

Division for Palestinian Rights
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine**
 Monthly media monitoring review
May 2010

Monthly highlights

- Arab Follow-up Committee supports indirect Israeli-Palestinian talks ([1 May](#))
- West Bank mosque arson attack is blamed on settlers ([4 May](#))
- Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat officially declares the start of proximity talks ([9 May](#))
- UNRWA children's summer games facility in Gaza is attacked and set on fire ([23 May](#))
- Israel's Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom threatens sanctions on the PA for its boycott of settlement products ([25 May](#))
- UN International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, Public Forum held in Istanbul ([25 - 27 May](#))
- Israeli naval forces kill 9 and injure many other participants in the Gaza aid flotilla ([31 May](#))

1

During his May Day speech at the General Palestinian Labour Union, PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said that the struggle for the Palestinian national project was continuing on three levels: the political process, non-violent resistance, and institution-building. At the same time, more than 2,000 Palestinian demonstrators gathered at the Erez and Rafah crossings in Gaza in support of the rights of Palestinian workers. (*AFP* , *IMEMC* , *Ma'an News Agency*)

At a meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee in Cairo, Arab Foreign Ministers gave their support for indirect talks between Israel and the Palestinians, to be brokered by the United States. Meanwhile, Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa said that there would be no automatic transition from indirect to direct talks without a complete settlement freeze. Lebanon and Syria rejected the decision on the basis that the United States had not provided sufficient safeguards. Arab League official Hisham Yusef said that the key guarantee given by Washington to persuade the Palestinians to enter indirect talks with Israel was a halt to the planned building of 1,600 new settler homes in East Jerusalem. Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Sha'ath said there had been "no appointment or dates" scheduled for talks between Israel and the Palestinians, adding that US Middle East Special Envoy George Mitchell "has a lot to do to curb the Israelis' stubborn stance toward resuming the peace process".

PA Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat said that the condition for Arab League support would be a halt of settlement activity in the West Bank, and that the final decision would be taken by the PLO Executive Committee the next week. The Spanish Presidency of the European Union issued a [statement](#) the following day welcoming the Arab League decision. (*AFP* , *AP* , *Ma'an news Agency* , *Reuters* , *Xinhua*)

A statement issued by the office of Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, noted Hamas' rejection of renewed talks between Israel and the Palestinians, due to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "insistence to maintain full control over Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and continued settlement building". At the same time, senior Hamas leader in Gaza, Mahmoud Al-Zahhar, said that without the involvement of Hamas in the political process, there could be no agreement. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

An Israeli military court sentenced a 16-year-old Palestinian to three months in prison and six others to three years of probation and 2,000 shekel fines for participation in an anti-wall rally. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

International Solidarity Movement activists reported that their apartment in Hebron had been broken into and said that they had strong evidence that it was the Israeli military that had carried out the illegal robbery. They noted that laptops, video cameras and flash drives had been stolen – but not cash and credit cards. (*IMEMC*)

2

Sources in Gaza said that Palestinian fighters from an unknown faction had misfired a projectile, hitting a Khan Younis home and critically injuring an 18-year-old, who later died in a hospital. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

An anti-wall protest in the town of Beit Jalat in the West Bank ended in clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli troops. Palestinian medical sources reported that seven residents, including a reporter, had been wounded after the Israeli army had opened fire at the non-violent protest. (*IMEMC* , *Palestine News Network*)

Israeli soldiers, operating under cover, detained six Palestinian teenagers, all under the age of 16, in Beit Ummar near Hebron. Palestinian Solidarity Project Spokesman, Mohammad Ayad Awad, said that confrontations subsequently erupted between residents of Beit Ummar and settlers of the nearby "Karmi Tzur". (*IMEMC* , *Ma'an News Agency*)

The *Arabs48* news website reported that Israeli police invaded the city of Taybeh and demolished a home after surrounding it and forcing the

residents out. In the ensuing clashes, several people were injured and three persons were detained. (IMEMC)

In an interview with the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Ayyam*, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said that US President Barack Obama had given a commitment that he would not allow "any provocative measures by either side." Mr. Abbas also confirmed that he would meet with Mr. Obama in Washington later this month to advance the peace process. (Reuters, Ynetnews)

At a meeting with Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen in Jerusalem, Israeli President Shimon Peres said that the upcoming indirect talks were in Israel's best interest, adding that "the gaps are small and we are interested in the establishment of an independent and stable Palestinian State alongside Israel". (DPA)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu welcomed the Arab nations' endorsement of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which he said that Israel was ready to restart "at any time and at any place". At the same time, Palestinians were reportedly meeting under the PLO auspices in Ramallah to define the parameters of the talks. Meanwhile, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine stated that no written or oral guarantees on a settlement halt had been received by the PLO from either the US or the Arab Follow-Up Committee, and called for a rejection of the peace talks. (AP, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Hamas confirmed that for the second month in a row, it was unable to pay in full the salaries of thousands of Government employees in the Gaza Strip. An Arab diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, was reported to say that in order to pressure Hamas into signing a reconciliation agreement with President Abbas, Egypt was trying to disrupt the cash flows to Gaza, assumed to be channeled from Iran to the Strip through tunnels from Egypt. (AP)

3

Thirteen Palestinians were reportedly detained by Israeli forces in the West Bank. The IDF confirmed that five "wanted" Palestinians had been arrested overnight. (IMEMC, www.idf.il)

US President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed making "full use" of indirect Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and moving to direct negotiations as soon as possible, the White House said. Mr. Obama had spoken with Mr. Netanyahu by telephone for about 20 minutes, White House Spokesman Robert Gibbs said, as US Special Envoy George Mitchell arrived in Israel for the start of US-mediated negotiations (Reuters)

In an interview with CNN, PA President Abbas said that he would be grappling with an Israeli Government he called "radical and stubborn" and promised to end talks if Israel built more settlements. (CNN)

Key Israeli ruling coalition members promised that the Government would give Prime Minister Netanyahu "substantial room for negotiations" with the Palestinians. (The Jerusalem Post)

Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen said that her country backed the proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians. She was speaking at a joint news conference in Ramallah after she had met with PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki. She added, "My country also backs Prime Minister's Salam Fayyad's plan to build up the establishments of the Palestinian State." (Xinhua)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met today behind closed doors at Sharm el-Sheikh. The 90-minute meeting focused on the renewal of the peace process and was characterized as "constructive". (AFP, Haaretz, KUNA, The Jerusalem Post)

During its weekly session in Ramallah, the PA Cabinet vowed to continue with institution-building, particularly in East Jerusalem. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Knesset was discussing a suggestion that Israel may prevent the import of goods, withhold tax money and impose fines on the Palestinian Authority if the latter continued to call for the boycott of Israeli settlement products. (IMEMC)

BBC News reported that documents had been submitted to an Israeli court in which Israel described the import curbs on Gaza as "a central pillar in the armed conflict with Hamas". The documents were submitted during the court case, brought by the Israeli human rights group, Gisha, to force the Israeli Government to provide information on the rationale of the blockade. (BBC)

4

Israeli forces detained seven Palestinians from Jerusalem, after they had been accused of affiliation with the PA security forces. Attorney Saleh Ayoub said that Israel wanted to put pressure on the PA following its efforts to ban settlement goods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces reportedly opened fire at and turned back two recently deported Palestinians attempting to transit through the Erez crossing, in northern Gaza. The pair said that they were attempting to return to the West Bank. According to other reports, the two had been deported from Israel. (Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

Israeli military vehicles crossed the Gaza border into eastern Rafah near the ruins of the Yasser Arafat International Airport this morning, security sources said. The vehicles, including at least two military bulldozers, advanced some 800 metres, destroyed farmlands and opened fire on unknown targets in fields east of the airport. The bulldozers also destroyed a mosque in Rafah. (Ma'an News Agency, KUNA)

A Palestinian worker was killed in the collapse of one of the tunnels used to smuggle goods between Gaza and Egypt, medics said. (KUNA)

Israel was considering handing over security responsibilities to the Palestinians in additional West Bank towns under US-backed plans for resuming the peace talks, Israeli and Palestinian security sources have said. (Reuters)

"We hope and expect to formally move forward with proximity talks later this week", US State Department Spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters.

"We'll have the meetings in the next four days and then we'll describe to you what they achieved", he said when asked whether Special Envoy Mitchell's meetings would amount to indirect talks. Mr. Mitchell was set to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 5 and 6 May. (DPA, Reuters)

PA President Abbas held talks in Saudi Arabia ahead of the expected resumption of peace talks with Israel. He was met by Intelligence Chief Prince Miqrin bin Abdul Aziz and was scheduled to hold talks with King Abdullah, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. (Saudi Press Agency, AFP)

Israel's Military Intelligence Research Division Chief, Brigadier-General Yossi Baidatz, told the Knesset: "[PA President] Abbas' goal is to expose Israel's true face and show that we do not want peace," adding, "Abbas is laying the groundwork for the failure of the talks." (Haaretz)

"If [Israel] adopts aggressive policies, then Turkey will respond to this," *Al-Hayat* quoted Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as saying.

