Strip:

The United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Robert Serry, is worried about the volatile situation on the ground, as exemplified by renewed firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel yesterday and this morning, and continued tensions over unresolved prisoner issues. It is of paramount importance to refrain from violence in this tense atmosphere and for parties to work constructively in addressing the underlying issues.

The renewed violations of the ceasefire risk undermining the ‘understanding’ reached between Israel and Gaza on 21

November, and unraveling the gradual but tangible improvements achieved since then in the easing of the closure and the security situation in Gaza and southern Israel. The United Nations condemns the indiscriminate firing of rockets into civilian areas and calls on Israel to act with restraint. The United Nations will continue to support Egyptian efforts to restore the calm and fully implement the ceasefire understanding as the only viable way to address the unsustainable situation in Gaza.

II. UNRWA REOPENS FOOD DISTRIBUTION CENTRES IN GAZA

UN-run relief and distribution centres in Gaza that provide food to around 25,000 people a day reopened on 9 April 2013 after security guarantees for UNRWA staff were given following a week of demonstrations by hundreds of Palestinian refugees outside the UNRWA office in Gaza due to cuts to a cash assistance programme. The following are excerpts of a statement by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees:

Based on the assurances UNRWA in Gaza received from different local parties, the Agency will reopen its installations across the Gaza Strip effective today, Tuesday 9 April. UNRWA was forced to close its distribution and relief offices last week due to ongoing demonstrations that affected its operations, a regrettable decision that hindered the Agency’s ability to provide much needed services and relief supplies to Palestine refugees in Gaza. While UNRWA

understands the frustration of the population, heightened by the tightened blockade on the Gaza Strip, and respects the right to peaceful demonstrations, UNRWA must ensure the safety and security of its staff. UNRWA in Gaza reaffirms that while it is re-opening these facilities now, if its staff or facilities are threatened or operations hindered by demonstrations in the future, it will again be forced to close those installations.

III. UN HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER DETERIORATING SITUATION IN THE GAZA STRIP

The following statement was issued on 10 April 2013 by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator James W. Rawley on the situation in the Gaza Strip:

In response to a deteriorating security situation in and around Gaza, in recent weeks Israel has announced a series of heightened restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from the Gaza Strip, including closures of the Kerem Shalom crossing.

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. James W. Rawley, expressed serious concern regarding the impact of these restrictions on the civilian population. “These measures are resulting in the depletion of stocks of essential supplies, including basic foodstuffs and cooking gas, and undermine the livelihoods and rights of many vulnerable Gazan families”, said Mr. Rawley. “If these restrictions continue, the effect upon the Gaza population will be serious”.

Since 26 February 2013, Israel has imposed new restrictions on the movement of people and goods to, from and within the Gaza Strip. Since 21 March these restrictions have also included a reduction in the fishing limit from six to three nautical miles. Approximately 3500 families in Gaza rely on the fishing industry as their main source of income.

We expect Israel, in any response to unacceptable rocket fire, to exercise maximum restraint and uphold international law, refraining from actions that would be punitive in nature or otherwise adversely impact the civilian population in Gaza. The United Nations will continue to support Egyptian efforts to restore the calm and fully implement the ceasefire understanding as the only viable way to address the unsustainable situation in Gaza.

IV. SECRETARY-GENERAL ISSUES STATEMENT IN APPRECIATION OF PALESTINIAN PRIME MINISTER FAYYAD’S TENURE

The following statement was issued on 15 April 2013 by the Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (SG/SM/14947, PAL/2159):

The Secretary-General appreciates Salam Fayyad’s strong efforts during his tenure as Prime Minister. He commends Mr. Fayyad’s leadership and his commitment to improving the lives of all Palestinians. The United Nations looks to build on his

achievements for the Palestinian State-building and development agenda, and will continue to work with the Palestinian leadership, under President Mahmoud Abbas, on achieving the two-State solution.

V. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ISSUES STATEMENT ON THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER FAYYAD

The following message was issued on 15 April 2013 by the office of the United Nations Special Coordinator Robert Serry on the resignation of the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad:

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, met today with Prime Minister Fayyad to express on behalf of the United Nations appreciation for his achievements. “Prime Minister Fayyad has not only been an interlocutor I personally hold in the highest esteem, but also a valuable partner for the international community, including the United Nations”, Serry said.

The United Nations recognizes that Prime Minister Fayyad had to contend with

circumstances that kept constraining the success of the state-building agenda he led together with President Abbas and which is now – in the absence of a credible political horizon – at serious risk.

The United Nations remains committed to working with its Palestinian partners, under the leadership of President Abbas, towards development, state-building and to achieve the long-overdue negotiated two-state solution.

VI. BUREAU OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ISSUES STATEMENT ON PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued on 16 April 2013 the following statement on Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons (GA/PAL/1263):

On the occasion of the Palestinian Prisoners Day, 17 April, the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People expresses its grave concern about the plight of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons and detention facilities.

It is estimated that over 750,000 Palestinians have been arrested by Israel since the beginning of the occupation in 1967. At the end of February 2013, there were 4,700 Palestinians in Israeli prisons, 235 of them children and 10 of them women, as well as 169 administrative detainees that are imprisoned without charge or trial.

Of particular concern is the situation of vulnerable people — children, women, the elderly and the infirm — in Israeli prisons. In a recently released report, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said that each year, approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17 were arrested, interrogated and detained by Israeli army, police and security agents. In the past 10 years, an estimated 7,000 children had been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned by the Israeli military. UNICEF confirmed that the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of Palestinian children in the Israeli detention system was widespread, systematic and institutionalized, in violation of article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is hardly any Palestinian family that has not been affected by the ongoing campaign of arrests, harassment and intimidation carried out by the Israeli occupying forces. The arbitrary Israeli military law criminalizes legitimate protest against the occupation. Palestinians are tried in military courts, which do not meet the minimum international standards of fairness, independence and impartiality. In contravention to international law, they often are convicted on secret evidence, based on confessions extracted under duress or torture, denied the right to a lawyer, with children tried as adults. Many Palestinians do not even get a trial. They suffer in detention, sometimes for years, not charged with any specific offence. These actions by the occupying Power directly contravene article 71 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The conditions of detention of Palestinians in Israeli prisons continue to be a source of grave concern. Prisoners are thronged together in overcrowded and unsanitary facilities, denied access to health services, abused, beaten and humiliated by the guards, subjected to solitary confinement, with family visits severely restricted, all in contravention of provisions contained in the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of protected persons. We are particularly alarmed by continued reports of torture and other forms of ill treatment.

The ongoing critical situation of Palestinian prisoners and detainees has led to raised tensions and is causing further instability in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The plight of several Palestinian prisoners and detainees who are undertaking long-term

hunger strikes to protest abuses and violations of their fundamental human rights has brought the prisoner issue to the fore. The current crises require the urgent attention and intervention of the international community.

The Bureau of the Committee calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to implement international humanitarian law and previous agreements with regard to its treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The deaths of prisoners under questionable circumstances should be promptly investigated by an independent authority. A humane solution must be urgently found for the long-term hunger strikers in accordance with international legal standards and principles. Administrative detainees should be charged and face trial, or promptly released. Israel must respect the right to peaceful protest and act with restraint while protests should be kept completely non-violent.

