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SECURITY COUNCIL IS TOLD ISRAEL-HAMAS PRISONER EXCHANGE OFFERS HOPE OF EASING

LONG-STANDING MIDDLE EAST IMPASSE — 'GIVEN DETERMINATION, POLITICAL WILL'

All-day Debate Hears Renewed Pleas for Palestine UN Membership; Israel, United States among Those Saying Move Would Be Counterproductive

The recent prisoner exchange agreement between Israel and Hamas showed that it was possible with sufficient exercise of political will to overcome long-standing impasses in the Middle East, the United Nations political affairs chief told the Security Council this morning, ahead of a full-day debate on the Middle East that included some 50 speakers.

"We have seen that political will can be brought to resolve a humanitarian issue, and a readiness in that context to take difficult decisions," B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said in his regular monthly briefing. "We call for this same determination to be displayed regarding the most important issue — the quest for a lasting peace. The parties must rise to this challenge," he added.

Recalling the framework for progress recently issued by the diplomatic Quartet — the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russian Federation — he called on the international community to support the moderate Palestinian leadership and on the parties to stand ready to offer serious proposals on borders and security as they approached their meetings with Quartet envoys later this week. They must also avoid provocations and respect their Road Map obligations, he said.

In that regard, he registered deep concern over Israel's continued construction activity in the West Bank, including plans for some 2,600 housing units in an area he called "of vital importance for the viability of a two-State outcome". Noting that the Palestinian application for United Nations membership was being examined by the Council and "is a matter for Member States", he said, however, that the Secretary-General remained increasingly concerned about the ramifications of such efforts as the Palestinian request for membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). He asked all to act wisely in determining a course of action. A negotiated two-State solution must remain the highest priority, he stressed.

On the security situation, he said that demonstrations in the West Bank following the application for statehood and the prisoner exchange were generally peaceful, but that incidents continued to occur, with a mosque in the Galilee set on fire and swastikas painted on the tomb of Joseph in Nablus. He called on Israel to take decisive action against settler violence. Despite firing of projectiles from Gaza and Israel incursions, Gaza remained generally calm but still beset by limited access. There had been no concrete progress towards further implementation of the May intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreement.

He said that the crisis in Syria, resulting in over 3,000 deaths, showed no sign of abating and he described raids by Syrian troops into Lebanese territory to kill or capture fleeing Syrian civilians and deserting troops. He reiterated the Secretary-General's call to the international community to act in a coherent manner to prevent further bloodshed and noted the Arab League call for dialogue and its planned visit to Damascus on 26 October.

Following Mr. Pascoe's briefing, the observer from Palestine said that attempts to postpone consideration of the membership application were unacceptable. "The status quo can no longer continue, for it is unacceptable, illogical, and unjust," he said. The sole blockage to renewing negotiations, which he continued to favour, was Israel's refusal to meet its legal obligations by ending settlement activities; statehood was a separate and non-negotiable issue. "We must reiterate clearly: the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, freedom and independence is not up for negotiation, nor will it be the product of negotiations".

Israel's representative said that his country had accepted the Quartet's call to restart negotiations immediately without preconditions. He added that the suggestion that settlements were the cause of the conflict was interesting; the conflict had been raging for nearly half a century before a single one had sprung up in the West Bank. The primary obstacle to peace was the Arab world's refusal to accept the Jewish State, he said. He maintained that the membership bid breached previous agreements and would raise expectations that could not be met, resulting in further instability. The international community must be clear

about its responsibilities: "You vote for it; you own it," he said. Sustainable peace must be negotiated, nurtured and anchored in security, tolerance and understanding, he stressed.

In the discussion that followed, representatives of Member States welcomed the prisoner exchange — with Pakistan's ambassador hoping it reinforced the will to find "mutually-acceptable compromises" — and stressed the importance of getting the parties back to the negotiating table. Many speakers, at the same time, also urged support for the admission of a Palestinian state to the United Nations. Brazil's representative said that such a move "can help reduce the asymmetry" of negotiations, explaining that no sustainable agreement could be reached if one side was too weak and was undermined by actions on the ground, citing continued Israeli settlement activity, against which many speakers today spoke in strong terms.

The representative of the United States, on the other hand, speaking about what she called her country's vigorous efforts to restart peace negotiations, said that the bid for Palestinian membership in the United Nations, as a unilateral move, was counterproductive; similarly, Israel's settlement activities changed facts on the ground outside of negotiations and were harmful to the prospects of talks.

Most speakers today also offered sympathy to Turkey following the death and destruction caused by yesterday's earthquake, with many also offering condolences to Saudi Arabia for the passing of Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud.

Also speaking today were the representatives of India, Germany, China, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, France, Gabon, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Portugal, Colombia, Nigeria, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Turkey, Maldives, Malaysia, Japan, Viet Nam, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Syria, Norway, Morocco, Uganda, Cuba, Bangladesh, Iceland, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Kuwait, Iran, Bahrain, Tunisia, Sudan and Qatar (on behalf of the Arab Group).

The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Head of the Delegation of the European Union also spoke.

The meeting started at 10:15 a.m., suspended at 1:20 p.m., resumed at 3:12 and closed at 6:25 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met today to hear a briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs on the situation in the Middle East, including the Question of Palestine, and to hold an open debate on that topic.

Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, recounted the 18 October start of a prisoner exchange agreement between Israel and Hamas, in which Israeli Sergeant Gilad Shalit, held without international access since 2006, was released and 447 Palestinian prisoners, many of whom had been jailed for attacks on Israelis, were released, mostly to Gaza, but also to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and Israel proper. Forty-two prisoners were released to Turkey, Qatar, Syria and Jordan. In all, 205 were transferred to locations other than their previous residence.

Unfortunately, he said, Hamas officials and some released prisoners lauded violent resistance in public statements following the agreement. Of the approximately 5,000 Palestinians who remained in Israeli prisons, a further 550 were set for release within two months in the second phase of the agreement, and prisoners suspended a hunger strike at news that solitary confinement would be ended. "We have seen that political will can be brought to resolve a humanitarian issue, and a readiness in that context to take difficult decisions. We call for this same determination to be displayed regarding the most important issue — the quest for a lasting peace. The parties must rise to this challenge," he said.

He recalled that in recent meetings, the diplomatic Quartet — the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and the Russian Federation — called for talks between Israel and the Palestinians to recommence without preconditions and for proposals within three months on borders and security, with a view to achieving substantial progress within six months and an agreement no later than the end of 2012. It stressed the need for the parties to refrain from provocations and keep to their Road Map obligations.

In that regard, he said, deep concern had been registered at Israel's continued settlement actions, including plans for the construction of some 2,600 housing units in an area "of vital importance for the viability of a two-State outcome". In addition, he said, restrictions continued on Palestinian construction in Area C and East Jerusalem and demolitions in Area C displaced 145 people. He remained concerned at plans to relocate around 2,300 Bedouins.

The Palestinian application for United Nations membership, he said, was being examined by the Council and "is a matter for Member States". The Secretary-General remained increasingly concerned, meanwhile, about the ramifications of Palestinian request for membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and asked all to act wisely in determining a course of action. A negotiated two-State solution must remain the highest priority.