"We will not remain silent on Israel's attacks on innocent Palestinian people", he added. (AFP, Al-Hayat)

Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered a full media blackout on the proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians. He instructed his Government and officials in charge not to grant the media any [information] regarding what happened behind closed doors until an agreement, if possible, was reached. (IMEMC)

Israeli Minister of Transportation Yisrael Katz said that his ministry was planning a railway for the West Bank. The railway, to be funded by international sources, would connect Jenin to the Jordan Valley and pass through Haifa, Afula, and Beit She'an. In his vision, the train would continue to the Jordanian border. He also intended to connect Jenin to the railway in Jerusalem. (Ynetnews)

Around 25 European Union Parliamentarians were expected to visit the Gaza Strip in mid-May. The electricity crisis will be the main issue on their

agenda. (*Palestine News Network*)

Mustafa Tayeh, relief official at the Federation of Arab Doctors, confirmed that the Egyptian authorities would allow a delegation of the Arab Doctors' Union to cross into the Gaza Strip to discuss the mechanism of distribution and installation of 5,000 prefabricated houses to the victims of the Israeli war in the Gaza Strip, which Egypt had agreed to build. (*The Palestine Telegraph*)

PA National Economy Minister Hassan Abu Libdeh, during a news conference in Ramallah, warned thousands of Palestinians to stop working in Israeli settlements or face stiff fines and jail time. (*AFP*)

Fire damaged a mosque today in the West Bank village of Libban al-Sharqia, near Nablus, burning holy books and prayer carpets. The local Palestinian Mayor said that he suspected settlers were responsible. (*AP*)

Hamas official Faraj Al-Ghoul said that resistance proved the only means to secure the release of Palestinian detainees in Israeli custody, following the failure of all talks on a potential prisoner swap deal. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian Legislative Council official Ahmad Bahar said that a proposed Knesset law prohibiting Hamas affiliates in Israeli custody from receiving family visits would lead to further attempts to kidnap Israeli soldiers. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The United States completed the transfer of \$75 million in budget support to the PA, in fulfilment of the US Government's commitment to provide \$150 million in direct budget assistance to the PA in Fiscal Year 2010. (*Wafa*)

Factions of the PLO had failed to agree on entering municipal elections in the West Bank under a unified list, representatives said. (*Xinhua*)

Farhan Haq, an [Associate] Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, told *AFP*: "The United Nations has no plans to use sea routes in Gaza, but will consider all legal options available to bring in assistance and commercial supplies". He said that the UN was working with the Israeli Government to use land crossings. John Ging, Director of Gaza Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), had reportedly told a Norwegian newspaper that the world should send ships to Gaza. (*AFP*)

5

Nine Palestinians were injured in clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police forces in the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, medics said.

The Israeli police fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters. No major injuries were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas held consultations with Egyptian President Mubarak. They discussed "preparing suitable conditions" for the indirect talks, the Egyptian news agency *MENA* reported. (*AFP*)

PA President Abbas warned that should the negotiations fail to focus on key issues, they could collapse within a few months. Speaking after meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II, he gave the talks four months, saying after that he would seek advice from the Arab League on the next steps. He said that crucial issues to be discussed in the indirect talks must include the final borders of a future Palestinian State. The comments came as Mr. Abbas convened the Fatah Central Committee, which was expected to give him permission to enter into proximity talks. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

US President Obama's Senior Adviser, David Axelrod, said that Mr. Obama had agreed to postpone Jerusalem until the final stages of talks. Issues to be discussed at initial stages included mainly security arrangements, water and borders, as the US Administration feared that the issue of Jerusalem could jeopardize the talks before their start. (*IMEMC*)

In Washington, D.C., US State Department Spokesman Philip J. Crowley said that US Special Envoy George Mitchell had completed a good and productive meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and would meet him again the following day. Mr. Mitchell would meet with PA President Abbas on 7 and 8 May. Mr. Crowley expected that proximity talks would move forward before the Envoy left the region on 9 May. According to PA Presidency Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh, "If the [PLO] Executive [Committee] approves these indirect negotiations, all the final-status issues will be on the table for discussion", stressing that "absolutely no issue will be excluded and Jerusalem will be the top priority." (*Reuters, www.state.gov*)

"Negotiations will be nothing but a cover for the continuation of an Israeli policy built on the continuation of occupation", said imprisoned leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmed Saadat. (*Reuters*)

"Indirect talks, proximity talks will not yield results", Israeli Intelligence Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor said in remarks published by *The Jerusalem Post*. "Everyone will want to pull America to their own side, and they won't get closer, they will get further apart", he told the daily. "I think we need to go quickly to direct talks". (*The Jerusalem Post*)

French Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bernard Valero said that the indirect talks were "important and awaited for". "We want them to be able to lead to a resumption of dialogue for which France has not ceased to mobilize", he said. (*KUNA*)

The EU contribution to the PA of NIS 103,812,384 (€21 million), channelled through PEGASE, will help pay civil servants' salaries and pensions. (*ReliefWeb*)

Leaders of the settler movement in the occupied West Bank called on the Israeli Government to withhold all funds meant for the PA for boycotting settlement products and for forbidding Palestinian workers from working in settlements. (*IMEMC*)

"President Abbas condemns the burning of the mosque in Lubban ash-Sharqiya by extremist settlers and said the responsibility for this criminal attack lies with the Israeli Government because the Israeli army protects the settlers", his office said. "This criminal attack threatens efforts to revive the peace process". Mr Abbas gave orders mandating the immediate reconstruction of the mosque. (*Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Israel's Supreme Court gave the State 90 days to explain why it had failed to carry out an order to demolish an unauthorized settlement outpost of "Amona", built on private Palestinian land. (*Middle East Online*)

Jordan's Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications and Government Spokesperson Nabil Sharif said at a press conference that the Kingdom "strongly condemns the burning of a mosque in a village near Nablus and the destruction of another in Gaza", adding that such actions constituted a clear violation of international laws, including provisions calling for securing the freedom of worship. (*Jordan Times*)

6

The IDF detained 33 "wanted" Palestinians during operations in the West Bank overnight. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

In an interview with *Asharq Al-Awsat*, PA President Abbas said that his security forces had thwarted the efforts by Hamas militants of smuggling large amounts of weapons into the West Bank. (*Asharq Al-Awsat*)

Israeli forces detained nine young men from Beit Ejza village, northwest of Jerusalem, Palestinian sources reported. An Israeli military spokeswoman confirmed the detentions, which family members said occurred following home demolition raids targeting three different families. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian Presidential Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said in a statement that US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell would "not get any answers from the Palestinian leadership" when he met with PA President Abbas the next day. He added that Mr. Mitchell would have to wait until the PLO Executive Committee met on 8 May for an answer as to the conditions under which Palestinian negotiators would proceed with talks. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In Paris, the Council of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) would be discussing Israel's membership ahead of a

final decision scheduled for 10 May. The discussion would include some issues raised by member countries and by civil society organizations. The IMF and the World Bank had concerns regarding Israeli restrictions on the Palestinian economy. Also, papers submitted by Israel for OECD's assessment included data regarding Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory but excluded data regarding Palestinians living in the same areas. Finally, the Council was concerned with the political timing of Israel's accession that could be seen by some as an undeserved reward, which might not help the US and the EU in their efforts to start proximity talks (www.jnews.org)

Karl Shembri of Oxfam said that the shortage of electricity that had prompted Gazans to buy portable generators had caused more than 100 deaths. He said, "People have blown themselves up switching them on while smoking next to a generator, or didn't realize the risks of carbon monoxide emissions". (AFP)

The IDF detained and released four men protesting the construction of the separation wall in Al-Walaja. The detainees included a former Yale professor. Witnesses said that three others were lightly injured by border police, who used clubs and Mace to remove protestors positioning themselves around Israeli military bulldozers. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli settlers threw stones at Palestinian cars on the Nablus-Qalqilya road, damaging them. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli firefighters said that a fire in a West Bank mosque appeared to have been deliberately set. Palestinian investigators had already drawn this conclusion and blamed settlers for the 4 May fire that had destroyed holy books and prayer rugs in the mosque. (AP)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert H.erry issued the following statement: "I am deeply concerned at a fire service report that a blaze in a mosque on 4th May in the village of Lubban al Sharqiya in the West Bank was probably arson. There have been a number of attacks upon mosques in recent months, as well as violence against Palestinian property and individuals by extremist settlers. I condemn these attacks. It is vital that the Israeli Government impose the rule of law and that those responsible for such crimes are brought to justice. Extremists from either side must not be allowed to set the agenda and undermine the vital efforts to renew negotiations." (UN News Centre)

7

Israeli President Shimon Peres told visiting US Envoy George Mitchell that Israel was committed to reaching a Middle East settlement that would see the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State beside Israel, but security must be a central focus of the talks. Mr. Mitchell was scheduled to meet with PA President Abbas in Ramallah later in the day. (Haaretz)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued a report entitled '[Gaza's Electricity Crisis: The Impact of Electricity Cuts on the Humanitarian Situation](#).' OCHA said in the report: "Since January 2010, there has been a serious deterioration in the supply of electricity in the Gaza Strip. The immediate reason was that Gaza's sole power plant, the Gaza Power Plant (GPP), was able to produce only half the electricity that it did prior to January 2010, due to a lack of funds needed to purchase the industrial fuel required to operate the plant. As a result, almost all of the 1.4 million Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip, with the exception of those who lived in the Rafah area, must cope with scheduled electricity cuts of 8-12 hours daily, compared to 6-8 hours prior to January 2010. These power cuts exacerbate the already difficult living conditions in Gaza and disrupt almost all aspects of daily life, including household chores, health services, education and water and sanitation services." (www.ochaopt.org)

The Montreal Gazette [reported](#) that a Canadian-led initiative to resolve the future of Jerusalem's Old City had been formally unveiled at a conference in Washington after seven years of research and planning. The proposed "special regime" to oversee the 0.9-square-kilometre district, to be created only after the adoption of a two-State solution for the broader region, would be managed by a joint body of Israeli and Palestinian officials headed by "an effective and empowered third-party" commissioner appointed by the two countries. The peace proposal was funded largely by the Canadian Government but spearheaded by the University of Windsor-based Jerusalem Old City Initiative. The 144-page report said any solution must respect the "profound symbolic needs embodied in the Old City" and reflect the interests of "Israelis and Palestinians and believers across the world." Detailed governance and security arrangements under the joint Israeli-Palestinian regime were laid out in the report, which concluded that the "charged history" of the Old City required fresh thinking and new solutions to bring an end to the dispute. (www.montrealgazette.com)

8

A Qassam rocket launched from the Gaza Strip landed in an open area in Israel's Negev region. No injuries or damage were reported. (Ynetnews)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a new report '[The Palestinian Human Development Report 2009/10 - Investing in Human Security for a Future State](#).' "Until Palestinians are afforded economic and environmental control, specifically control over macro-economic policy, trade, livelihoods, water resources and borders, sustained development will remain elusive," UNDP said in the report. The report also explores different facets of human security - economy, food, health, environment, political, personal, community - from the perspective of establishing freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity. (www.undp.ps)