On its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue to keep the situation under review and raise international awareness on the issue of Palestinian prisoners, as it did in 2011 and 2012 with two of its international meetings specifically devoted to this crucial issue, and to call for the release of all Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The Committee will also continue to appeal to the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect by the occupying Power for its provisions on the treatment of civilians under its occupation, including Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

VII. OFFICE OF THE QUARTET REPRESENTATIVE ASSESSES THE SITUATION IN THE GAZA STRIP

Due to the tightened restrictions on movement and access between Israel and the Gaza Strip in the last month, a team from the Office of the Quartet Representative Tony Blair visited the Gaza Strip. They met with private sector and civil society representatives to discuss the impact of these restrictions on the Gazan economy. On 19 April 2013, the team issued the following assessment:

Businesses & Livelihoods Constrained

Since September 2007, a closure policy has been in place on Gaza, including restrictions on imports, severe restrictions on outward trade, and the intermittent closure of the commercial goods crossing. Fluctuating hostile actions between Israel and the de facto government in Gaza have led to a static economic situation. Despite an increase in the number of goods permitted to enter Gaza in 2010, and the Israeli Government decision to allow Gazan exports to all markets except the West Bank and Israel in February 2011, restrictions continue to hamper basic service provision to the people of Gaza, and to prevent necessary levels of economic development and private sector-led growth.

In Gaza last week the OQR team discussed the current, unsustainable situation with private sector representatives engaged in a range of industries including manufacture of metals, plastics, furniture, and garments, as well as in agriculture and services. All of the interlocutors listed the same essential needs:

- Ability to import and export all legitimate items
- Increased access at Kerem Shalom crossing through streamlined procedures
- Access to markets in the West Bank and Israel
- Full movement and access for business people and potential investors

Without significant steps to open up the Gaza Strip in this way, the private sector will continue to decline and the resulting bleak economic picture will severely impact development and employment prospects, and thus broader stability in Gaza.

Tackling the Problem

The opening up and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip is a key priority for OQR, and indeed for local stakeholders and the international community. OQR's expert advisers on movement and access, infrastructure and private sector development are working to:

- Identify and seek to change the full range of restrictions that inhibit growth, collecting data and information and providing analysis;
- Advocate for increased numbers of materials, machinery and equipment that can enter Gaza, including revision of the list of materials considered to have a 'dual-use' purpose;
- Liaise between private and public stakeholders to facilitate progress on much needed infrastructure projects for basic water, sanitation and energy needs including the North Gaza Emergency Sanitation Treatment plant, the Khan Younis wastewater treatment facility and Gaza Power Plant; and
- Actively support progress for the development of the strategically important Gaza Marine gas field project.

VIII. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ISSUES THE CARACAS DECLARATION

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People met in Caracas on 17 and 18 April 2013, upon the invitation of the Venezuelan Government. The following declaration was issued at the conclusion of the meeting. (GA/PAL/1264):

We, the members and observers of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, gathered in Caracas at the invitation of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, expressing our unwavering solidarity with the State of Palestine, the Palestinian people and their leadership, at a time when they face unprecedented challenges due to the escalation of illegal actions by Israel, the occupying Power, solemnly declare the following:

We reaffirm our unconditional support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, the right to national independence and sovereignty in the framework of the independent State of Palestine, and the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homeland in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 194(III).

In this context, we welcome the admission of the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State by the United Nations General Assembly, and its admission as a Member State by the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] General Conference. We express deep appreciation to all the States which demonstrated their solidarity by voting in favour of these measures, which constitute an important step towards the realization of the ultimate goal of a two-State solution with a contiguous and economically viable State of Palestine, existing side by side in

peace with Israel, on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

We express optimism that the granting of non-member observer State status to Palestine by the General Assembly will help accelerate the momentum in the Security Council regarding its pending United Nations application. We consider the affirmative vote cast by an overwhelming majority of Member States on 29 November 2012 as a vote of confidence that Palestine meets the Charter criteria of statehood, and is ready and willing to assume its Charter responsibilities. We stand ready to act in solidarity with the State of Palestine in the General Assembly on the issue of admission.

Heightened worldwide solidarity manifests itself in the growing number of States recognizing the State of Palestine. In this regard, we appreciate the catalytic role played by the Latin America and Caribbean region, strongly illustrated by the initiative of the Venezuelan Government to convene in Caracas a special meeting of the Committee. We urge all States, particularly those which already extended recognition to the State of Palestine at the United Nations, but have yet to do so bilaterally, to establish full diplomatic relations.