In the West Bank, both the application for statehood and the prisoner release evoked significant public demonstrations, but few acts of violence. However, tensions and violent incidents continued, with settler attacks on Palestinians resulting in one death, 19 injuries and damage to 664 olive trees, and injuries to an Israeli soldier in a settler attack on an Israel Defense Force vehicle. He urged Israeli authorities to take decisive action against such violence. In addition, an attack on a mosque in the Galilee triggered unrest and subsequent damage to other holy sites, Muslim, Christian and Jewish. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the West Bank resulted in two deaths when a vehicle was stoned, and two injuries, including the stabbing of a child and extensive material damage from stoning and Molotov cocktails. Swastikas were painted on the exterior walls of Joseph's Tomb.

He said the fragile calm in Gaza was broken by the firing of 19 projectiles indiscriminately into Israel during the period, and two Israeli incursions and five air strikes resulted in five injuries. He called for an end to militant rocket fire into Israel and maximum Israeli restraint. Echoing the Secretary-General's statements, he said he hoped the prisoner exchange would be followed by more far-reaching steps to end the closure of Gaza, with smuggling of weapons brought under control, in the framework of Security Council resolutions. The worrisome humanitarian and development situation in Gaza had led to a vacuum that was filled by other actors fuelled by the illicit tunnel trade, deepening the Palestinian divide and causing concern for prospects of a viable Palestinian State. There had been no concrete progress towards further implementation of the May intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreement.

Turning to Lebanon, he said the situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally quiet, with, however, almost daily Israeli over-flights. There had been incursions into Lebanon by Syrian troops seeking fleeing nationals and army deserters. The United Nations was coordinating with the Lebanese Government to assist such displaced Syrian nationals. Unfortunately, the crisis in Syria, with more than 3,000 people killed since March, was of great concern to the United Nations. He reiterated the Secretary-General's call to the international community to act in a coherent manner to prevent further bloodshed and noted that the Arab League called for dialogue and planned a visit to Damascus by a ministerial delegation on 26 October.

Turning back to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, he said leadership was urgently needed to end the impasse between the parties. The moderate Palestinian

leadership must be supported. The parties must refrain from provocations and should stand ready to offer serious proposals for negotiation on borders and security, as they approached their meetings with Quartet envoys later this week. The international community must stand ready to play an active role in helping steer the situation towards the two-State solution and a resolution of all outstanding issues.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer for Palestine, said the debate took place at a historic moment when the Council was engaged in consideration of the application by Palestine for admission as a Member State of the United Nations, a moment that was long overdue. To date, 130 countries had recognized the State of Palestine. There had been significant progress in the building and strengthening of Palestinian national institutions via implementation of the Palestinian Authority's two-year plan. At the same time, the peace process had repeatedly and regrettably failed.

He said, "All of these dynamics have led us to this moment — a moment in which we are insistent that international law and resolutions, including of the Security Council, be upheld, and also insistent that the status quo can no longer continue, for it is unacceptable, illogical, and unjust." The Council had been debating the application for nearly a month, sufficient for its thorough consideration. Attempts to extend or postpone that application indefinitely were unacceptable.

The core understanding of the Palestinian leadership of the 23 September Quartet statement, he said, was that negotiations were to begin on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and that Israel was expected to meet its legal obligations, including under the Road Map, to stop all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. "Clearly, no credible peace process can proceed in the absence of such a basic understanding," he said.

If the Quartet were to succeed in securing a commitment from Israel on that basis, then the Palestinian side was willing to resume negotiations, in accordance with the agreed terms of reference reflected in the Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. There was no contradiction between resuming negotiations in that framework and the Palestinian efforts to become a Member State of the United Nations. That was particularly clear since the two-State solution enjoyed global consensus.

He said the current reality of the Israeli occupation and the situation of the Palestinian Authority could not be sustained. It must either change, or Israel must assume full responsibility as the occupying Power. The situation on the ground continued to worsen and tensions continued to rise. Israel had intensified its illegal settlement campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. During the last three weeks, there had been arrogant declarations regarding the construction of nearly 4,000 more settlement units, particularly in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Those measures would sever the northern and southern parts of the West Bank, encircling Occupied East Jerusalem, and would undermine the contiguity and viability of a Palestinian State.

The obstruction of peace moves had also been underscored by the intensification of ill-treatment and the abuse of thousands of Palestinian civilians who remained imprisoned, he said. The international community, including the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must demand that Israel cease its abuse of Palestinian prisoners. Another unsustainable situation was the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. All pretexts for continuing that illegal blockade must be rejected and the international community must be unanimous in demanding that Israel fully lift the blockade.

He said the Palestinian leadership remained committed to peace and committed to negotiate seriously all final status issues — Palestine refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security and water — when the appropriate environment was secured. It would, however, not enter into negotiations for the sake of negotiations. Israel, the occupying Power, must be speedily compelled to commit to negotiations along the clear parameters the Palestinian leadership had already committed to. "We must reiterate clearly: the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, freedom and independence is not up for negotiation, nor will it be the product of negotiations. This is an inalienable right and is the sole domain of the Palestinian people; it has never been an issue for negotiation with Israel, nor will it ever be."

RON PROSOR (Israel) reminded participants that today's debate was entitled the "situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" — and not vice versa. The Middle East was in turmoil. People were calling for their freedom and demanding their rights. Yet, month after month, the Council focused disproportionately on one, and only one, conflict in the region. For generations, the Arab world had failed miserably to address the needs of its own people. And with their world in flames, Arab leaders continued to blame Israel and the West for all their problems. Today, the people of the Middle East demanded real answers for their plight.

Mentioning the events in Syria and Libya, he said that in Iran, the Ayatollah regime repressed its own people as it helped other tyrants to butcher theirs. Iran remained the world's central banker, chief trainer and primary sponsor of terror, with state-directed terrorist activities extending from the Persian Gulf to the Washington Beltway. "One can only imagine what it would do with a nuclear capability — with the dangerous combination of extremist ideology, advanced missile technology and nuclear weapons. IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] reports made clear that Iran continued to march towards the goal of a nuclear bomb. "The world must stop Iran before it is too late," he said.

He said, "Make no mistake: it is important for Israel and the Palestinians to resolve our longstanding conflict. It is important on its own merits, so that Israelis and Palestinians alike can lead peaceful, secure and prosperous lives. But it will not produce a sudden outbreak of stability, harmony and democratization from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea." Seriously addressing the underlying problems of the Middle East would be essential for advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The road to peace could be built only on a foundation of mutual recognition and dialogue, he said. A month ago at the United Nations, President Mahmoud Abbas had referred to "the Holy Land, the land of Palestine the land of... ascension of the Prophet Muhammad... and the birthplace of Jesus Christ". That denied 4,000 years of Jewish history. It had not been an oversight. The Palestinian leadership attempted to erase the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Others in the Arab World had offered a different message, such as King Hussein in 1995 who had referred to "the birthplace of their three great monotheistic religions".

He continued "Those who seek peace do not negate the narrative of the other side. "On the contrary, they recognize its existence and choose to sit down and negotiate peace in good faith... the ancient Jewish bond with the land of Israel is unbreakable. This is our homeland." The United Nations had recognized Israel as a Jewish State 64 years ago. It was time for the Palestinians and the more than 20 Muslim countries around the globe to do the same. Israel wanted peace with a future Palestinian state. "In word and in deed, my Government has demonstrated time and again that we seek two States for two peoples, living side-by-side in peace."