Four Palestinians were injured and four others went missing when a smuggling tunnel on the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt collapsed, medics said. (AFP)

Israeli forces detained a 27-year-old resident of Hebron and deported him to Jordan. He was told by Israeli officials that he had entered the West Bank more than 10 years before on a tourist visa and remained illegally after the visa's expiration. The expulsion is the fifth since 13 April, when two new Israeli military orders went into effect expanding the definition of an "infiltrator" to include any person residing in Israeli-controlled areas without Israeli permission. (Ma'an News Agency)

9

Palestinian medical sources in Hebron reported that an 18-month-old Palestinian child had died after inhaling gas fired by the Israeli army at protestors in the nearby village of Beit Ummar. (MEMC)

Four Palestinians were arrested in IDF operations in the West Bank. (The Jerusalem Post)

Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, said after PA President Abbas met with US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell: "I can officially declare today that the proximity talks have begun. ... If he [Prime Minister Netanyahu] announces a complete halt to settlement building, there will be direct talks." The US State Department said in a [statement](#): "The talks were serious and wide-ranging. Both parties are taking some steps to help create an atmosphere that is conducive to successful talks, including President Abbas' statement that he will work against incitement of any sort and Prime Minister Netanyahu's statement that there will be no construction at the Ramat Shlomo project for two years. ... As both parties know, if either takes significant actions during the proximity talks that we judge would seriously undermine trust, we will respond to hold them accountable and ensure that negotiations continue. Special Envoy Mitchell emphasized the

importance of making progress in these talks to enable the parties to move to direct negotiations that will result in a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He will return to the region next week to continue the proximity talks.” Mr. Netanyahu said during his remarks at the start of the weekly Cabinet meeting: “I would like to welcome the Palestinian Authority’s decision to begin proximity talks. ... These talks are developing and are taking place without preconditions, as we requested and as we insisted upon during the past year. ... The proximity talks must quickly lead to direct talks. Peace cannot be made from a distance or by remote control.” (*Reuters, www.pmo.gov.il, www.state.gov*)

The Spokesman for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued the following statement: “The Secretary-General is encouraged by the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian proximity talks. He commends the United States’ initiative in this regard. The Secretary-General hopes that the parties are able to make progress and move towards direct negotiations.” (*UN News Centre*)

Peace Now said that renovation work had recently begun for the construction of 14 [settlement] housing units in an old Israeli police station in Ras Al Amud in East Jerusalem. (*Haaretz, www.peacenow.org.il*)

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) said in a report that most Palestinians in East Jerusalem lived below the poverty line. Seventy-five per cent of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem live in poverty compared with 45 per cent of the city’s Jewish children, according to the report. Despite the rampant poverty, only 10 per cent of East Jerusalem’s 300,000 Palestinians have access to social services. “Israel’s policy for the past four decades has taken concrete form as discrimination in planning and construction, expropriation of land, and minimal investment in physical infrastructure and government and municipal services,” ACRI said in the report. (*AFP*)

10

Israel Air Force planes bombed two targets in the southern Gaza Strip in retaliation for a rocket attack on 8 May, the Israeli army said. Hamas officials said the IAF had targeted a smuggling tunnel under the border with Egypt and the nearby inoperative Gaza airport. No casualties were reported in the attacks. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces discovered five explosive devices on three Palestinians at a checkpoint east of Nablus. Sappers neutralized the explosives and the Palestinians were arrested. (*www.idf.il*)

PA President Abbas asked the US Administration for answers on reports that settlement construction in East Jerusalem was continuing, even as Palestinians had agreed to re-enter proximity talks. “Building is expected to begin soon in Har Homa ... and Neve Yaakov, where bids have been issued”, Israeli Cabinet Secretary Zvi Hauser had told *Army Radio*. Mr. Abbas also told journalists that the Palestinian Government must carry on with its agenda adopted in order to announce the Palestinian State, legally and officially: “We hope we do [would] not be misinterpreted; when we talk about the establishment of a State, we will declare it unilaterally”. (*AP, Ma’an News Agency, Wafa*)

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton said that she was “delighted that proximity talks appear to be moving... There has got to be 3-4 months of proximity talks moving to real talks. [US Special Envoy Mitchell] has my full backing and we will do everything to support him”, she added. She also issued a [statement](#) supporting the talks, on behalf of the EU. (*KUNA, www.europa.eu*)

Japan [welcomed](#) the start of proximity talks between Israel and Palestinians through the mediating efforts of the US. Japan called on both parties to act in a way that enhances mutual confidence, and hoped that the proximity talks will swiftly develop into the resumption of direct talks and lead to substantive progress in the peace process. (*www.mofa.go.jp*)

Kuwait signed an agreement with the World Bank to transfer \$50 million to the multi-donor Trust Fund to support the Palestinian Reform and Development Program (PRDP). This amount was in addition to the \$80 million that Kuwait had provided to the PRDP trust fund in August 2008, and would help support the urgent budget needs of the PA. (*www.worldbank.org*)

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told an emergency meeting on Jerusalem of the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC): “Jewish settlement activities, which represent the biggest obstacle to the peace process, must be halted”. A draft Istanbul declaration condemned provocative Israeli acts at holy places in Jerusalem and urged the international community to prevent geographical and demographic changes in the city which “will push the region to the brink of an abyss”. OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu told the Istanbul meeting: “Israel is taking advantage of the international community’s lassitude with its policies and carrying out a hideous plan aimed at depopulating the city of Al-Quds [Jerusalem] of its Palestinian citizens.” (*Reuters, SANA*)

Yasser Abed Rabbo, Secretary-General of the PLO’s Executive Committee, said that the construction of 14 housing units in East Jerusalem violated the terms of new talks. “This is the first violation and first breach of the terms to start the indirect negotiations. ... We will act immediately to stop this, because we will not agree that negotiations will be used as a cover for settlement activities,” Mr. Abed Rabbo said. (*Haaretz*)

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat said in a statement: “The real test is of practical steps – the municipality continues to advance building in all parts of the city, in accordance with master plans for Jews and Arabs alike. We expect the Interior Ministry and the Housing Ministry to approve the plans and assist in the effort to preserve the young population and the hold on Jerusalem, which suffers from lack of housing, to stop the emigration from the city. We trust the Prime Minister not to approve a freeze in Jerusalem, not in words and not in deeds.” (*Ynetnews*)

Responding to a request from the High Court, the Israeli Government said it intended to “legalize” the “Hersha” and “Givat Hayovef” settlement outposts. In July last year, the Court had demanded the Government to provide it with a detailed timeframe regarding orders to demolish the two outposts, which had officially been issued by the Court in 2001 and 2003. (*IMEMC*)

Israeli troops raided the village of Bani Na’eem in the southern West Bank and handed out 10 demolition orders. The Israeli army said the homes had been built in an Israeli-controlled area without the army’s approval. (*IMEMC*)

11

Ghassan Daghlis, a PA official monitoring settlement activity in the West Bank, said that settlers from the “Shvut Rachel” outpost had bulldozed 30 dunums of land ploughed by Palestinian farmers near the village of Jalud, south of Nablus. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

In a [telephone call](#), US President Obama spoke with PA President Abbas congratulating him on the start of the proximity talks, stressing the need for both parties to negotiate seriously and in good faith, and to move from proximity talks to direct negotiations as soon as possible in order to reach an agreement on permanent status issues. He confirmed his intention to hold both sides accountable for actions that undermined trust during the talks. (*www.whitehouse.gov*)

In a statement the Quartet welcomed the first round of indirect talks between Israelis and Palestinians as a significant step towards a comprehensive peace, calling on both sides to pursue these talks in good faith and offering its support for their efforts. (*UN Press Release SG/2159*)

Hamas official Ahmad Yousef said that letters sent to US President Obama had detailed Hamas' stance on the return of Palestine refugees, the declaration of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and the need for the US Administration to take practical measures to end the siege on Gaza.

(*Ma'an News Agency*)

"Any future flare-up of the Middle East situation is fraught with the danger of catastrophe", Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev said during a joint news conference with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. "I have personally emphasized that Russia will do everything possible to restore Middle East peace talks under the existing international legal base", he added. He said that Russia was ready to make every effort and hold a peace conference in Moscow that would achieve "at least some intermediate results". (*RIA-Novosti*)

Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, told the Knesset that the "deteriorating relations" with the US should push Israel to come up with a serious initiative for peace with the Palestinians, addressing all the core issues. (*IMEMC*)

In Damascus, Russian Federation President Medvedev asked Hamas' Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal to quickly resolve the IDF soldier Gila Shalit issue, said Hamas' Political Bureau member Izzat al-Rishq. Mr. Mashaal told Mr. Medvedev that Hamas did not want to keep Mr. Shalit but only an honourable deal [of prisoner exchange] would solve the issue". (*Reuters*)

Israeli authorities had opened the Kerem Shalom and Karni crossings into the Gaza Strip, allowing the delivery of limited quantities of food and fuel, crossings official Raed Fattouh said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Ali Al-Jarbawi, PA Minister of Planning and Managerial Development, and French Consul General in Jerusalem Frédéric Desagneaux signed a €5.8 million agreement whereby France would fund a medical storehouse capable of accommodating medical supplies for the whole population of the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a speech to mark "Jerusalem Day", Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he would continue building across the city, adding "The struggle for Jerusalem is a struggle for truth... No other nation has the same ties as we do to Jerusalem – but there is also no nation that has allowed so much freedom of worship to others. We are building the city. We will continue to build it and ensure it thrives". (*Haaretz*)

Fatah Jerusalem Affairs official Hatem Abdel Qader said that Israel was planning to build a shopping mall in East Jerusalem on Palestinian land. The land's trustee had been given administrative orders, including eviction notices, from the director of the Israel Land Administration, the latter claiming that the land was Government-owned. According to Abdel Qader, the land had been owned by the Islamic Waqf for over 400 years. Palestinian lawyer Majed Ghanaem would be launching an appeal to overturn the claim in an Israeli court. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A delegation of right-wing Israeli Knesset members toured the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan, where an Israeli development plan had slated 88 homes for destruction. They visited the ultra-Orthodox settler home "Beit Yonatan", built without a permit in the Palestinian neighbourhood.