We recognize that by virtue of its admission to the United Nations as a non-member observer State, Palestine has been vested with additional rights, as well as obligations as set forth in Article 2 of the

United Nations Charter. We welcome in this regard the declaration of 23 September 2011 by President Mahmoud Abbas that the State of Palestine is a peace-loving nation and that it accepts the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations and solemnly undertakes to fulfil them.

We acknowledge that in accordance with the Charter, the State of Palestine may choose to become a party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice upon the recommendation of the Security Council. Pending such a recommendation, the State of Palestine may still avail itself of the international dispute-settlement mechanisms provided by the Court, in accordance with international law, by accepting its jurisdiction and undertaking to comply in good faith with its decisions.

We support any action by the State of Palestine to use expanded opportunities at the United Nations, such as the right to place items on the provisional agenda of the Security Council and the General Assembly, and to participate fully, effectively and constructively in all relevant international conferences convened under the auspices of the United Nations. The State of Palestine should seriously consider signing and ratifying multilateral treaties open to it, such as the Geneva and The Hague Conventions, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We also discussed options for the State of Palestine to make a constructive contribution to the work of United Nations specialized agencies.

We condemn the ongoing denial of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people due to the Israeli military occupation of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, and the illegal actions by the occupying Power that cause civilian casualties,

socioeconomic and humanitarian deprivation and destruction to Palestinian institutions, properties, infrastructure, lands and water resources, and fragment its territory. These measures include, but are not limited to, construction of settlements and the separation wall, use of deadly force against Palestinian civilians, including unarmed protesters, political imprisonment and prisoner abuse, imposition of the Gaza blockade and hundreds of checkpoints throughout the West Bank, withholding of Palestinian revenues, and measures to change the character and isolate East Jerusalem. We demand that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease all its illegal actions and measures and make reparations for all damages. We recall that last year's Seminar in Cairo, convened by this Committee, estimated at over \$7 billion per year the damage caused by the occupation. We reiterate our call upon all States, including the donor community, to continue to stand by the Palestinian people by providing timely development, humanitarian and budgetary assistance to support Palestinian institutions.

We strongly condemn the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which are a grave violation of international law and undermine the peace process and the two-State solution, and demand their immediate and complete cessation. We welcome the findings of the fact-finding mission on settlements, dispatched by the Human Rights Council, and urge all Member States to demonstrate active solidarity by implementing its recommendations. We call on the Security Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to uphold their responsibilities. We support actions and initiatives that promote accountability for actions by third parties that contribute to grave Israeli breaches of international law.

We express our utmost concern at the stalemate in the political process and we call on the international community to re-engage with Israel and Palestine and remove the obstacles to resuming meaningful negotiation on all final status issues. A revitalized Quartet should coordinate with key regional players. It should report regularly to the Security Council on its efforts, and progress achieved.

We reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails and detention centres. We strongly condemn prisoners' abuse by Israel and the illegal practice of administrative detention without trial, which provoked prolonged hunger strikes, and resulted in deaths. We call for the immediate release of all Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including children, women, elected officials, pre-Oslo detainees and those held without trial. We urge a global solidarity campaign to address this important issue.

We reaffirm our solidarity with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, under the strong leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas. We call on the Palestinian factions to implement reconciliation agreements in good faith, and for the international community to support Palestinian unity unequivocally.

We recall the historical ties between the liberation movements of Namibia and Palestine and the crucial importance of the support by the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America for Namibia's independence, and pledge to apply that experience in engaging all strata of the international community, in particular the youth, in support of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

We took note and supported a number of proposals from the floor for action in the United Nations and ask the Bureau of the Committee to consolidate them into a plan of action to be implemented by the Committee within its annual programme of work. We solemnly commit ourselves to intensify our efforts in solidarity with the Palestinian people and the State of Palestine at the Security Council, General Assembly, Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations, and all other relevant fora. We pledge to engage with the United Nations Secretary-General, the Quartet, League of Arab States, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, national Governments and parliamentarians towards a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We will prioritize outreach to civil society, including youth and women, academic institutions, think tanks, mainstream media, expand social media efforts and partner with all other relevant constituencies. We commend worldwide solidarity initiatives with the Palestinian people, and we undertake to do our utmost to support them. We will continue to strengthen the programme of activities during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to maximize its impact.