He said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had last month issued a clear call to President Abbas: Sit down with Israel. Leave your preconditions behind. Start negotiations now. The international community had called on the Palestinians to go back to negotiations. Israel had accepted the principles outlined by the Quartet to restart negotiations immediately, without preconditions. "We are waiting for the Palestinians to do the same," he said.

The Palestinians suggestion that settlements were the core cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an interesting one, considering that the conflict was raging for nearly half a century before a single settlement had sprung up in the West Bank. The primary obstacle to peace was the Arab world's refusal to acknowledge the Jewish people's ancient connection to the land of Israel — and the Palestinian insistence on the "so-called right of return". The idea that Israel would be flooded with millions of Palestinians was a non-starter.

The Palestinians' unilateral action at the United Nations breached the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol, among other things. It would raise expectations that could not be met. It was a recipe for instability and, potentially, violence. Members of the international community should be clear about their responsibilities: You vote for it, you own it.

In conclusion, he said sustainable peace must be negotiated, nurtured and anchored in security. It must take root in homes, schools and media that taught tolerance and understanding, so that it could grow in hearts and minds. It must be built on a foundation of younger generations that understood the compromises necessary for peace.

SUSAN RICE (United States) said her country continued to work vigorously with the parties and international partners to bring about renewed negotiations on the basis of the 23 September Quartet statement. The focus remained on laying the groundwork for talks in coming meetings and making concrete progress by the end of the year. She urged all Member States to help bring about a positive climate for renewed negotiations, maintaining, however, that only the two parties could make the kind of agreement that could bring about a lasting peace. Unilateral initiatives, such as status bids at the United Nations, would be counterproductive in that context, she stressed. She reiterated that the United States did not accept continued settlement activity on the part of Israel, as land-use issues must be negotiated as part of talks.

Turning to other areas in the Middle East, she called for an end to violence in Syria and for unfettered access by international observers to the country as part of a peaceful reform process. She deplored Syrian raids into Lebanon and called for them to stop. In addition, she called on all parties in Yemen to cease violence; in Lebanon, she said, it was of utmost importance that Lebanon fully support the International Tribunal and she stressed the importance of the Lebanese armed forces taking control of all national territory. She finally congratulated the Tunisian people on the holding of elections for a constitutional assembly.

E. AHAMED, Minister of State for External Affairs of India, said that the issue of Palestine had "taken a decisive turn" in the history of the Middle East conflict, with Palestine's recent application for full membership in the United Nations. Speaking before the General Assembly in September, a day after the application had been filed, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that India had been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine. India had been the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988, he added, stressing that Palestine now fulfilled all criteria mentioned in Article 4 of the United Nations Charter for full membership. India therefore supported the application for membership and hoped that the process would be concluded expeditiously.

"The call of the international community for democracy and respect of fundamental human rights will sound hollow if the present impasse continues and Palestinians are denied their aspirations," he continued, adding that lasting peace and security in the region could be achieved only through peaceful dialogue and not through the use of force. The biggest "stumbling block" to direct negotiations remained the continued settlement of the occupied Palestinian territories; Israel should end those activities.

He said India continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority, and had enhanced its annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

He said the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not the only important issue in the Middle East. Developments since February 2011 underlined the need for reinvigorating the search for peace, as the countries of the region undertook inclusive political processes and implemented reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. "It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue and negotiations, rather than resorting to arms," he added, stressing that it was the responsibility of all countries to create conditions that enabled their peoples to freely determine their pathways to development.

PETER WITTIG (Germany) said there was reason to hope that the current stalemate might be broken, as the Quartet would talk to Israel and the Palestinian leadership. Trust, however, was key to the return to negotiations. He said he was concerned, therefore, at Israeli plans to extend settlement activities and to legalize illegal outposts, something which undermined trust and ran counter to the Road Map obligations.

The imperative of trust should also be taken into consideration when looking at the Palestinian application for membership. Germany supported the establishment of a Palestinian State which then would become member of the United Nations, but there was no alternative to resumption of negotiations. While welcoming the exchange of prisoners, he hoped it would bring new momentum. Now was the time to open all crossings into Gaza.

He said that nine months ago, Tunisians had stood up to their regime and now free elections were taking place in Tunisia for the first time; 90 percent of those with the right to vote had cast their ballot. Germany would continue to support Tunisia through its transformation. On 4 October, the resolution condemning the violence in Syria had failed; the strategy of some to give the regime more time had failed and bilateral efforts had not succeeded. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 14 October had voiced her disappointment with the Council's inaction. The Council should send a strong message through a resolution. He could, however, not accept any approach suggesting that the opposition was as responsible for the violence as the authorities.

LI BAODONG (China) said the Middle East peace process was at an impasse. He hoped that all parties would demonstrate the political will to settle the dispute by political and diplomatic means so that the two countries could coexist in peace. The issue of Israeli settlements was the cause of the present impasse. He regretted Israel's recent decision on new settlements in East Jerusalem and urged Israel to stop the project. Welcoming the recent exchange of prisoners, he said he hoped both sides would seize the opportunity to continue to take steps to ease tensions.

He said China had been among the first to recognize the State of Palestine and had always supported the establishment of a State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. He supported Palestine's application for United Nations membership. For peace in the Middle East, progress must be made on all tracks of the peace process, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VOTTI (Brazil) welcomed the orderly prisoner exchange between Israel and Palestine and hoped it would lead to further cooperation, particularly regarding the situation in Gaza. It was time for Palestine to be fully represented at the United Nations; she hoped the Council would take a decision on the application "very soon", and noted that turning to international law and multilateral institutions to realize its legitimate right to self-determination demonstrated that Palestine was peace-loving.

While supporting Palestinian aspirations, she continued, the only way to achieve Middle East peace was through meaningful and balanced negotiations that took into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. "No sustainable agreement can be reached if one side is too weak and is constantly undermined by the actions of the other on the ground," she added.

The announcement of new settlements in occupied East Jerusalem was illegal and undermined the prospects for resuming negotiations. Coming shortly after the Quartet had called for such a resumption, based on Security Council resolutions and the Road Map, they contradicted Israel's proclaimed disposition to negotiate a viable peace. The continuation of settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was the major obstacle to resuming negotiations and destroyed the feasibility of the two-State solution. Strong political will was needed to halt and reverse settlement activity. The Quartet should keep the Council apprised of progress made or lack thereof.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said he shared Mr. Pascoe's concern over the continuing stalemate in peace talks in the Middle East, noting a lack of mutual trust between the parties. Optimism remained, however, because of the absence of major violence, despite predictions to the contrary, and the continued attention of the Quartet. He expressed concern in that context over continued settlement activity by Israel; the parties must take steps towards each other, and not unilateral steps on the ground. He said the Palestinian bid for membership in the United Nations was logical, as Palestinians already met all criteria involved and membership in the Organization would not harm prospects for a negotiated settlement.

He said the prisoner exchange, which his country had provided assistance for, had contributed to an improvement in the atmosphere of the region. He called for an end to the closure of Gaza and stepped-up reconciliation between Palestinians, as well as progress on all tracks of Middle East peace, including those that involved Syria and Lebanon. He reiterated that the Russian strategy on Syria was for an end to the violence and the avoidance of tactics such as sanctions that would exacerbate the situation.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) said this was a moment for the people in the Middle East to advance in democratic governance as well as political and economic freedom. He pledged to work in partnership with those forging a new future for their people and their countries.