(*Ma'an News Agency*)

A ship was to leave port from Ireland the following day for Gaza waters to break the siege. Palestinian Legislative Council Member Jamal Al-Khudari, also head of the Popular Committee Against the Gaza Siege, said that more vessels would leave port from Turkey and Greece on 22 May.

Reports in recent days said that Israel was threatening to shell the first ship, which would transport construction materials, cement, medicines, humanitarian aid supplies, as well as some 600 supporters of the campaign against the siege. The ship would have on board members of the Free Gaza Movement, the Turkish Relief Foundation, as well as groups and movements from Malaysia, Greece, Ireland, and other European countries.

(*KUNA*)

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told members of the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG), organizers of the sail to Gaza, that he would support them in their efforts to "break the oppressive siege on the Gaza Strip", which he said was "at the top of Turkey's list of priorities". (*Ynetnews*)

12

Israeli troops arrested 15 Palestinian civilians during pre-dawn incursions in Hebron, Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus and Salfit. (*IMEMC*)

In Ramallah, PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad met with a Spanish delegation headed by Spain's Foreign Minister, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, mainly discussing his two-year plan to end the Israeli occupation and attain statehood, read a statement issued by Mr. Fayyad's office. Mr. Moratinos reaffirmed Spain's and the EU's support for the PA efforts. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu said that peace talks must take place without preconditions: "The path to peace is through negotiations, and that is our intention with the Palestinians and with the Syrians". (*Haaretz*)

In Ankara, Russian Federation President Medvedev urged the US to actively work to achieve peace in the Middle East with the support of other nations, saying there was a "human tragedy" in Gaza. At a joint news conference with Mr. Medvedev, Turkish President Abdullah Gül said: "Nobody should be excluded when [peace] talks are held. Unfortunately, the Palestinians are divided in two. They must be united and to unite them, there must be talks with both sides". Mr. Medvedev, on his part, said, "We agreed to perhaps resolve this problem more actively, attracting all sides that are participating in the conflict, without isolating anyone from the process". (*AP, Reuters*)

The spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry said, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs absolutely rejects calls by the Presidents of Russia and Turkey to include Hamas in the diplomatic process and expresses its deep disappointment in President Medvedev's meeting with Khaled Mashaal in Damascus." (www.mfa.gov.il)

Marking the 62nd anniversary of the *Nakba*, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics issued a Special Statistical Bulletin saying that the number of Jews and Palestinians living in the territory of historic Palestine would be equal in five years, amounting to 6.2 million each. (*DPA, www.pcbs.gov.ps*)

Israeli Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch told the Knesset that Israel would demolish Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem in the coming days despite the renewal of indirect peace talks. "As of right now, there is no directive for police not to implement the demolition orders," he said, adding that Jerusalem police were prepared to deploy the forces necessary for demolitions. An unnamed Obama Administration official told Israeli media that the US "calls on both sides to avoid inflammatory actions in Jerusalem." (*BBC, Haaretz*)

Hasan Khatir, Secretary-General of the Islamic-Christian Commission for Support of Jerusalem and the Holy Places, said during a news conference that Israel's expansion of Jerusalem's borders included a 12,000 unit housing complex on land belonging to the West Bank village of Al-Walaja, south of Jerusalem, where a new settlement called "Giv'at Ya'e'l", which could house around 45,000 Israelis, would be constructed. He added that the project would "foster the enclosure of Jerusalem from the south", lay the foundation for the appropriation of land between Jerusalem and "Gush Etzion", and consolidate the settlements of "Har Homa" (Jabal Abu Ghneim), "Gilo" and the smaller "Har Gilo" settlement in Beit Jala in the Bethlehem Governorate. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said that Israel had not agreed to freeze construction in East Jerusalem, adding that "Jerusalem is a united city, which is open to everyone, Jews, Christians and Muslims, and so it will be in the future as well". (*Ynetnews*)

A 32-year-old Palestinian woman from Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem was admitted to a hospital with a broken nose after a settler hit her in the face with a heavy object. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A group of Israeli settlers torched an olive orchard in Silwan in East Jerusalem. (*IMEMC*)

Lt.-Gen. Paul Selva, the US envoy appointed to monitor the implementation of the Road Map, met with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon and expressed concern about settler violence, including the uprooting of trees and the burning of Palestinian orchards, and said that the US would like to see better results in Israeli law enforcement and prevention of those types of activities. (*The Jerusalem Post*)
During celebrations to commemorate Israel's 43rd anniversary of "Jerusalem's reunification" after the 1967 war, Jerusalem's Mayor, Nir Barkat, pledged to keep the city undivided, adding that the city's boundaries were "non-negotiable". (*AP*)

UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi marked the adoption of a Beit Lahia school in Gaza by the Abu Dhabi-based Khalifa Bin Zayed A Nahayan Foundation. The school had been shelled with artillery and white phosphorus during "Operation Cast Lead". (www.unrwa.org)

13

Israeli troops detained 12 Palestinian civilians in Jericho and villages in the Jordan Valley. (*IMEMC*)

US President Obama would ask Congress to provide \$205 million to Israel to spur the production and deployment of a new short-range rocket defence system, Administration officials said. "The President recognizes the threat missiles and rockets fired by Hamas and Hezbollah pose to Israelis", White House Spokesman Tommy Vietor said. (*Reuters*)

Russian Federation Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov called President Abbas to update him on recent talks in Damascus and Turkey. The two also spoke about the progress in the proximity talks and the importance of signing the Egyptian proposal on Palestinian reconciliation. The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement: "We are convinced that achieving Palestinian unity, not isolating individual trends or groups, is the way towards implementing the demands of the international community... with reference to peace, stability, and security for the Middle East." (*Ma'an News Agency*, *Wafa*, www.mid.ru)

The Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Abed Al-Rahim Mallouh, issued a statement urging President Abbas to reverse his decision to engage in proximity talks because the United States had not fulfilled the guarantees on a halt to settlement activities. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

During a telephone conversation, Russian Federation President Medvedev and US President Obama agreed to work more actively together on the situation in the Middle East and to consider "non-standard approaches". (*AP*, *The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai told the Shas Party's newspaper: "There is not and never has been a freeze on [settlement] construction in Jerusalem, nor will there ever be." Mr. Yishai said that he intended to expedite procedures for planning and construction across Israel, particularly in Jerusalem. "We will build everywhere in the capital of the Jewish nation's everlasting homeland, and I have clarified this to our American counterparts and friends," he said. (*Haaretz*)

A Palestinian man was killed and four other members of his family were wounded when a power generator exploded in their house in Rafah in southern Gaza. This was the latest in a series of accidents stemming from the protracted electricity crisis and reliance on portable generators in the Gaza Strip. (*IMEMC*, *Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas announced that it had decided to establish a new temporary refugee camp at the Erez Terminal, between Gaza and Israel, to absorb the Palestinians who were being forced out of the West Bank pursuant to Israeli military order 1650. (*IMEMC*)

Around 105 Palestinians who had been stranded in Egypt were allowed to return to Gaza through the Rafah crossing, which had been closed for 37 days. At the same time, Egypt announced that the Rafah crossing would be open for three days, starting on 15 May. (*IMEMC*)

Human Rights Watch released a report documenting 12 separate cases during "Operation Cast Lead", in which Israeli forces extensively destroyed civilian property, including homes, factories, farms, and greenhouses, in areas under their control, without any lawful military purpose. Investigations found no indication of nearby fighting when the destruction occurred. (*Haaretz*, www.hrw.org)

14

A Palestinian boy from the Ramallah area was shot and killed by Israeli settlers, after he had thrown stones at their car. An Israeli police spokesman said that authorities were investigating the case. (*CNN*, *Ma'an News Agency*, *The Straits Times*)

During a patrol in the Gaza buffer zone north of Rafah, an explosive charge detonated and hit an Israeli military vehicle. No injuries were reported, but Palestinian witnesses said that eight Israeli tanks and four military bulldozers had subsequently penetrated nearly 500 metres into Gaza, beyond the unilaterally declared no-go zone, where they destroyed lands amid gunfire. (*Haaretz*, *Ma'an News Agency*)

The IDF reported that Israeli forces were using "riot dispersal means" against approximately 100 Palestinians, who were hurling rocks at Israeli security forces during a "violent and illegal riot" near An-Nabi Salih. (www.idf.il)

The IDF arrested three Palestinians in the West Bank after finding an axe in their car. (*Haaretz*, www.idf.il)

In its weekly report, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported that an infant had died from inhaling the tear gas fired by Israeli forces in the Beit Ummar village, north of Hebron. In addition, 3 Palestinian civilians, including a child, had been wounded by Israeli gunfire in the West Bank, as Israeli forces continued to use force against peaceful demonstrations and fire at Palestinian farmers and workers in the Gaza border areas. (*IMEMC*, www.pchrgaza.org)

The Division for Palestinian Rights launched a redesigned "Question of Palestine" web portal, available at www.un.org/depts/dpa/qpal. (*Division for Palestinian Rights*)

15

Palestinian sources said that IDF soldiers had fatally shot 75-year-old man and wounded another, 22, near the border with Gaza. (*Haaretz*)

Former Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States Prince Turki Al-Faisal told diplomats in Riyadh that President Obama had until September to push for a settlement of the Palestinian issue. If nothing happened by then, then the US president had to make "the morally decent" gesture and recognize Palestine as a sovereign independent State, he said. (*AFP*, *Xinhua*)

Thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip marked the 62nd anniversary of the *Nakba* (catastrophe) and the birth of the refugee issue. Hundreds took to the streets in the Gaza Strip. Hamas leaders participated in the march, as did members of Fatah. In the West Bank, the PA marked the *Nakba* by turning on sirens at midday, while rallies and demonstrations were held in several villages. (*DPA*)