We decide to ask the General Assembly to proclaim 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to launch a global campaign to bring an end to the Israeli occupation, realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive negotiated peace.

We express our gratitude to the Government of Venezuela and to its President Nicolás Maduro Moros personally, for the initiative to convene this important event.

IX. USG FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 24 April 2013, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Excerpts of his briefing are reproduced below (S/PV.6950):

...

Action must also be taken on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The fragile hope triggered by the renewed United States engagement must be sustained and translated into serious efforts on the part of the parties. The desire for peace needs to be cultivated by early measures to reverse negative trends on the ground and build trust.

Last month's visit of United States President Obama marked an important opening. Secretary Kerry's subsequent trips and continued engagement with the parties and regional leaders demonstrate a serious commitment to breaking the political deadlock. It was in support of these efforts for renewed meaningful talks that the Secretary-General met with President Obama on 11 April. The two agreed that there is at least a window of opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to resume negotiations. The Secretary-General reconfirmed the United Nations commitment to supporting, including through the Quartet, a substantive initiative with a defined political horizon to achieve a two-state solution. He spoke to the urgency of making progress towards peace.

In the margins of the Group of Eight meeting on 10 April, ministers recommitted themselves to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. They further agreed on the need for a major international effort, involving regional parties and the Quartet, to drive the peace process forward. Now is the time for the international community to work in a

concerted manner and without delay. During the recent Doha Summit, Arab leaders reconfirmed their intention to send a ministerial delegation to Washington, D.C., on 28 April to discuss the peace process.

Of course, much depends on whether the parties have the political will and exercise the bold leadership required to create conditions conducive to the resumption of a political process, despite the considerable differences between them and the risk that events on the ground could overtake new efforts at engagement.

In a development of note, on 13 April President Abbas accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad. The Prime Minister is expected to continue carrying out his functions as caretaker until a new Prime Minister is announced. The United Nations recognizes that Prime Minister Fayyad had to contend with circumstances that kept constraining the success of the statebuilding agenda he led together with President Abbas and which is now, in the absence of a credible political horizon, at serious risk. We remain committed to working with our Palestinian partners, under the leadership of President Abbas, towards state-building and development, and to achieving the long overdue negotiated two-State solution.

In an encouraging development Israel and Palestine, with the facilitation of several parties, reached an important agreement on 23 April at a meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board, which allows for an experts mission to the old city of Jerusalem in mid-May. The parties also agreed on the

postponement of five resolutions taken by UNESCO's Executive Board. This agreement exemplifies how cooperation and dialogue can be beneficial to all Member States and also conducive to maintaining stability on the ground.

The financial viability of the Palestinian Authority remains at stake, and we continue to call for donors to step up their financial support. The budget approved by the Palestinian Cabinet on 28 March for the 2013 fiscal year reflects fiscal discipline, yet reveals the Palestinian Authority's continued and increased dependence on external aid to cover its expenditures in the short-term. The Palestinian Authority's efforts to expand its tax base and enhance collection will result in increased net revenue of \$2.5 billion, and total expenditure will amount to \$18 billion, more than half of which is for wages, even with the implementation of a net hiring freeze. This expenditure includes some \$350 million planned for development projects, most of them to be financed externally and dedicated to rural communities in Area C. International assistance amounting to close to \$1.4 billion will be required to cover the deficit. The most recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in March forecasted a worsening economic outlook for the current year, with slower growth rates than in 2012, and a growing financing gap for the new budget should foreign aid continue to decline.