In that context, he said, he was deeply disappointed that the Council was unable to act against the brutal tactics of Syrian authorities, and called for the strong collective action required. He was pleased, however, at the Council's action on Yemen and called for the authorities to cease bloodshed and sign onto the regional peace plan. In that light, Palestinians must also realize a democratic, peaceful state of Palestine, living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security.

In that context, he said, he would reaffirm the 23 September statement of the Quartet; it was time for both parties to commit to negotiations in that framework, and to make the bold compromises needed. At the same time, he condemned Israeli plans to expand settlement activity in ways that would hamper the creation of a viable Palestinian state. He called for such activity to stop. Welcoming the release of Gilad Shalit, he said that there must now be an end to the firing of projectiles out of Gaza and the opening of increased transit in and out of the territory in order for the economy there to improve.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France), welcoming the elections in Tunisia, said France would continue to support Egypt, Tunisia and Libya on their road to democracy. As for Yemen, he hoped that a peaceful political transition would take place soon. In Syria, leaders who lost all legitimacy were hanging on to power and dragged the people into a bloody cycle of violence. Those responsible should be held accountable and violence must stop. The paralysis of the Council was supporting the regime.

He said the desires of the Palestinian people were just as legitimate as those of other States in the region. As the path to admission to the United Nations was facing obstacles, France had proposed an intermediate State to elevate the status of Palestine at the United Nations to that of an Observer State.

He said the Quartet framework for negotiations was based on a strict timeline to resume negotiations without preconditions. In two days, members of the Quartet would meet with the two parties in Jerusalem. Chances for success were meagre, however, because of a lack of confidence. He condemned the recent Israeli announcements regarding settlement expansions. The projects threatened a contiguous nature between Jerusalem and the West Bank and directly called into question the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state. Settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were in blatant violation of international law and Council resolutions. He condemned also the decision to legalise the outposts. He called for full implementation of the Council's resolution 1860 (2009) with regard to the blockade of Gaza and an end to the firing of rockets into Israel.

NOEL NELSON MESSONE (Gabon) said the implementation of the two-State solution within the framework of the Quartet was the backdrop for consideration of Palestine's bid for membership at the United Nations. He welcomed in that regard the forthcoming meeting between the Quartet and the parties. He hoped the meeting would chart the way for negotiations on substantive issues, including those of borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem. He called on the parties to refrain from all actions that could undermine trust and impact on the negotiations. He said the announcement by Israel of new settlement constructions did not promote peace.

Turning to Libya, and noting recent developments, he said the international community should work with the National Council, so that it could promote reconciliation and reconstruction. The elections in Tunisia should pave the way to democracy. On Yemen, he said he shared the Secretary-General's appeal for a true dialogue to end the deterioration of security. The efforts taken by the Gulf Cooperation Council should be supported.

BASO SANGU (South Africa) said that there had been no progress in the Middle East for far too long. Positive developments were diminished by Israel's continued settlement activity. He said Palestine was a peace-loving State and was ready to carry out its obligations as a member of the Organization under the Charter of the Organization. Such membership should not be made conditional on a peace agreement. He called on the Council to recommend full membership for Palestine. While the Quartet framework was useful, he recalled that time frames had been set before; he called on the parties to make serious progress and for the international community to help create a climate for such progress.

Welcoming the recent prisoner exchange, he called for released Palestinian prisoners to be allowed to live without harassment, and said he hoped for a release of all Palestinian political prisoners. He expressed regret that according to the relevant human rights rapporteur, there had been an increase in the detention of minors, and called on Israel to fulfil its obligations under all human rights laws. He pledged his country's continued contribution to any initiatives that could bring about a just and lasting peace in the region.

IVAN BARBALIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said the only way to bring about a just and lasting resolution to the Middle East conflict was through direct negotiations based on previous agreements, taking note of the Quartet statement. He called on Israel to end all settlement activities in the West Bank and Jerusalem, saying that the latter should be subject to final status negotiations. He also called for more access to Gaza and an end to violence emanating from that territory. Welcoming the prisoner exchange, he said it showed that a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians was possible. On Yemen, he said he condemned all human rights violations and supported a Yemeni-led and inclusive process of transition. He called for an end to violence and the start of inclusive dialogue in Syria, saying that all those who violated human rights must be held to account.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said there could be no final solution to the Palestine question without real and substantive negotiations on final status issues. The request for membership should be dealt with by the Council solely on the basis of objective merits. More fundamentally, the question of Palestinian statehood should not be subjected to the outcome of Palestinians and Israelis. That would make it dependent on the approval of Israel, the occupying Power, and give it the right of veto. The right to self-determination was inalienable.

He said he would remind Council members that the Road Map required that the Government of Israel take no actions undermining trust, and that the Government of Israel must immediately dismantle outposts and must freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth. The 23 September Quartet statement called on the parties to refrain from provocative actions. Israel had since then approved several construction plans for settlement expansion, encircling East Jerusalem, and had continued the blockade of Gaza and the construction of the Separation Wall. Was that not clearly provocative? he asked. It would not be enough for the Council to recommend admission to United Nations membership for Palestine; it must also end the occupation. The Council must hold Israel accountable for not abiding by international obligations, including Council resolutions, and for systematically violating international law.

JOSÉ FILIPE MORAES CABRAL (Portugal) said momentous events were taking place in the Arab world, which had a direct impact on the desires of the Palestinian people. The Quartet would be meeting with Israeli and Palestinian representatives and had called on the parties to refrain from provocative actions. He hoped the recent release of the Israeli soldier and Palestinian prisoners would not only lead to positive developments in Gaza, but also to easing tensions between neighbours. Only negotiations, in good faith, on all core issues would allow for a peaceful and comprehensive two-State solution. Such a solution was urgent in light of events in the Middle East; the status quo was unacceptable.

He said statehood was an inalienable right of the Palestinian people. An independent State could be achieved only through direct negotiations. Both parties should give diplomacy a chance. The announcement of settlement expansion and legitimizing outposts ran counter to the peace process and was disturbing. He condemned the violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians and was concerned by demolition of Palestinian homes.

Turning to the situation in Syria, he said there was now a threat of a full-fledged civil war. It was urgent that the Council send a strong message to Syria that violence must stop immediately and that those responsible should be held accountable.

NÉSTOR OSORIO (Colombia), surveying movements for democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, offered his country's support to countries in transition there, and called for an end to violent repression and a start to inclusive dialogue towards reform in Yemen and Syria.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said he supported the two-State solution through a negotiated agreement, which he called the only possible and durable path to lasting peace. He welcomed the recent prisoner exchange and spoke of his country's efforts to encourage a resumption of talks between the parties on the basis of the recent Quartet proposals. He called on the entire international community to work to make peace, based on the realities of two States living side by side.

The Council President, U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria), speaking in her national capacity, said the situation in the Middle East was complex and daunting. She spoke of the application for membership in the United Nations by the Palestinians. Considering all recent developments, she added, concerted action must be made by the international community to help bring the parties back to the negotiating table, based on the Quartet's recently developed framework. She affirmed that her country solidly believed in the two-State solution, noting that her country had long recognized Palestinian statehood; the Palestinians met the criteria for statehood and Israel deserved recognition by its neighbours. Both parties must commit to progress through negotiations without preconditions. Israel must end settlement activity and Palestinians must take all possible action to end militancy.