16

Indirect negotiations were not likely to create significant changes or advancements in the peace process, PA Presidential Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said. The PA continued to coordinate with Arab countries over the talks, Abu Rudeineh explained, saying officials hoped to use the four-month window for talks to simultaneously crystallize a united Arab position on an acceptable final status stance. Such discussions had started during the Arab League Summit in Libya, he said, noting discussion would continue at the next session of the United Nations General Assembly and Arab League sessions. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahhar said that Hamas was awaiting a response from Fatah and the PA about a unity proposal Hamas had put forward. "So far, we haven't felt that any substantial changes have been made by Hamas toward signing the Egyptian reconciliation document", Fatah Central Committee member and unity talks Representative Azzam Al-Ahmad said. He added that Hamas should sign the Egyptian-brokered document and that amendments were no longer negotiable. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Egyptian authorities sent food supplies into Israel destined for Gaza via the Al-Ouja crossing, sources said. Head of the Egyptian Red Crescent, Suzanne Mubarak, instructed border officials to expedite the delivery of 265 tons of food, including flour, through the southern commercial goods crossing after coordinating with Israel, sources said. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas police, wielding clubs, beat and pushed residents out of dozens of homes in Rafah before knocking the buildings down with bulldozers, residents said. Hamas officials said the homes had been built illegally on Government land. (*AP*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan had donated funds for five major projects, underway at key locations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, worth more than 2 million Jordanian dinars, said Jordan's Minister of Waqf and Islamic Affairs Abdulsalam Abbadi. (*Petra*)

Prominent academic and activist Noam Chomsky was denied entry by Israeli authorities at the Allenby Bridge between Jordan and the West Bank. Israeli Interior Ministry Spokeswoman Sabine Haddad told *AP* he had been turned away for "various reasons" but declined to elaborate. Mr. Chomsky had been scheduled to deliver a lecture at Birzeit University. (*AP*)

17

PA President Abbas was to meet US Special Envoy George Mitchell on 19 May to discuss final-status issues, Saeb Erakat, Head of the PLC Negotiations Affairs Department, said. "For now, we will focus on the issues of borders and security in order to demarcate two States along the 1967 border", he added. (*AFP*)

Morocco's Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi told Parliament that Morocco continued to pursue action to uphold the just cause of the Palestinian people and their right to establish their independent State. Moroccan diplomacy was rallying international support to counter the Israeli measures imposed on the Palestinian people. Morocco was also providing direct support in the humanitarian and socio-economic fields, as well as through contributions to preserve the sacred Arab and Islamic identity of Jerusalem and prevent its Judaization. (*MENA News Agency*)

Prime Minister Netanyahu pledged to his faction [Likud] to show the courage of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin to advance the diplomatic process, and he challenged PA President Abbas to follow the lead of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Israeli Defence Minister Barak told his faction [Labour] that Israel needed a border based on security and demographic considerations that would leave a Jewish State with a huge Jewish majority on one side and a demilitarized Palestinian State that could sustain itself politically and economically on the other. He said that the refugee issue should be resolved only inside the Palestinian State and Jerusalem's fate would be decided in final-status talks in which an end to the conflict was declared. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israel's Interior Ministry renewed a military order banning Fatah Jerusalem Affairs official Hatem Abdel Qader from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound for a further six months. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Estonia would lend some of its expertise to the PA to help boost e-Government and online education services, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet said. Palestinian officials would be brought to Estonia for training and help in building up the use of information technology on the ground, officials said. (*AFP*)

A senior Israeli official told European diplomats that a plan by pro-Palestinian activists to break Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip was a "provocation" and would be stopped. (*AFP*)

18

Hamas announced that its security forces had executed three Gazans convicted of homicide. (*DPA*)

PA Police received 25 police vehicles donated by Belgium, with support and coordination from UNOPS and EUPOL COPPS. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Top Israeli military officials were reportedly looking for a suitable candidate for the post of Gaza Military Governor in the event of another Gaza offensive, after which Israel would be "compelled to govern the areas for an extended period", according to *Ma'ariv*. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The German-Palestinian Steering Committee convened for the first time at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, co-chaired by Federal Foreign Minister and Deputy Chancellor Guido Westerwelle and PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The initiative, entitled "Future for Palestine", aimed at giving sustained support to the Palestinian Authority's efforts to build effective institutions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to give Germany's activities there a sharper focus and intensify German-Palestinian cooperation. (www.auswaertiges-amt.de)

Following Hamas' demolition of 11 homes in Rafah, Ahmed Assaf, a spokesman for PA President Abbas said, "Hamas has proven to be identical to the Israeli occupation". Issa al-Nashar, Rafah's Mayor and a Hamas member, said Hamas would continue to carry out demolitions and "target land dealers who built private property on State land". (*Reuters*)

Palestinians began a door-to-door campaign against products made in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Campaign coordinator Haitham Kayali said 3,000 Palestinian youths would visit some 427,000 homes across the West Bank to distribute booklets listing banned settlement goods, and hang posters. The "Yesha Council," the main settlers' organisation, decried the campaign as "an act of terrorism and ill will", called for the closure of "all Israeli ports to Palestinian imports and exports", and suggested Palestinian funds held in Israel should be used to compensate affected companies.

The campaign is being carried out by the Karameh (Dignity) Fund. (*AFP*)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert H.erry briefed the Security Council on "The situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian question". (*UN News Centre*)

Three Palestinian girls, educated in an UNRWA school in a refugee camp, who had won an Intel science competition prize for a revolutionary walking cane for the blind, demonstrated it to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York. "This is a story about brain power not fire power... I am very impressed by your brilliant idea. This is the truth that I repeat every day. By empowering women, we can achieve anything in the world," the Secretary-General said. (*UN News Centre*)

British rock star Elvis Costello cancelled two planned performances in Israel, citing the intimidation and humiliation of Palestinians. (*AFP*)

19

Egyptian security forces said that they had discovered two caches of weapons and explosives, prepared for smuggling into Gaza through tunnels. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas and US Special Envoy George Mitchell discussed final status issues during a meeting in Ramallah. Saeb Erakat, Head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, said: "We are focusing on final-status issues like borders and security... We hope that in the next four

months we can achieve the two-State solution on the 1967 borders”, he added. He also warned that continued Israeli settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, could scupper the talks. Earlier Mr. Mitchell briefly met Israeli Defence Minister Barak. (AFP, Reuters)

According to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Israel’s insistence on discussing only “secondary issues”, such as the environment and the rights to airspace, threatened to stall any peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Then we will see terrorism increase and spread throughout the world”, Mr. Mubarak said. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said Italy, together with its international allies, was “putting pressure” on both the Israelis and Palestinians to resume negotiations. During a joint news conference with Mr. Mubarak in Rome, the Italian Premier renewed his Government’s offer to host such talks in Sicily. (DPA)

A proposal put forward by Hamas would see the acceptance of a Palestinian State “in stages” on the Green Line, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and “the return of all refugees without recognizing Israel in exchange for a 10-year truce”, Hamas official Khalil Al-Haya said. “This means that if the international community grants the right of return to the six million Palestinian refugees across the world to their homes in Haifa, Jaffa, and Akko [Acre], then there will no longer be an occupying State”, Mr. Al-Haya said. (Ma’an News Agency)

A delegation of Hamas officials, headed by Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal, met with Libyan leader, Col. Muammar Al-Qadhafi, in Tripoli to discuss current developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including unity talks with Fatah, Political Bureau member Izzat Ar-Rishiq said. (Ma’an News Agency)

US Embassy officials in Damascus, the Syrian Government, and UNRWA inaugurated a newly constructed community centre that would benefit some 144,000 refugees living in the Yarmouk refugee camp. A statement issued by the US State Department said that the US had contributed \$1.4 million for the centre’s construction. (Ma’an News Agency, www.state.gov)

Senior Hamas official and Palestinian Legislative Council member Mahmoud Abu Tir, arrested in 2006, following the seizure of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by Gaza militants, would be released from Israeli prison, the Israel Prison Service confirmed. Israel still holds 12 Hamas legislators in custody. Mr. Abu Tir, who returned to his home in East Jerusalem, urged Israel to reach an agreement with Hamas that would see the release of Mr. Shalit. (AFP, Haaretz, Ynetnews)

20

Israeli forces detained seven Palestinians in Bethlehem and Ramallah as well as several Palestinians, aged 16 to 18, in East Jerusalem. (IMEMC)

A Qassam rocket fired from Gaza hit near Ashkelon. No injuries or damage were reported. (The Jerusalem Post)

US Special Envoy George Mitchell met Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem for a second round of indirect peace negotiations. Israel’s Defence Minister Ehud Barak and Mr. Netanyahu’s adviser, Attorney Yitzhak Molho, also took part in the meeting. Details of the meeting had not been disclosed, but Israel’s *Army Radio* said Israel was prepared to offer gestures to the Palestinians, including removing roadblocks in the West Bank and releasing Palestinian prisoners. Government sources said that Mr. Netanyahu was examining favourably a proposal to build a road in the West Bank on land Israel had originally allocated for a settlement. (AP, Haaretz)

In a press briefing, Assistant Secretary of State Philip J. Crowley said that the “[indirect] talks were constructive.” Special Envoy Mitchell had also urged the parties to remain committed to promoting a positive atmosphere for the talks. (Ma’an News Agency, www.state.gov)

Saeb Erakat, Head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, denied media reports that the PA would be willing to have NATO forces deployed in a future Palestinian State. (Ma’an News Agency)

Palestinian official at the Erez crossing, Maher Abu Ouf, said that Israel had shut down all mail services between the West Bank and Gaza following the detention of Gaza-based postal service official Sufian Abu Zubda the previous day. (Ma’an News Agency)

Medical equipment due to enter the Gaza Strip in October 2009 continued to be obstructed by Israel, said Raed Fattouh, a Palestinian liaison official. The equipment, which included incubators, CT scanners, and heart monitors, among others, had been sent from the West Bank. (Ma’an News Agency)

