



# Press Release

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## **'WE MEET AT A LOW POINT', UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL PRENDERGAST**

### **TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL IN LATEST BRIEFING ON MIDDLE EAST**

#### **International Community Must Reassert Its Role, Help Implement Road Map, As Violence Has Left Palestinians, Israelis Questioning Two-State Solution**

Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, called this morning on the international community to assist the parties in the Middle East conflict to commit to confidence-building measures to stop the ever-worsening violence, as he briefed the Security Council on developments in the region.

"We meet at a low point", he said. Suicide bombings, rejectionist language, extrajudicial killings, walls that extend deep into the occupied territory, destruction of homes and other "mutually reinforcing confidence-destroying measures" had left both sides in the conflict to feelings of hopelessness, despair and hatred. They left each side doubting whether they had a partner for peace and questioning the viability of the two-State solution. The escalation of violence since the last briefing, he said, had crossed "previously respected lines, principles and borders".

It was now clear that the parties were unable to return to the negotiating table on their own, he continued, since the level of trust was too low and the lines of communication too weak. For that reason, it was imperative that the international community reassert its role in Middle East peacemaking and assist the parties along the [Road Map](#), for which implementation had been stalled for too long.

Describing some of incidents that led to a death toll of 27 Israelis, 47 Palestinians and three Americans since his last briefing, he called on the Palestinian Authority to bring to justice those who carried out acts of terrorism. He said, though, that the Israeli air strike against Syrian territory was a dismaying new escalation, and that Israel's operations in civilian areas, resulting in scores of casualties, could be viewed as collective punishment, which was a violation of international humanitarian law. While recognizing Israel's right to defend itself, he called on that Government to cease the use of disproportionate and indiscriminate force in civilian areas and for a halt to extrajudicial killings.

For the parties to re-engage in the negotiating process, he said, they must be able to commit to credible confidence-building measures. In that connection, a new Palestinian Prime Minister should be empowered and credible, to whom the consolidated Palestinian security forces would report. He should take immediate steps to establish law and order, diminish violence and start operations to confront those who engage in terror. For its part, Israel must implement a settlement freeze and halt the construction of the security wall.

Meeting on 26 September, the Quartet principals said they viewed the current situation with great concern and reaffirmed their commitment to continue working together for progress towards peace. In addition, in what he called a "rare positive note amid the gloom", he described the "Geneva Accord" of Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, in which Israelis and Palestinians had imagined a future final status settlement that detailed possible solutions based on the two-State solution.

The Secretariat had not seen details, but welcomed any initiatives that brought Israelis and Palestinians together for discussion of a common future, he said. However, he stressed, there was no substitute for the official representatives of the Israeli and Palestinian people returning to the negotiating table and progressing down the Road Map.

The setbacks in the quest for peace had had a deleterious effect on the humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, Mr. Prendergast continued. Unemployment rates had risen to 36 per cent, and the number of Palestinians below the poverty line was at 60 per cent. Severe restrictions on the movement of humanitarian goods and aid workers remained in place. While recognizing Israel's security concerns, donors failed to understand the logic of measures that increased insecurity for the civilian population and the aid community, raising the costs of providing assistance. The aid community felt that the Government of Israel had thus far failed to appoint a high-level empowered interlocutor to discuss those policy issues.

He said a meeting of the capitals-level Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHCL), composed of key donors, was scheduled to take place on 18 and 19 November. That meeting, which would address Palestinian economic stabilization and emergency needs, as well as ongoing support to the Palestinian Authority's reform efforts, would coincide with the launch of the United Nations consolidated appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory.

The construction of the separation barrier or wall continued to deeply worry not only Palestinians, but the international community as a whole, he said, drawing particular attention to the rapid expansion of Israel's "separation barrier" around east Jerusalem. He repeated his call on the Israeli authorities to halt construction of the wall. On 2 October, the Israeli Defence Force had issued a military order declaring those areas between the wall and the "Green Line" to be militarily closed areas. That order marked an unacceptable deepening of restrictions against the Palestinians caught between the barrier and the Green Line.

Concerning Lebanon, he said the day after the 5 October Israeli air strike into Syria, two hostile incidents occurred along the "Blue Line", underscoring yet again the need for the Government of Lebanon to exert control over the use of force from the whole of its territory. The spiral of events of the first week of October also

illustrated the significant potential for escalation within the region. The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Roed-Larsen, had travelled to Beirut and Damascus on 8 and 9 October on instructions of the Secretary-General, and had also discussed the situation with Israeli officials.

It was of paramount importance that all parties exercise restraint and work through diplomatic channels, he said. In that regard, the Secretary-General appreciated the approach of the Governments of Syria and Lebanon of turning to the Council for redress. Further, he noted that Israeli overflights had shown a marked increase since early October and the continued violations "are not helpful".

The vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, must remain the goal, he said. To achieve that vision, it was essential that there was a return to the negotiating table and that, meanwhile, not only restraint was exercised, but that there was an end to all acts that undermined confidence among the parties. "There has to be a better way", he said. "Israelis and Palestinians alike feel exhausted by today and fearful for tomorrow. We have to break the cycle of violence, revenge and escalation. Let us work together to find that better way."

Following the briefing, Council members went directly into closed consultations on the issue.

This morning's meeting, which opened at 10:15 a.m., closed at 10:35 a.m.

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