She called for peace, stability and dialogue in Syria as well, and the full implementation of Security Council resolutions in Lebanon.

MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said all serious efforts by international and regional parties to resume direct negotiations on the Palestinian track had failed, mainly because of lack of clear parameters for those negotiations and the insistence of Israel, the occupying Power, to continue illegally, unilaterally and aggressively changing facts on the ground. It was highly to be condemned that Israel, the occupying Power, continued to pursue its illegal settlement activities. Recent announcements about thousands more settlements units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and other actions were the true measure of Israel's alleged commitment to the peace process, and the two-State solution. The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterated its call for the Security Council to be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its legal obligations; Israeli impunity must not continue to be tolerated.

He said the Movement emphasized the need to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to lift fully its illegal blockade, in accordance with Council resolution 1860 (2009). It called on Israel to open all its crossing points with Gaza. Welcoming the recent prisoner swap deal, under Egyptian auspices, the non-aligned group strongly condemned the continued detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails. Three developments — the 23 September speech of President Abbas, Palestinian reconciliation and recognition of the State of Palestine by more than 130 countries — coupled with consensus that Palestinian institutions were more than ready for statehood, were clear indications that the dream of a Palestinian State was closer than ever to becoming reality.

He said the international community must exert all efforts to compel Israel to abide by its obligations and commitments and to resume final status negotiations based on clear parameters that would include: cessation of all settlement activities, an agreed time frame, and accepting the 1967 borders as the foundation and starting point for the negotiations.

Turning to Lebanon, he said the Non-Aligned Movement condemned Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and called on all parties concerned to implement fully Council resolution 1701 (2006). As for the Occupied Syrian Golan, he said the Movement reaffirmed that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the area, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, were null, void and had no legal effect.

MOHAMMAD ABDO ABD ELKARIM TARAWNEH (Jordan) said it was not acceptable that Israel continued to build settlements and to undermine the two-State solution. The authorities in Israel must promote strategic instead of short-term interest. He supported the Palestinian request to fully restore the 1967 borders. The initiatives for peace, however, were torpedoed by Israel's continuing settlement activities. He supported a lasting solution on all final status issues, including refugees, borders, settlements, security and water, to be achieved as soon as possible.

He said the Palestinian application for United Nations membership should not be coupled with negotiations. The recent Quartet statement was a good opportunity to return to negotiations as long as the Quartet's framework was fully respected without any reservations. The international community must put pressure on Israel, so that it would comply with "dozens of resolutions" that called for an independent Palestine. Without settlement of the issue of refugees, there could not be a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

ABDALLAH YAHYA A. AL-MOUALLIMI (Saudi Arabia) noted that the permanent members of the Security Council and most of the countries gathered today had issued statements opposing the continuation of Israeli settlement activities; what was needed now was collective action reflecting that consensus. Security, he stressed, could be achieved only by respecting human rights and the rule of law. On Gaza, he urged the Council to shoulder its responsibilities by lifting the siege and he called on the international community to compel Israel to protect holy sites and places of worship and to release all Palestinian prisoners.

Recalling that his country's introduction of the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002 showed its commitment to a just and comprehensive peace, he said that Israel responded to that initiative by continuing its violations against the Palestinian people. As a result, he said Council members should support the Palestinian people by recognizing their State within the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, in order "to make Israel understand and the children and people of Palestine recognize, that the international community agreed, albeit belatedly, to support their cause".

Turning to what he called "the despicable plot to assassinate the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States", reportedly by perpetrators connected to the Iranian Government, he said his country would not stand idle towards such conspiracies. He reaffirmed his country's full cooperation with the Council to ensure that anyone involved in that plot, whether State or individual, be held accountable.

DIEGO MOREJÓN (Ecuador) said his country would recognize Palestine as a State. Noting the 23 September statement of President Abbas and the consensus of the international community, Palestine was capable of governing a state. He welcomed the exchange of prisoners as a positive development. Unfortunately, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians had failed because of the lack of clear parameters. The continued violence suffered by the Palestinians was a product of Israeli impunity. Israel should end the occupation in order to achieve a two-State solution. He appealed for a dialogue between the parties so that in the near future, there would be two States living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

JAIME HERMDA CASTILLO (Nicaragua) condemned once more the illegal occupation by Israel of all of the occupied Arab territories and demanded immediate withdrawal. He condemned Israeli's practices of expanding settlements as well as its continued inhumane blockade of Gaza. "We can no longer allow for the continued denial of the Palestinian state," he said. Such reasoning was part of a policy that was based on denying Palestinian citizens their status as human beings. It was urgent that Israel now free all Palestinian prisoners.

He said Israel must comply with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. The Palestinian people had made considerable concessions, which had been answered by Israel through, among other things, illegal killings, and the destruction of homes. He reiterated the need to put an end to the intolerable immunity Israel enjoyed, among other ways, through the imposition of the veto by a member of the Security Council. It was high time for the

Council to demand that Israel make a commitment to peace, without threats of veto. He called for the immediate recognition by the Council and the General Assembly of the Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) said that the quest for democracy in North Africa and the Middle East could be delayed, but not be reversed; his country would continue to support the democratization of the region. He welcomed developments towards that goal in Libya, as well as the Council's action on Yemen, hoping that crisis ended peacefully and soon. Observing with deep concern the continuing violence in Syria, he said that the legitimate aspirations of its people should be respected. At that same time, the plight of the Palestinian people must be addressed with the utmost urgency.

There was no alternative to a negotiated settlement in the Middle East, but progress in that effort could not be made when Israeli settlement expansion continued. He urged Israel to stop that activity and begin negotiations on a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. In addition, he said it was high time for Palestine to become a member of the United Nations. That would help negotiations as it would foster equality between the parties. Welcoming the recent prisoner exchange, which he said had been assisted by his country, he said that the situation in the Gaza Strip continued to shame the international community. In the context of ending the blockade, he called for the flotilla issue to be referred to the International Court of Justice.

ABDUL GHAFOOR MOHAMED (Maldives), noting that his country had recently gone through a transformation from autocracy to democracy, expressed hope for positive outcomes in Egypt, Libya and Syria, with appropriate support from the international community. He said that the single most important issue concerning peace in the Middle East was the recognition of Palestine as a state, because the peace process was continually undermined by the very fact of an unequal power relationship between the parties. It was clear to his country that Palestine had a Government that was capable of administering its country. Palestinians must be able to negotiate their own interests and concentrate on developing their own social and economic infrastructures. After 64 long years, the time to move forward was now.

HUSSEIN HANIFF (Malaysia), aligning his statement with the one delivered by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said that decades of "politico-legal" arguments had made the quest for a solution ever more elusive. Malaysia fully endorsed the application of Palestine to become a member of the United Nations, he said, adding that, in light of the fact that more than two thirds of the Organization's membership had recognized the State of Palestine, "the Security Council has a moral, political and legal responsibility to ensure that Palestine is admitted as a member of the United Nations without further delay."