Despite the freeze on settlement construction, 56 members of the Knesset petitioned Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defence Minister Barak to allow the construction of a neighbourhood in the settlement of “Ariel” for the evacuees from the Gaza Strip settlement of “Netzarim”, who had been without permanent housing since Israel’s disengagement in 2005. (Haaretz)

In its decision to expel recently released Palestinian Legislative Council member Mahmoud Abu Tir from East Jerusalem, the Israeli police said that the Hamas legislator had lost his residency rights in the city after he had decided to run in the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006. The decision poses similar threats to three other Palestinian legislators. (IMEMC)

An Israeli court extended the detention of five Palestinian teenagers from East Jerusalem until 23 May, after they had been detained the previous day for questioning. Among the detainees was a son of Fatah’s Secretary for Jerusalem, Omar Ash-Shalabi. (Ma’an News Agency)

In a letter, the British Committee for Universities for Palestine called on British singer Elton John to cancel his shows in Israel. “Please read what Judge Goldstone said about the onslaught on Gaza; what Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been saying for decades about the crimes committed against the Palestinians”, the letter said. (www.bricup.org.uk)

21

The IDF reported that the Israeli Air Force had struck three tunnels in Gaza overnight. Meanwhile, witnesses said that the Israeli warplanes had also targeted training sites of the armed wing of Hamas. No injuries were reported (IMEMC, Ma’an News Agency, www.idf.il)

The US Congress approved President Obama’s plan to grant Israel \$205 million in support for the development of Israel’s “Iron Dome” system that intercepts short-range missiles. (Haaretz, IMEMC, www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)

During a fire fight at the Israel-Gaza border, the IDF killed two Palestinian militants who had tried to infiltrate Israel from the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post)

Three people were arrested during an anti-wall protest in Bil’in, and Israeli border policemen were reportedly lightly hurt by rocks during protests in Nabi Saleh. (Haaretz)

Immediately after US Special Envoy George Mitchell’s departure, the office of Prime Minister Netanyahu issued a statement saying that Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Netanyahu had discussed a number of measures, including “acts of good will towards the Palestinians”. Meanwhile, *Israeli Army Radio* reported that goodwill measures would not be implemented without progress in the proximity talks and that Israeli Deputy Prime Minister, Moshe Ya’alon, had reiterated that settlement activities would resume in September when the settlement freeze ends. (IMEMC)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain announced that a summit of the Union for the Mediterranean, scheduled to take place in Barcelona on 7 June, had been postponed until November to give more time for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian proximity talks. (AP)

In its weekly report on Israeli human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights found that a Palestinian child had been killed by an Israeli settler in the West Bank and an elderly man had been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza. In addition, three Palestinian civilians, including a child, had been wounded by Israeli gunfire in the West Bank. Israeli forces continued to use force against peaceful protests and to fire at Palestinian farmers and workers in border areas of the Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency* , www.pchrgaza.org)

Hundreds of settlers from "Binyamin" participated in a march against the ongoing construction by the PA of a new Palestinian city, Rawabi, north-east of Ramallah, on land slated by the Israeli Government for nearby settlements. "This is about the tacit agreement and acquiescence of the Israeli Government to the laying of foundations for a Palestinian State", the demonstration's organizers said. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Palestinian farmers from Qusra village were forced to leave their fields and were unable to harvest their crops, after armed Israeli settlers had threatened them with violence. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

22

After two rounds of US-brokered indirect peace talks, PA President Abbas said that the Palestinians were ready to swap some land with Israel, although differences remained over the amount of territory to be traded. Mr. Abbas dismissed recent media reports that the Palestinians were willing to trade more land than in the past, saying: "We did not agree about the land area, but we agreed on the principle of swapping land [equal] in quality and value." (*AP*)

A Turkish ferry set sail from Istanbul to join the Freedom Flotilla of passenger and cargo vessels seeking to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The ferry and two Turkish cargo vessels were sponsored by a charity group. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had called on Israel to allow the flotilla to reach Gaza. (www.irishtimes.com)

23

Speaking at a meeting of Likud Ministers, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said that US Special Envoy George Mitchell had been discussing with the Palestinians what they wanted to talk about, and with Israel what it wanted to talk about, denying that there was "back and forth" between the two sides, or that they were negotiating the parameters of a land swap. He said that Israel had received no Palestinian proposal on the issue. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said that Israel was serious about reaching a peace settlement, but the Palestinians seemed interested in reaching a dead-end as soon as possible, avoiding having to enter direct talks. (*Haaretz*)

An Israeli ministerial committee on legislation approved a draft bill seeking to toughen the conditions under which Hamas prisoners were being held in response to the stalemate over IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. (*AFP*)

A group of approximately 30 armed and masked men attacked and set fire to an UNRWA recreation facility under construction on the beach in Gaza City for UNRWA's annual "Summer Games" programme for over 250,000 refugee children in Gaza, due to commence on 12 June. UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, John Ging, called the incident "vandalism linked to extremism and an attack on the happiness of children". He went on to reassure parents and the children of Gaza that: "UNRWA will not be intimidated by such acts and will quickly rebuild the location in good time to host the Summer Games". Spokesman for Hamas Taher al-Nunu condemned the attack and pledged that authorities "will track down the perpetrators". Hamas banned a protest rally against the vandalizing of the UNRWA facility, Gaza civil society groups said. (*Ma'an News Agency*, *Reuters*, www.unrwa.org)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General condemns the act of vandalism by intruders against an UNRWA summer games facility for children in Gaza.

UNRWA's extensive summer games programmes offer a rare opportunity for relief from the deprivations and difficulties of everyday life in Gaza. This action is an attempt to intimidate and harm the most defenceless in Gaza. The Secretary-General calls upon the de-facto authorities to ensure the safety of the UN's operations and to allow UNRWA to carry out its work unhindered. (*UN News Centre*)

24

Israeli forces raided the Al-Esawiyeh area of East Jerusalem and imposed a curfew on inhabitants, the Popular Committee for the Defence of Al-Esawiyeh said. Also in East Jerusalem, Israeli police were reportedly carrying out a raid in the Shu'fat refugee camp. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

At a Likud meeting, Prime Minister Netanyahu called on the PA to stop opposing economic peace with Israel, saying, "We have removed checkpoints, eased the lives of Palestinians and are working all the time to advance the Palestinian economy. Despite this, the Palestinians are opposing economic peace and are taking steps that in the end hurt themselves". He cited the Palestinian opposition to Israel's entrance to the OECD and the Palestinian boycott of settlement products as examples. (*Haaretz*)

US Special Envoy George Mitchell said that he believed Israeli-Palestinian peace was possible and that both sides seemed "serious and sincere" about the ongoing proximity negotiations. (*Haaretz*)

In an interview aired on *FRANCE 24* Television, PA President Abbas said: "If we fail to reach an agreement through talks, we will have to turn to the UN Security Council for a resolution. I am opposed to any other alternative, in particular that of armed struggle." He suggested a two-State solution with an international military force ensuring security on both sides of the border. Mr. Abbas rejected Israel's claims that his appeal to boycott settlement products was inciting hatred against Israel, saying, "There's a difference between boycotting products from the Israeli State and boycotting products from Jewish [settlements] built on Palestinian land." (www.france24.com)

The European Commission Representative in Jerusalem, Christian Berger, said that the EU could rethink the future size of its €300 million (\$370 million) aid budget for the Palestinians if no progress was made towards peace soon. The aid's objective was to prepare the Palestinians for a peace treaty with Israel that would give them their own State, but "if that isn't coming, then I can see a number of questions", Mr. Berger said. (*Reuters*)

Jordanian and Saudi Arabian aid had reached the Allenby Bridge crossing between Jordan and the West Bank en route to the Gaza Strip, Mahmoud Al-Habbash, PA Minister of Waqf and Religious Affairs said. The Jordanian aid consisted of nine truckloads while that of Saudi Arabia consisted of eleven truckloads of aid. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A UNDP report entitled "One Year Later: Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment" said that nearly 16 months after "Operation Cast Lead", approximately three quarters of the buildings and infrastructure damaged had yet to be repaired. The report, produced in partnership with the Gaza-based Engineering and Management Consulting Centre, estimated that another \$527 million would be needed to rebuild all the buildings damaged during the offensive. Much of the repair work that had been completed with materials smuggled in through tunnels from Egypt to

circumvent the blockade, which had severely handicapped traditional international aid donors. (AFP, www.undp.ps)

After meeting with Palestinian officials, the Israeli army said in a statement that it would relieve some of the restrictions placed upon travel in the West Bank. The "goodwill gestures" included the entry of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and ID cards through all checkpoints into the West Bank. Restrictions would be eased on senior Palestinian businessmen and 60 roadblocks would be removed throughout the West Bank, the army said. All checkpoints into Bethlehem would be opened to tourists. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli authorities had barred Fatah Central Committee member Tawfiq At-Tirawi from travelling to Jordan via the Allenby Bridge, Mr. At-Tirawi said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel would be allowing today the entry of limited construction materials into the Gaza Strip for UNRWA projects, a Palestinian liaison official said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Residents of the Dura Al-Qar'a village, east of Ramallah, said that "Beit El" settlers erected a tent near the village's water springs to "provoke" locals by raising Israeli flags and prevent them from reaching the water springs for their daily use. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas official Ayman Taha said that Islamic Jihad and Hamas would boycott local elections in the West Bank due for mid-July because "they are held without a national agreement and aim to deepen division". (Ma'an News Agency)

An attorney from East Jerusalem was charged with transferring funds from Hamas and Islamic Jihad to Palestinian prisoners jailed in Israel. The director of an East Jerusalem branch of the Israel Postal Services, a resident of the Gaza Strip, and another resident of East Jerusalem were also charged in the affair. The suspects allegedly bypassed the legal procedures which stipulate that only up to NIS 1,300 per month could be deposited into prisoners' accounts, and by family members alone. (Haaretz)