The reporting period witnessed a considerable increase in Palestinian casualties, mostly as result of new clashes with Israeli security forces during Palestinians demonstrations that grew violent. On the occasion of Palestinian Prisoners Day on 17 April, some 3,000 prisoners went on hunger strike for the day and demonstrations were held in main West Bank cities, resulting in 11 Palestinians being injured by rubber-coated bullets fired

by Israeli security forces. The issue of Palestinian prisoners has fueled much of the unrest, especially following the terminal illness and death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh in prison on 2 April. During the clashes that ensued, Israeli security forces killed two Palestinian teenagers and injured two more with live ammunition at a checkpoint near Tulkarem after they allegedly threw Molotov cocktails at the checkpoint. The case is under investigation by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and we look forward to a timely and public announcement of its conclusion.

We welcome the resolution in the case of Samer Issawi, who has reportedly suspended his hunger strike following a court ruling on 23 April that provides he will be freed to his Jerusalem home after he serves an additional eight months. We continue to call for a swift resolution to his case based on humanitarian grounds. The United Nations remains closely involved on the ground, and the Secretary-General has urged that a solution be reached without delay in order to end the prisoners' plight and to preserve calm. We cannot but recall that other fundamental issues incorporated in the May 2012 agreement remain unresolved.

Wide demonstrations were also organized throughout the West Bank on the occasion of Land Day on 30 March, but violence was relatively contained compared to previous years. Some 22 Palestinian protesters and four Israeli soldiers were injured on that day. Protests continued against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We reiterate that demonstrations must remain non-violent. We also urge the Israeli security forces to show the utmost restraint and to ensure the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully and freely.

In all, incursions by Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank remained at approximately the same level — a total of 303 operations compared to 186 in the previous reporting period. But the levels of violence have nearly doubled, with Israeli security operations resulting in two Palestinian teenagers dead and 724 people injured, including 352 children and six women. A total of 354 Palestinians were arrested, including a number of Hamas and Islamic jihad leaders. Thirty-five Israeli soldiers were also reportedly injured by protesters in the clashes during the period.

Clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have also continued. A total of 13 Palestinians, including six children, were injured by settlers, and over 600 trees belonging to Palestinians were vandalized. On 7 April, Israeli settlers reportedly spray-painted racist slogans on the walls of two mosques in a village near Bethlehem. In two instances, Israeli security forces arrested a total of six settlers, among them a serving soldier, suspected of involvement in so-called price-tag activities. Palestinian attacks on Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank resulted in ten injuries, including one child and one woman, and extensive damage to Israeli vehicles as the result of stone-throwing.

The reporting period registered continued demolitions and related displacements in Area C and East Jerusalem. As compared to the monthly average of 50 demolitions in 2012, 29 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished between 25 March and 23 April 2013, including 16 structures demolished yesterday, leading to the displacement of 40 Palestinians.

We remain deeply troubled by the continued developments with respect to settlement activity. Let me reiterate unequivocally the consistent position of the

United Nations that settlement activity violates international law. Settlement activity further undermines Palestinians' confidence in the viability of the two-State solution. The Secretary-General is particularly worried about reports suggesting that the Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction has predicted the construction within a year and a half of housing units in the El area of the West Bank. Separately, initial approval was granted on 9 April to begin a new construction project in a settlement that is part of occupied East Jerusalem.

We are also concerned about the potentially negative impact on Palestinians of the continuing expansion of the Sderot Begin Highway through parts of the neighbourhood of Beit Safafa, occupied by the Israelis in 1967. Such actions are counterproductive to creating the right environment for peace.