Malaysia called on Israel to immediately fulfil all of its obligations, including refraining from provocation. Its recent settlement plans in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, were "deplorable under international law". In that context, he called on Israel to stop those activities completely and to abrogate all policies and practices that contravened international law, including the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip. Although a recent prisoner swap between the two sides was a step forward, some 5,000 Palestinian civilian prisoners continued to be imprisoned or arbitrarily detained by Israel; even more worrying were the poor and undignified conditions in which they were being held. Finally, he again urged the Security Council to take necessary measures towards restoring the rights of the Palestinian people, "failing which, the Council's credibility will be at stake".

TSUNEONISHIDA (Japan), understanding the aspirations of Palestinians to build their own State, strongly supported a two-State solution. Borders for such a solution should be defined through negotiations based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps to achieve the peaceful co-existence of a viable Palestinian State and Israel, with secure and recognized borders. A two-State solution could only be achieved through sincere negotiations between the concerned parties, he said, and to that end, he supported the Quartet's statement of 23 September, including its timetable. He expected that the meeting of Quartet members with the respective parties in Jerusalem on 26 October would be a step toward the resumption of direct negotiations.

Japan had been following discussions in the Council's Committee on the Admission of New Members, he said. He hoped the agreement between Israel and Hamas for the release of Gilad Shalit and of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel would contribute to confidence-building and contribute to the resumption of direct negotiations. Japan recognized no measures that prejudged the outcome of final status negotiations and associated itself with the Quartet, calling upon both sides to refrain from provocative actions. He called on Israel to freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank and deplored the Israeli Government's announced plans to build new housing units in East Jerusalem. He also called on the Palestinian Authority to improve security and fulfil its commitments to cease violence and work against incitement.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said negotiation was not an end in itself but must lead to a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although sharing the frustration expressed today with regard to the current stalemate in the peace process, the Committee was nevertheless encouraged by the renewed efforts of the Quartet, which would be successful only if new negotiations were based on the principles and other parameters agreed by the parties and guaranteed by the Quartet.

Although strongly supporting the resumption of negotiations, he said there was a considerable gap between the political process and the situation on the ground. Israel had approved many new settlement units and had even created a committee to legalize illicit settlements under Israeli law. Those settlements were contrary to the provisions of international law and the Road Map, jeopardized peace efforts and were a long-term threat to the two-State solution. He condemned in particular the recent escalation in the coordinated campaign of provocation, desecration and violence carried out by extremist settlers. The Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should take immediate and firm measures to ensure that international law was respected.

He called on the Council and the General Assembly to grant Palestine's request to membership of the United Nations and called on countries that had not yet done so to recognize the Palestinian State, on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Although welcoming the recent exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hamas, the Committee called for the release of all prisoners languishing in Israeli jails. He urged the Council to take action on initiatives to achieve the common goal of creating two States, living in peace and security within safe and internationally recognized border.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, said that fundamental changes across the Arab world made progress on the Middle East peace process urgent. He appealed to the parties to resume negotiations under the terms and within the timelines indicated in the Quartet statement of 23 September. Reiterating the European Union's clear positions on parameters, principles and issues, he supported the Quartet's call for the parties to refrain from provocative actions and to respect the Road Map, further deploring recent Israeli decisions to advance settlement expansion. Settlements in the West Bank were illegal under international law and constituted an obstacle to peace and a two-State solution. All settlement activity should cease immediately and new construction plans be abandoned, he said.

He welcomed reports stating that the Palestinian Authority was above the threshold for a functioning state and that Palestinian institutions compared favourably with those in established States, and he expected the Authority to continue its institution-building efforts. He stressed the necessity of further predictable support from the donor community, in that regard, and backed the organization of a new donor's conference in Paris. He further hoped that the release of Gilad Shalit and the related prisoner exchange would positively impact the peace process. Concerning the Gaza Strip, he said crossings must be opened to allow the flow of humanitarian aid and commercial goods and the movement of people between Gaza and the West Bank and recalled the European Union's readiness to assist with reconstruction and economic recovery.

Concerning Syria, he condemned the regime's "ongoing brutal repression" of its population and the widespread human rights violations, including killing, mass arrest and torture of civilians, peaceful protestors and their relatives, that might amount to crimes against humanity. He also condemned the incitement of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict and the targeted assassinations of political figures. The European Union demanded that Syrian authorities end the violence immediately and that those responsible for the repression be held accountable. "President [Bashar Al-]Assad must step aside to allow for a political transition in Syria," he said. Disappointed that the Council had been unable to adopt a resolution on current developments in Syria despite months of brutal abuses by the

Assad regime, he urged Council members to assume their responsibilities regarding that situation.

LE HOAI TRUNG (Viet Nam) said that the Palestinian people continued to be denied their fundamental right to self-determination. Palestine had made the difficult decision to "adopt the path of relative justice", he said, quoting the phrase of President Abbas, as demonstrated by the Palestinian agreement to establish a State on only 22 per cent of Palestine's historical territory. However, the peace process was at a stalemate due to Israel's refusal to engage in issues buttressed by international law and numerous United Nations resolutions, and had intensified the building of settlements on Palestinian territory. He recognized the legitimate concerns of all parties, but said those concerns could only be promoted within the framework of earnest negotiations.

Viet Nam supported Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, he said. He also supported negotiations between parties and welcomed renewed efforts by the Quartet, the League of Arab States, regional countries and the United Nations to help promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues. He called for intensified efforts by the international community, in particular the Security Council and the Quartet, to address the current political and humanitarian crisis in the Occupied territories and to promote comprehensive peaceful solutions to the conflict, based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map, which emphasized the principle of land for peace and the right of all States in the region to live in peace and security.

AHMED AL-JARMAN (United Arab Emirates) said that this morning's briefing showed the continued suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation, much of it caused by continued settlement activity and other illegal practices. The continued disregard of such measures by the international community would only cause Israel to entrench itself further. Serious and effective measures must be taken to stop Israel's practices, including the blockade on Gaza. He supported what he called the historic quest of Palestine for statehood, expressing hope for a unanimous Council decision in that regard based on the 1967 borders. The bid for statehood would not hamper renewed talks; it was Israel's recalcitrance that put off such progress. Welcoming the prisoner exchange, he demanded that Israel immediately release remaining prisoners and called for more protection for Palestinians from illegal Israeli practices by the international community.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) said the Palestinian request for full rights in the United Nations was a call for justice and an expression of the right of self-determination. The United States was seeking to delay or block the historic demand for a Palestinian state, which his country had already recognized because it met all the criteria for a sovereign State under international law. He maintained that Israel was blocking the road to a negotiated settlement between the parties by its practices of colonization, including its detention of thousands of prisoners, some of them under the age of 12.

He called on the international community to ensure that Israel met its obligations under international law. He supported compensation and return for Palestinian refugees. Turning to Syria, he paid tribute to the Government of r. Bashar Al-Assad for maintaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of his country. He also called for the end of the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel. He reiterated his Government's unconditional support for the liberation of the Palestinian people, quoting statements to that effect from his President, Hugo Chavez.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said the situation in the Middle East mainly focused on the question of Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. Adding other topics, while remaining silent on Israel's lack of commitment to bring an end to the occupation and the matter of the membership of Palestine to the United Nations, was not helpful. Some countries sought to destabilize the region, setting up States against each other and striving to set up internal fronts. All of that served the interests of Israel. It was unacceptable that the Council could remain inactive regarding Israel's policies. The Council must recognize the Palestinian State within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in step with international law.