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, condemned in a statement the attack on an UNRWA summer camp, saying she strongly supported her colleagues in UNRWA and their determination to rebuild the attacked facility. (www.un.org)

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The Israeli army said that "an explosive device concealed on a donkey-drawn wagon exploded along the security fence" in northern Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian militants fired a rocket and mortar shells at Israel, the Israeli military said. A group that identifies with al-Qaeda claimed responsibility. (Haaretz)

Hamas security services reported that they had arrested a group of people suspected of burning down the UNRWA-run summer camp for children. (DPA)

Viet Nam's President Nguyen Minh Triet held talks with visiting PA President Abbas. The two leaders witnessed the signing of a bilateral framework agreement on economics, culture, education, science, technology, sports and tourism, a memorandum of understanding on cooperation between the two countries' Foreign Ministries, a pact on education cooperation, and an agreement between the respective news agencies. (Viet Nam News, Xinhua)

Acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Philippe Lazzarini, representing humanitarian aid agencies, and the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), said in a statement: "Saving agricultural livelihoods and local food production in Gaza depends on three factors: the opening of border crossings, unrestricted and safe access to vital agricultural land and fishing zones; and access to materials necessary to prevent long-term damage to soil. (www.ochaopt.org)

A group of 16 Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups petitioned Israel's High Court of Justice to stop the policy of expelling Palestinians from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip on the basis of their registered address. They said thousands of people lived in constant fear; their only "crime" having an address which Israel refused to correct. The Hamoked Centre for the Defence of the Individual said that it was awaiting a response to an earlier court petition for the Government to reveal how many Palestinians had been expelled to the Gaza Strip. (AFP)

Israel's Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom threatened to impose sanctions on the PA for its organized boycott of Israeli [settlement] products, and a prohibition against working in Israeli [settlement] factories in the West Bank. Mr. Shalom suggested sanctioning the PA with higher taxes on products made in its territories and by blocking the transfer of goods into Israel. Another suggestion was to compensate the factories with money intended for the Palestinians. (Ynetnews)

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton condemned in a statement the attack on the UNRWA Summer Games, which were supported by the EU budget. (www.consilium.europa.eu)

Under the theme "Ending the occupation and establishing the Palestinian State," the two-day United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process opened in Istanbul under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Opening statements were made by Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey; Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, speaking on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Zahir Tanin, Head of the Committee's delegation and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the UN in New York; and Nemer Hammad, Special Political Adviser to the President of the Palestinian Authority. Following the opening statement, Mr. Serry gave a keynote presentation entitled "The path to a Palestinian State." (Division for Palestinian Rights, UN News Centre)

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu called on Israel to lift its blockade of Gaza and allow aid ships to reach the territory. The campaign spearheaded by the Free Gaza Movement brought together nine ships and boats, among them three Turkish vessels. He said: "We don't want new tensions... We believe Israel will use common sense towards this civilian initiative." The Foundation of Humanitarian Relief, a Turkish charity involved in the campaign, said that the vessels embarking from Britain, Greece, Ireland and Turkey planned to meet near Cyprus and sail on together to Gaza. (AFP, Haaretz)

Israel warned that it would block the fleet of aid ships from reaching the Gaza Strip. Spokesman to the Israeli Foreign Ministry Yigal Palmer said: "Ships that make their own way to Gaza don't do anything to help the people there," adding that the Free Gaza Movement was "less interested in bringing help, than with advancing their radical agenda, which plays into the hands of Hamas". Meanwhile, the organizers denied that the Israeli authorities had urged them to bring their goods to Gaza via a pre-approved border crossing. (Haaretz)

An Israeli Border Guard officer, who had shot and killed a Palestinian boy in July 2008 during an anti-wall demonstration in N'lin, had been indicted with negligent manslaughter. (Ma'an News Agency)

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A total of 22 Palestinians had been injured during air raids in Gaza, PA sources said, as Israeli warplanes bombarded a training base belonging to Hamas' military wing in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip and the disused airport in the south of Gaza. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli media reported the landing of three projectiles in the western Negev, including two mortars and a home-made rocket, causing no injuries.

(Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas told *Egyptian TV*: "My motto since the outbreak of the second *intifada* was that it must be stopped, because armed activity destroys us, and it indeed destroyed us". He further told the TV station that he had the courage to sign a permanent agreement with Israel to end the conflict "once and for all" but that however would have to be approved by a referendum. "Peace could be achieved in a week" if the Netanyahu Government would actively pursue it, Mr. Abbas added. According to him, former Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert had waived the demand for the Israeli military presence along the future Palestinian State's borders with Egypt and Jordan, agreeing to international forces. (*Ynetnews*)

A visiting Palestinian parliamentary delegation led by member of the Fatah Central Committee, Azzam Al-Ahmed, hailed Morocco's efforts to support the Palestinian issue in general, and occupied East Jerusalem in particular. (*Xinhua*)

Egyptian authorities prepared for the entry of a United Arab Emirates aid convoy destined for Gaza, security sources said. They added that Egyptian authorities had completed preparations to receive the Freedom Flotilla should the Israel navy obstruct its attempts to dock at the Gaza port.

(Ma'an News Agency)

The Qatar 2022 [World Cup] Bid Committee was partnering with UNRWA to renovate football facilities and launch football community development programmes for youngsters in the Yarmouk Palestine refugee camp in Damascus. (*Gulf Times*)

Israeli Interior Ministry spokesman Roi Lachmanovich said that the State would spend around \$10 million in total to compensate the settlements affected by the construction freeze. This payment will be in addition to the compensation granted to individuals harmed by the slowdown. (*AP*)

The resolution that created the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its meetings failed to recognize a two-sided conflict, "so from this perspective, Israeli Government officials are not attending those meetings", Israel's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Daniel Carmon said. Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said that the invitation to Israel to the [Istanbul meeting] had been half-hearted. "We are not just one invitee among others," he said. For a conference of this type, the UN should have been in direct dialogue with the Israelis to explain the programme, solicit their input, and explain how they could contribute, he said. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Brazilian Senator Eduardo Suplicy, representing the State of São Paulo, addressed the Brazilian Senate and called on Israel to facilitate the entry of the Freedom Flotilla into Gaza, and for the blockade to be lifted. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

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Ten Silwan, East Jerusalem, residents, including a pregnant woman, were injured following violent confrontations with Israeli settlers who had moved into the area, local officials reported. The clashes were subdued by Israeli forces using tear gas and sound bombs. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Speaking during a visit to Malaysia, PA President Abbas said that the current proximity talks focused on borders and security, expressing hope that they would yield results in four months. If a first phase was successful, "then we can go to direct talks", he said, adding that he was set to go to the US to continue talks with the President Obama, where he said he would press the [settlement freeze] issue. For his part, Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak hailed Mr. Abbas' position as solid, saying the proximity talks must form a solid base for peace negotiations. He added that Malaysia urged the Palestinian leadership to continue the negotiations and also urged the Israeli Government to take positive steps to reinforce Mr. Abbas. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

"We want to move as speedily as possible to direct talks because the kind of problem that we have with the Palestinians can be resolved... only if we sit down together", Prime Minister Netanyahu told reporters at the French presidential palace. He said he would discuss the peace efforts with President Obama in Washington next week, adding, "I think there is a broad consensus that we should move on to direct talks". (*AP*)

Israeli crossings officials allowed the entry of limited construction materials into Gaza for the fourth day, a Palestinian liaison officer said, noting that the goods were for UNRWA re-building projects. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel will, for the first time in eight years, reopen a West Bank road to Palestinian traffic, starting the following day, following a 2009 court ruling, a military official said. Road number 443 links several West Bank villages to Ramallah, although access to Ramallah will remain impeded by a new Israeli roadblock. A motorcade of Palestinian vehicles will take to the road on 28 May to protest the continued restrictions to Palestinian use.

(*DPA, Ma'an News Agency*)

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is implementing a \$13 million grant focused on improving PA public services such as roads, hospitals, and schools through regional public-private partnerships. JICA will focus on improving public services in the Jordan Valley, as part of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' concept of a "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" in the region. (*ReliefWeb*)

The United Nations Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process stressed the importance of the two-year State-building plan put forward by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, and considered that the entire international community should be ready to recognize the new State, based on the 1967 borders, including through a Security Council resolution, once statehood had been declared by the PA at the appropriate time.

These were among the concluding remarks framed by the organizers at the two-day Meeting in Istanbul. The participants also cautiously welcomed the "proximity" talks, and stressed the urgency of achieving tangible progress in improving the situation on the ground, to create a climate favourable to negotiating all permanent status issues. (*UN press release GA/PAL/1165*)

Israeli ministers agreed to intercept the Freedom Flotilla 20 nautical miles off the Gaza coast and bar it from arriving in Gaza's main port, with officials saying that the ships would be directed to the port of Ashdod "by force if necessary", and activists and ship personnel would be arrested and expelled from the country. The vessels – from Algeria, Turkey and Kuwait, Ireland, Britain, Sweden, and Greece – plan to take to Gaza 10,000 tons of construction material, medical equipment and school supplies, along with 750 to 800 politicians, human rights workers and political activists from 40 countries. Among the Irish nationals are Nobel laureate Mairead Maguire, and several Members of Parliament. The vessels also planned to carry children's toys, clothing and chocolate, all of which were not on the list of 81 items allowed into Gaza by the Israeli authorities. (*Ma'an News Agency, IRIN, The Irish Times, www.idf.il*)

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Israel sealed its border crossing with Gaza, a Palestinian crossings liaison official confirmed. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Khan Yunis went dark following what Gaza power officials said was Israeli fire directed toward the main line providing electricity to the city. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

New checkpoints on Highway 443, which was reopened for Palestinian traffic, will not allow the Palestinians to access Ramallah or Jerusalem.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which had petitioned the Supreme Court to allow Palestinians onto the highway, said that the Israeli army was "acting in utter disregard of the spirit of the ruling". (*BBC*)

For the first time, the IDF had produced a document defining rules of engagement for the military during combat in areas of civilian population. It incorporates lessons gleaned from "Operation Cast Lead," the Goldstone report and reports by human rights groups on IDF activities in Gaza.