The situation in Gaza has become increasingly fragile. The calm that followed the ceasefire on 21 November 2012 has been challenged, and there has been little progress on the more substantive underlying issues that formed part of that understanding. In an alarming development, over the last month, a total of 20 rockets, including three Grad rockets and four mortar shells, were fired from Gaza into Israel and towards the sea, albeit without causing injuries or damage. Explosive ordnance placed along the border fence hit an Israeli patrol, causing physical damages to the vehicles but no injuries during the reporting period. Israel conducted four incursions and two airstrikes into the Gaza Strip. Two Palestinian civilians were injured on 5 and 16 April by Israeli fire while approaching the border fence. In reaction to the shooting of rockets, Israel again closed the Kerem Shalom crossing from 8 to 11 April. Since 26 February, the crossing, which is the only passage for

goods from Israel into Gaza, has been closed for 29 out of 56 days. The off-shore fishing limit has remained reduced from six to three nautical miles since 21 March, well below the 20-mile limit agreed by the Israelis and Palestinians in the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which remains in force and should be respected. The movement of Palestinians across Erez has been further restricted to humanitarian cases with special permits for several periods since 26 February.

In another development, on 17 April two Grad rockets fired from Egypt's Sinai peninsula exploded in open areas of the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat, causing no casualties or damage. The attack, claimed by the Salafist jihadist group, Mujahideen Shura Council, was the first such rocket-firing at Eilat in a year. The same group has previously claimed responsibility for rocket attacks from Gaza into Sderot on 21 March.

We continue to strongly condemn the firing of rockets into Israel. Those rockets, which are indiscriminate, are intended to sow fear and cause civilian casualties, and can trigger cycles of violence difficult to stop. We also call on Israel to act with restraint. At the same time, we remain seriously concerned about the impact of Israeli restrictions on the vulnerable civilian population in Gaza. The United Nations continues to support Egypt's efforts to fully implement the ceasefire understanding it brokered between the parties. In that regard, we continue to call for preservation of the calm, with crossings into Israel remaining open and the fishing limit line to be expanded in full implementation of the November understanding. The United Nations will also continue to work for the relief of the Gaza population, including by stepping up reconstruction efforts.

Demonstrations and sit-ins took place all over the Gaza Strip in front of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities on 4 April, protesting against cuts to its cash-assistance programme, which were necessitated by budget shortfalls. Protests grew aggressive when a group of demonstrators entered UNRWA offices and threatened staff members, forcing UNRWA to close its offices until 9 April, thus preventing the Agency from providing necessary assistance to Palestine refugees.

Meanwhile, efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation continue. Hamas and Fatah have resumed informal working-level meetings but have not advanced in their discussions. On 2 April, Khaled Meshaal was re-elected Chief of the Hamas Political Bureau. A day earlier, President Abbas reiterated his position, in accordance with the Doha understanding of February 2012, that he was prepared to lead a technical interim Government, which would prepare for elections 90 days into its term. On 12 April the Chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC) handed a copy of the updated voter register to the Palestinian President and informed him that the CEC is technically ready to organize any election, once so decided. The voter register now includes over 1.8 million electors, both in the West Bank and Gaza, representing over 80 per cent of the total Palestinian adult population, of which 48.2 per cent are female. The CEC continues to organize the complementary municipal elections scheduled for 1 June 2013 in the West Bank.

...

In conclusion, allow me to make the following observations. As the situation inside Syria continues to deteriorate, it is more vital than ever that everyone

collectively works towards preserving regional stability. Advancing the Middle East peace process remains central to ensuring that the region is not at further risk of destabilization. Let me repeat what the Secretary-General has stated at every opportunity: there is now an opening to develop a meaningful initiative to achieve the negotiated two-State solution that will best serve the interests, rights and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. But it is not an overstatement to suggest that we are about to reach a critical point in the viability of the peace process. Whether that prospect solidifies or vanishes will depend on the direction that leaders on both sides choose to take, and on the level of regional and international support for new efforts.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas have reiterated the right commitments. The choice ultimately rests in their hands not to disappoint their people and to offer them, at last, real prospects for peace and security. The international community also bears a unique responsibility to help them move forward together. The United Nations welcomes the renewed attention that the United States is giving to the peace process. We stand ready to contribute to a return to meaningful negotiations in the period ahead, including through the Quartet and through broader engagement with all relevant partners. Despite the difficult regional context and the challenges on the ground between Israel and Palestine, we believe that this is a moment of opportunity that we cannot afford to lose.

X. SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSES UN INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE AT ADDIS ABABA

The United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held on 29 and 30 April 2013 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the theme "African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights". The meeting examined, among other things, the situation in Palestine as a State under occupation; responsibility and accountability of the occupying Power under international law; and lessons learned from African States' experience in ending colonization and achieving sovereignty and independence. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 29 April addressed the meeting in a message that was delivered by the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Carlos Lopes. The text of Mr. Ban's message is reproduced below (SG/SM/14993, GA/PAL/1266):

Earlier this year, I told the General Assembly that 2013 would be a critical year for the peace process, and I identified five priorities: collective international engagement; meaningful negotiations; stability in Gaza; Palestinian reconciliation; and preventing the financial collapse of the Palestinian Authority. These goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

A window of opportunity for renewed international engagement has opened following the visit of President Obama to the region. I am also encouraged by the subsequent visits by Secretary of State John Kerry. In my recent meeting with [United States] President [Barack] Obama, I reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to support any serious initiative that presents a credible political horizon, including multilaterally, through the Quartet

and key regional partners. Now is the time for concerted action.

It is also crucial to defuse tensions on the ground and preserve the calm. I am concerned by renewed violence, particularly over the situation of Palestinian prisoners and violations of the November 2012 Gaza ceasefire. Israel's decision to close key crossings in Gaza has only exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation. The parties should refrain from actions and rhetoric that aggravate tensions and diminish the prospects for negotiations, which remain the only way towards the two-State solution.

I recognize the crucial importance of the prisoners' issue. Israel should uphold international humanitarian law and implement previous agreements in this regard. Prisoner deaths should be promptly investigated by an independent authority. A solution must be urgently found for the long-term hunger strikers. Administrative detainees should be charged and face trial, or released without delay. Israel must respect the right to peaceful protest and act with restraint, and protests should be kept non-violent.

The United Nations will continue its efforts to solidify the Gaza ceasefire. I condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza. At the same time, Gaza borders should be fully opened for the legitimate movement of people and goods. This is especially important given the humanitarian situation, with much of Gaza's population relying on assistance from the UN and its partners, and given the major investments required for Gaza's water resources and other critical development needs.

I am deeply troubled by Israel's continued settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, all of which is illegal under international law. These actions

constitute ever-greater impediments to peace and must not be allowed to prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns must be recognized and addressed, especially on the issue of arms smuggling and rocket fire.

The decision by the United States to restore aid to the Palestinians is highly welcome, as is the decision of the Israeli Government to resume the monthly transfers of clearance revenues. I call on donors, especially those from the region, to accelerate the provision of timely and predictable assistance to stabilize the finances of the Palestinian Authority. I also call upon Israel to lift its administrative policies and practices that severely curtail Palestinians' freedom of movement. Restrictions on movement and access and unfulfilled donor commitments have had a negative impact on the gains made in institution-building and hindered the Palestinian Authority's ability to deliver services.

For international engagement to be sustainable, the Israeli and Palestinian political leaders must demonstrate a willingness to move beyond discussions about negotiations and to tackle the final status issues in a constructive spirit. Their respective constituencies should do more to press their leaders in this direction.

I support regional efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation, within the framework of the PLO commitments and the Quartet parameters. Ending Palestinian divisions in a manner which is conducive to peace is an essential step for achieving the two-State solution.

The status quo is unsustainable, both politically and economically. There is an urgent need for a concerted push for peace

this year if we are to salvage the two-State solution. The accomplishments of the Palestinian State-building programme and donor funding will be difficult to maintain in the absence of concrete progress on the political track.

The contours of a two-State solution based on 1967 borders with territorial swaps are well known. There should be a just

solution on all final status issues, including agreements on territory, security, settlements and water. I will continue to do my utmost to support and facilitate efforts to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive negotiated peace. In that spirit, please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.