He said Israel, the occupying Power, refused to return the occupied Golan to Syria and refused to accept the resolutions on the matter, which determined that the area's annexation was null and void and illegal. The occupying forces were undertaking an ongoing campaign to break the links in the occupied area with the homeland, through erecting a wall. He called on the United Nations and the Security Council to take measures to commit Israel immediately to putting an end to its international law violations.

He was concerned that some representatives called for an uprising against the Government of his country, while those same countries falsely proclaimed their attachment to Syrian stability and refused the offered reform. Syria had established a Committee to draft a temporary constitution and had announced a Committee for the establishment of a national dialogue. Those same representatives closed their eyes regarding the question of settlements. He condemned the inappropriate remarks of the representative of the European Union and others regarding his country and its political leadership.

MORTEN WETLAND (Norway) said that in 1949 his country had voted in favour of admitting Israel as a Member State to the United Nations. Since then, Norwegian policy had been based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Norway stood ready to recognize a Palestinian State, while supporting all international efforts leading to a comprehensive agreement on the outstanding final status issues. Norway had consistently stood by Israel regarding its inherent right to self-defence, and had supported the Palestinian right to statehood.

She said a main obstacle to a Palestinian State remained the occupation and the continued building of Israeli settlements on occupied land. Deeply concerned by the grave effects on peace and security of recent plans for settlement expansion, she said those measures were rapidly changing the territories around Jerusalem, in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. They undermined negotiations and might soon render the two-State solution unattainable.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) called for recognition of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders and hoped that the consultations of the Security Council would lead to that goal. The Palestinian question was at a crucial crossroads, at which the international community should make progress towards a Palestinian State, despite Israel's efforts to change the demographic nature of the occupied territories, including the recent announcement of plans for thousands of housing units in East Jerusalem, which he called an escalation counter to all international norms.

He strongly condemned all attempts to alter East Jerusalem and its historic character. He called on the United Nations to exercise its responsibilities and supported the Quartet framework proposed in September to revive peace talks towards a lasting and comprehensive peace and the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people. He pledged his country's unending efforts toward that goal including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

ADONIAAYEBARE (Uganda) called on the Israeli and Palestinian parties to muster the necessary courage to resume negotiations, welcoming the 23 September Quartet statements. She said she also welcomed the agreement reached on exchange of prisoners and considered it as an important gesture that could foster greater cooperation. The continuation of settlement activity and any other action that could hamper progress should be avoided. Concerned about the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza, she reiterated Uganda's call for a complete lifting of the blockade. It was important that the Israeli and Palestinian parties, with the support of the international community, step up their efforts towards the attainment of a two-State solution.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba) called for the immediate cessation of the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, the settlement activities in Palestinian territory, and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of military force against the civilian population, and for the urgent, unconditional and complete lifting of the illegal blockade to Gaza. He said his country fully supported the request for full membership in the United Nations by Palestine. The Council must positively rule on that matter without further delay, expressing the wish of the overwhelming majority of the Organization's Member States.

Turning to the issue of Palestinian political prisoners, he said the Council and the Assembly must take practical measures to ensure that Israel end policies of inhumane treatment of such prisoners. Those policies were carried out deliberately, in violation of international humanitarian law and human rights, including the Geneva Conventions. All such measures, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan, were violations of international law, the United Nations Charter and United Nations resolutions. He demanded Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June

1967 border.

ABUL HASAN MAHMOOD ALI ([Bangladesh](#)) said the key issue in achieving a lasting solution in the Middle East was ending the prolonged and illegal occupation of Arab territories, saying that the occupying Power should immediately cease its settlement activity, which was blocking negotiations. He commended President Abbas's leadership of the Palestinian Authority and its State-building efforts, but expressed concern over destruction of Palestinian property and institutions, as well as restrictions on movement of people and goods and what he called the inhuman treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. He was pleased by the prisoner exchange, however. In the context of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, he also welcomed the Palestinian application for membership in the United Nations. He called it "morally befitting" for the Council to unanimously respect the will of the majority of the Organization's member States and endorse that application.

GRÉTA GUNNARSDÓTTIR ([Iceland](#)) said she was very disappointed by the Council's recent veto on the draft resolution on Syria, as such a veto could further undermine international efforts while the situation continued to deteriorate. However, she welcomed the adoption of the Council resolution on Yemen and strongly supported the condemnation of human rights abuses and calls for the end of violence. She said the Council's deliberations on the Palestinian application for membership took place in an environment where peace negotiations were at a standstill. The Palestinian Authority had demonstrated clearly, through institution-building and infrastructure improvement, that Palestine could stand on its own. Iceland was supporting the Palestinian case and was determined to fully recognize Palestine.

She said there was no contradiction between Palestine seeking membership of the United Nations and the Quartet-led peace process. It was of the utmost importance that a negotiated agreement should be based on the two-State solution where both parties could live in peace with their neighbours. She urged the Council to recommend to the General Assembly that Palestine be accepted as the 194th Member State of the United Nations.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON ([Pakistan](#)) noted renewed hope for lasting peace in the Middle East. "The impressive march of the Palestinian people towards statehood had reached an important milestone with the application for United Nations Membership," he said, expressing hope that the Council would conclude its deliberations in favour of such membership, setting a foundation for the lasting solution of the conflict and rectifying the historical injustices suffered by the Palestinian people.

The prisoner exchange also boded well, he said; he congratulated the families of those released, saying that the agreement proved that all disputes and differences could be resolved amicably through negotiations. He hoped that it would reinforce the will to find mutually-acceptable compromises and would lead to the release of more Palestinian prisoners. The Quartet's latest initiative to renew negotiations was positive in its intent, but was neutralized by the Israeli decision to build new settlements. He called for an end to that activity and for an easing of the blockade of Gaza.

PALITHA T.B. KOHONA ([Sri Lanka](#)) said it was timely to focus on the situation in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian question, which for a long time had occupied the attention of the Security Council. In his view, the peaceful settlement of this issue would be one of the "defining achievements of this century", reflecting our collective will and responsibility.

While the question of Palestine remained a laudable goal for the United Nations, it was an "existential necessity" for the Palestinian people. He therefore hoped that the application for admission of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations would receive sympathetic consideration.

It was Sri Lanka's sincere wish that Israel, Palestine and their neighbours coexisted in peace and harmony. Realizing the two-State solution would be the greatest investment in peace in the region and was the only sustainable solution.

He said he welcomed the recent exchange of prisoners. Another important development towards the early resumption of negotiations included Palestine's completion of its "state-building programme"; with some internal reconciliation among relevant local political stakeholders, they had united to pursue common objectives.

YUSRAKHAN ([Indonesia](#)) called on the Council to expedite the application of Palestine for membership in the United Nations. He also supported the resumption of negotiations between Israelis and the Palestinians, as proposed by the Quartet in its September statement. However, he added: "We do not think it is sufficient for anyone to simply express bland support for the two-State vision, while avoiding the practical support the Palestinians need in order to obtain what is justly theirs."

In that light, he said, Palestinian membership in the United Nations was not an obstacle to the two-State solution. The true obstacles were the failed policies of Israel, particularly settlement activities. Supporting the prisoner exchange, he called for remaining political prisoners to be set free.