(*Haaretz*)

On a visit to Gaza, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa Sigrid Kaag highlighted the plight of Gaza children due to the blockade, and the many threats they face. Ms. Kaag cited the existence of "parties here who consider these kinds of [UNRWA] summer camps to be running [counter to] religious values." A related concern, she said, was the "political manipulation" of children through messages encouraging

violence. "Eighty per cent failed [Math and Arabic tests]," added Ms. Kaag. (www.unicef.org)
"We have the right to sail from international waters into the waters of Gaza", said Greta Berlin, one of the Freedom Flotilla's organizers. "The only illegal presence in the area is Israel", she told *AFP*, adding that the convoy was on schedule to arrive in Gaza on 29 May. A spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Martin Nesirky, said: "We strongly urge that all involved act with a sense of care and responsibility and work for a satisfactory resolution." He restated the United Nations' opposition to the closure of Gaza and the lack of material to meet "basic needs, begin reconstruction, and revive economic life". (*AFP, UN News Centre*)

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UNRWA Spokesman Adnan Abu Hasna said in an interview with *DPA* that Gaza was facing a two-fold humanitarian disaster. The first was related to human development, mainly the sectors of health and education, and the psychological stress that the population was enduring. The second was the high rate of unemployment and poverty and the near collapse of the commercial, industrial and agricultural sectors. He explained that Gaza's rich and poor were equal, saying, "If you have one million dollar or one dollar, you can't get good education, proper medical treatment or good food". (*DPA*)

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The Aid flotilla to the Gaza Strip began its journey from international waters off the coast of Cyprus (400 kilometres away) after two days of delays.

According to organizers, the flotilla was expected to reach Gaza the next day and two more ships were expected to follow in a second wave.

(*Haaretz*)

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In a statement, the IDF said that early during the day, Israeli navy fighters intercepted six ships attempting to break the maritime closure of the Gaza Strip and rejecting the warning calls by Israel and the navy which were issued before the interception. They also ignored the invitation to anchor at the Ashdod port in order to transfer the humanitarian supplies using Israeli means. On five of the six ships of the flotilla, soldiers who boarded met with no resistance from the passengers, and the ships were brought to the Ashdod port where the passengers cooperated with Israeli security forces.

When the Israeli soldiers boarded the "Mavi Marmara", the largest ship in the flotilla carrying hundreds of people, the Israeli navy were attacked with gunfire, stun grenades, knives and clubs. The demonstrators stole two pistols from the soldiers and also used these to shoot at the soldiers.

The naval soldiers, who were equipped with paintball guns in order to avoid using live fire, were forced to use first their riot dispersal means, followed by live fire. Nine of the flotilla participants who were on board the ship were killed while seven naval soldiers were injured. (www.idf.il)

"Personally I saw two and a half wooden batons that were used [by activists] ... There was really nothing else. We never saw any knives...

This was an attack in international waters on a peaceful mission... This was a clear act of piracy", German activist Norman Paech said. Fellow

German activist Inge Hoeger said that they had been on the ships "for peaceful purposes". "We wanted to transport aid to Gaza," she said. "No

one had a weapon." She added: "We were aware that this would not be a simple cruise across the sea to deliver the goods to Gaza. But we did not count on this kind of brutality." (*BBC*)

US President Obama spoke by phone with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu expressing deep regret at the loss of life in the naval attack incident.

He expressed the importance of learning all the facts and circumstances around the incident as soon as possible. (www.whitehouse.gov)

The PA Government strongly condemned the Israeli attack against the Freedom Flotilla, calling it a crime. The Government called on the international community to condemn this attack and reiterated its call for lifting the siege on Gaza. (*Wafa*)

In Ottawa, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said in a statement that he would have to cut short his visit as a result of the naval incident with the Gaza aid flotilla. He said that the Government's policy was to let all humanitarian and peaceful goods into Gaza. The flotilla was told the ships could take all cargo to the port of Ashdod to be cleared. Israel succeeded in doing this peacefully with five of the six ships. "And regrettably in this exchange at least 10 people died. We regret this loss of life. We regret any of the violence that was there. We would like -- I would like to wish speedy recovery to the wounded, including to four of our own soldiers". (*Reuters*)

Fatah Central Committee member Mohammed Dahlan said leaders from the PA and the PLO agreed at an emergency meeting in Ramallah on a six-point plan in response to the Israeli attack on the Flotilla to Gaza, including: sending a PA delegation to Gaza to discuss the situation; demanding that the Security Council order an end to the siege on Gaza and initiate an investigation into the attack; for PA President Abbas to call for an urgent session of the Arab League and asking the EU to freeze relations with Israel (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, Chief of the General Staff and Israeli Naval Commander Maj. Eliezer Marom held press conference a few hours after the attack at the aid flotilla to the Gaza Strip. Mr. Barak said: "Tonight the IDF gained control over the flotilla which tried to enter the Gaza beaches and break the blockade. The Cabinet, the Prime Minister and I instructed the IDF to take action. On one of the six ships, the protesters initiated violence. We express remorse for the injured activists; however, the full responsibility rests on the organizers of the flotilla and those participants who acted violently". (www.idf.il)

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton said in a statement made in Warsaw that she had spoken to Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, expressing the EU's deepest concern about the tragedy that had happened. She called for an immediate inquiry by Israel into the circumstances, and pointed out the importance of opening the crossings for humanitarian aid to go through. (www.consilium.europa.eu)

In a statement, British Foreign Secretary William Hague called on Israel to open all crossings for aid to enter Gaza and deplored the loss of life during the interception of the Gaza Flotilla, saying, "We have consistently advised against attempting to access Gaza in this way because of the risks involved. But, at the same time, there is a clear need for Israel to act with restraint and in line with international obligations. He said that this news underlines the need to lift the restrictions on access to Gaza, in line with Security Council resolution 1860. (www.fco.gov.uk)

The following Governments summoned Israeli ambassadors to provide a full explanation of the assault: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey. China and the Russian Federation condemned the move, but have not gone so far as to call in Israel's representatives. Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Israel. (*JTA, Ma'an News Agency*)

The Turkish ship "Mavi Marmara" was the last of the six-ship flotilla to be docked at the Ashdod port, nearly 16 hours after it had been attacked by Israel navy commandos. The ship's almost 600 passengers had been kept on board while Israel police sappers conducted a thorough examination of the vessel. Nine activists aboard the ship had been killed and several more wounded in the clashes that erupted with Israel navy troops the day before. Eight Israeli soldiers had been wounded, two of them seriously. The other ships had been towed earlier with 32 of their passengers

having been detained for refusing to sign Israel's deportation orders. A total of 34 activists had been treated at hospitals across Israel for their wounds. Israel said that it would deport all the activists in the flotilla, but those who refuse to cooperate would be jailed. (*Haaretz*)

In a two-hour telephone call with Turkish President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, PA President Abbas discussed the Israeli attack against the Aid Flotilla, paying condolences for the Turkish victims. (*Wafa*)

In remarks to the media in Kampala, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that he was shocked by "reports of killings and injuries of people on the boats carrying supplies for Gaza, apparently in international waters, in the early hours of this morning. I condemn this violence. It is vital that there is a full investigation to determine exactly how this bloodshed took place. I believe Israel must urgently provide a full explanation... I have instructed my Special Coordinator, Robert Serry, and UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi, to actively engage on the ground in urging restraint and ensuring that no further harm is done and coordinating with all relevant parties," Mr. Ban said. (*UN News Centre*)

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes condemned in a statement the waste of life as a result of the Gaza aid flotilla attack. He called for lifting the blockade on Gaza once and for all. (*ReliefWeb*)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay condemned the Israeli military interception, in international waters, of the Gaza aid flotilla, calling for an immediate and credible independent inquiry into "what appeared to be a disproportionate use of force," and urged the lifting of the blockade. (www.ohchr.org)

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Richard Falk, urged the international community to bring to justice those responsible for the killing of unarmed peace activist aboard the ships of the Gaza aid flotilla. (www.ohchr.org)

At an emergency meeting of the Security Council, Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, addressed the Council saying that he was distraught by the fact that the IDF stormed the Gaza aid flotilla with around 600 people from 32 countries on board, in international waters, 72 nautical miles off the coast, killing and wounding many civilians. He said that Israel's actions constituted a grave breach of international law and that the incident would impact the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. He said that Turkey would like to see the Security Council adopt a presidential statement strongly condemning the Israeli act of aggression, and demands of an urgent inquiry into the incident and called for the punishment of all responsible authorities and persons. He said Turkey expected an apology from Israel to the international community and to the families of the casualties, an urgent inquiry to be carried out, appropriate international legal action to be taken immediately against the perpetrators, and a warning to be issued by the UN, urging Israel to abide by international law and basic human rights. (www.mfa.gov.tr)

The Security Council at the end of a 12-hour emergency meeting, agreed on a presidential statement condemning acts which resulted in the loss of at least 10 civilians and many wounded during Israel's naval attack on the Gaza flotilla. The Council requested the immediate release of all ships and civilians held by Israel and called for an impartial investigation of the attack. It urged Israel to permit full consular access, allowing the countries concerned to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately, and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance from the convoy to Gaza. (*UN News Centre*)

More than a thousand demonstrators marched to the Israeli Embassy in Dublin demanding the removal of the State's Ambassador. Almadi al Harati, an Irish citizen, was among the 50 international aid workers who had been injured when Israeli commandos stormed the Turkish ship. Hundreds of New Yorkers took to the streets in Times Square to protest Israel's naval attack on the Gaza aid flotilla. In Kuala Lumpur, some 400 Malaysians held a protest outside the US embassy to condemn the deadly raid by Israel. Some 400 demonstrators gathered in front of the UN office in Beirut to protest the Israeli naval attack. Massive street protests broke out in Turkey. (*CNN, DPA, The Irish Independent, JTA*)