SIN SON HO ([Democratic People's Republic of Korea](#)) said that after 60 years the Palestinian land and other Arab territories still remained under Israel's military occupation. The use of armed forces, expansion of settlements and the blockade of Gaza continued. There could be no lasting peace and security in the Middle East and the Arab world unless the Palestine issue was completely solved.

He said the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had recognized Palestine as an official State in 1988 and was fully committed to stand firmly with the Palestinian and Arab people in their struggle for a final solution to a just cause. Therefore, his country unreservedly supported Palestine's application for full membership of the United Nations.

BYRGANYMATIMOVA ([Kazakhstan](#)), speaking for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, called the Palestinian question a "defining global justice issue and pressing challenge for the international community and Security Council in particular". It was painful to watch the Palestinian people constantly await the transformation of the Security Council's longstanding political commitments and resolutions into actual practice. Once it was made, the decision regarding the Palestinian bid for membership at the United Nations would serve as a secure foundation for peace, security and justice. Based on a two-State solution, that decision would enhance the opportunity for the just and enduring settlement of conflict in the Middle East.

The approach of the Palestinians to gaining their right to a recognized State through the United Nations verified their commitment to peaceful resolve. The Security Council must actively "contribute to, proclaim and materialize" Palestinian inalienable rights, including the right of return and self-determination in a sovereign State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital.

Israel, he said, continued to commit violations, unilateral actions and unlawful policies in the West Bank, including the construction of new settlements which, if left unchecked, would threaten the stability and security of a two-State solution and undermine its viability. He welcomed the recent release of the prisoners exchanged for captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. It was time to adopt a resolution that recognized the independent State of Palestine on the basis of 1967 borders.

MANSOUR AYYAD SH AALOTAIBI ([Kuwait](#)) said the eyes of the international community were now focused on the Council to take a historic decision regarding the Palestinian request for full membership, particularly since more than 130 countries, a majority of two thirds of the Member States, already had recognized the Palestinian State. While the entire world demanded the return to negotiations and the halting of all provocative unilateral activities, Israel persisted in its illegal expansionist campaign of settlements. He appealed to the international community not to stand idle in the face of those criminal Israeli actions that violated all international norms, conventions and charters.

While welcoming the recent release of a number of Palestinian prisoners, he demanded the release of the remaining prisoners and called for an international fact-finding commission to look into the conditions in Israeli jails. The continued blockade of Gaza represented a violation by Israel of Council resolution 1860 (2009) and of the Fourth Geneva Convention. He renewed his country's demand for Israel's implementation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which called for withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan. He also demanded the immediate cessation of Israel's continued violations of Lebanon's territory and air space. He appealed to the Council to approve the Palestinian request for United Nations membership and to oblige Israel to halt its illegal settlement activities as well as to resume negotiations.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI ([Iran](#)) said that the legitimate demands of people in the Middle East and North Africa should be addressed through a peaceful political process, avoiding foreign intervention, in order to avoid further violence. Maintaining that Palestinians had lived under severe pressures and atrocities by the Israeli regime for the past six decades, he said that all negotiations with the occupiers had proved futile and the question remained of how to secure the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, including their right of return and the establishment of "an independent and viable state in all the Palestinian territories". He said that last week's release of Palestinian prisoners was tempered by disturbing reports of the worsening situation of Palestinian prisoners, including women and children. He hoped efforts to obtain their release continued.

He also expressed concern over settler violence and what he called Israel's failure to hold settlers accountable. He said the international community could not continue to stand idly by as the Israeli regime continued to colonize Palestinian territory and commit other violations of international law.

Turning to Syria, he said that any foreign intervention would jeopardize the stability of the region. Syria's people realized, he added, that the key to Syrian independence and dignity was "to keep their ranks united and remain steadfast in their resistance and struggle against Israeli occupation and aggressions".

He said that the Zionist regime had today again attempted, by levelling baseless allegations at Iran, to deflect attention from "its long and dark catalogue of crimes". He said that the allegations of a plot for the assassination of the Saudi ambassador in Washington, D.C., were obviously fabricated to implicate Iran, in a pre-planned scenario supported by the Israeli regime. "The Iranian nation with more than six thousand years of history and civilization has never and will never engage in such despicable attempts." On the nuclear issue, he said that Israel's unlawful possession of nuclear warheads was the only threat to the region's security.

JAMAL FARES ALROWAIEL ([Bahrain](#)) said his country had promoted all efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Palestine question on the basis of a two-State solution and continued to play an active role in the Arab Peace Initiative Committee. The international community now had the unique opportunity to recognize the Palestinian independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. That would require Israel's withdrawal to the line of 1967, as well as withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and from Lebanon. The Palestinian Authority had made many concessions; however, that flexibility had been received by Israel with more settlements. The fact that according to international consensus the Palestinian Authority was able to manage its state affairs should be taken into consideration when the application for United Nations membership was taken up. The Council should approve that application.

OTHMAN JERANDI ([Tunisia](#)) at the outset thanked speakers for their congratulations with Tunisia's historic elections. He said that despite the readiness on the Palestinian side to invigorate the peace process, Israel put up more obstacles and undermined efforts to break the stalemate. The obligations of the Road Map called for a complete halt by Israel of all settlement activities. Israel, however, had among other things announced new settlement units in East Jerusalem, stripping it of its Arab character. Those Israeli actions violated international agreements, including the Road Map.

Tunisia strongly condemned the continued unjust siege of Gaza and measures that limited the Palestinian people's freedom of movement, he said. Tunisia also strongly supported the Palestinian application for full United Nations membership, which was a right based on historic, moral and objective foundations, and called on the Council to support that application. Tunisia also called for an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining Lebanese territories.

DAFFA-ALLA ELHAG ALI OSMAN ([Sudan](#)) also supported the bid of Palestine to become a fully-fledged member of the United Nations. He said that Israel was imposing a status quo and trying to change the facts on the ground, depriving people of their homes and besieging Jerusalem with settlements. He condemned all attempts to change the demographic character of the city and maintained that it was time that the Palestinian people obtained their right to an independent State. Welcoming the prisoner exchange, he called for the freedom of the many Palestinians who remained in Israeli prisons, including women and children. He called on Israel to heed all United Nations resolutions and respect Lebanon's sovereignty and withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights as well.

MESHAL HAVAD M.J. AL-THANI ([Qatar](#)), speaking for the Arab Group, said that after decades of discussion, the Palestinian question was still awaiting a solution that had been proposed long ago: the establishment of two independent States living in peace side by side, on the basis of 1967 borders, according to the Arab peace initiative, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map.

Despite support for the peace process, its outcome had been held hostage to the intransigence of the Israeli side, whose policies, such as its expansion of illegal settlements in East Jerusalem, undermined the basic condition to resume negotiations. The Council now had an opportunity to take its responsibility by unanimously supporting full membership for the Palestinian State, which had received recognition from over 130 countries who understood that the institutions of the Palestinian State were prepared to manage a viable state, as confirmed by international organizations. The application for membership did not close the door to negotiations.

The Arab Group anticipated resumption of negotiations in accordance with the Quartet statement of 23 September, and stressed that their success hinged on stopping settlement construction and repressive Israeli policies towards the Palestinians, and the lifting of the illegal siege of the population of Gaza.

He said that what he called Israel's nuclear policy, its refusal to accede to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation, to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and subject its nuclear facilities to international monitoring, threatened stability in the region. He called for a conference in 2012 to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

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