

Division for Palestinian Rights  
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the  
 Question of Palestine**

MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REVIEW

**May 2008**

*Monthly highlights*

- Quartet, [Ad Hoc](#) Liaison Committee of donors meet in London . ( [2 May](#) )
- Rising prices, funding shortfalls force UNRWA to stop emergency food aid to 13 per cent of Gaza refugees. ( [2 May](#) )
- Some 480 PA police deploy in Jenin. ( [3 May](#) )
- Following visit to Israel, OPT, Secretary of State Rice says US observers to monitor impact of Israeli roadblocks. ( [5 May](#) )
- Quartet Representative Tony Blair unveils package designed to allow greater movement in the West Bank and help the Palestinian economy. ( [13 May](#) )
- Palestinians commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Nakba* . ( [15 May](#) )
- US President Bush starts five-day tour of the Middle East. ( [15 May](#) )
- French Foreign Minister Kouchner confirms informal contacts with Hamas. ( [19 May](#) )
- Palestine Investment Conference held in Bethlehem. ( [21](#), [22](#) and [23 May](#) )
- PA President Abbas meets Hamas officials in the Muqataa . ( [26 May](#) )
- South African Archbishop Tutu leads Human Rights Council-mandated fact-finding mission to the Gaza Strip. ( [29 May](#) )
- Number of Israeli roadblocks rises to 607 at end of April, up from 566 in September 2007, OCHA report says. ( [29 May](#) )

**I**

Nafez Mansur, a 40-year-old activist from the Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, who was alleged to have been involved in the capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, was killed and Khulud Al-Injili, a 13-year-old girl, was injured in the Rafah district when an unmanned Israeli drone fired a missile. ( *Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Wafa* )

A 62-year-old Palestinian civilian, Muhammad Abu Duqqa, from Khan Yunis, was killed and three militants were wounded during fighting in the southern Gaza Strip. ( *Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency* )

A 12-year-old Palestinian boy was shot in the head and seriously injured as Israeli military vehicles entered Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. ( *Ma'an News Agency* )

Israeli forces arrested 16 Palestinians in the West Bank. ( *Ma'an News Agency* )

Israeli forces detained 40 Palestinians from Al-Farahin, east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, before withdrawing from the area. ( *Ma'an News Agency* )

At least 10 Qassamrockets were fired at Israel's western Negev region. A house in a kibbutz was damaged, and four people were treated for shock. ( *Ynetnews* )

Islamic Jihad announced that it would not formally sign the ceasefire agreement between 12 Palestinian factions and Israel brokered by Egypt but that it would also not be the first to violate it. Some factions reserved the right to retaliate against Israeli attacks. Egypt expects Israel to accept and implement the agreement. ( *Haaretz* )

Two Palestinians were wounded in an Israeli drone attack on the Al-Satariya neighbourhood of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. ( *Wafa* )

European Union (EU) High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana told the Saudi newspaper *Okaz* that the EU was ready to deploy international observers in the Gaza Strip, expressing hope that all the Palestinian parties would accept the measure. ( *Palestine Press Agency* )

Senior United States Administration officials indicated that President Bush did not intend to present his own guidelines for resolving the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian permanent peace agreement. ( *Haaretz* )

Henrietta Fore, Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), said that the United States would look favourably on a request from the Palestinian Authority for more funds to finance a budget shortfall. ( *Reuters* )

It was reported that four-month-old Naseem al-Beyook died because he was denied entry by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) into Israel from the Gaza Strip for treatment. Medical sources indicated that the infant was suffering from an acute disease. (Wafa)

2

Israeli forces arrested three Palestinians in Tulkarm. (Wafa)

Egypt handed over to Israel a formal written draft proposal for a complete ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian factions, including Hamas. The draft agreement did not contain many details but required that the ceasefire start in the Gaza Strip and later be applied in the West Bank, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

The IDF released a video exonerating itself of responsibility for the deaths of a Palestinian woman and her four children in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip on 28 April 2008. The clip was supposed to show that the deaths had been caused by the detonation of explosives carried by a militant hit in an Israeli air strike. (Haaretz)

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown held talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in London ahead of a series of meetings aimed at taking forward the Middle East peace process. Mr. Brown raised a number of issues, including Israeli settlement activity, the importance of boosting investment in Palestinian areas, the commitment to a viable Palestinian State and the need for confidence building measures on movement and access. "We cannot let the opportunity for peace between Israel and Palestine slip between our fingers," he said. ([www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk))

Following are excerpts from a [statement](#) issued by the Quartet:

Representatives of the Quartet -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, High Representative for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel -- met today in London to discuss the situation in the Middle East. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

...

The Quartet called upon both sides to fulfill their obligations under the road map. It also called on both sides to refrain from any steps that undermine confidence or could prejudice the outcome of negotiations. In this context, the Quartet expressed its deep concern at continuing settlement activity and call upon Israel to freeze all settlement activity including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001. It called on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to fulfill its commitments to fight terrorism and to accelerate steps to rebuild and refocus its security apparatus. It urged Israel and the PA to increase cooperation in that respect and to facilitate the delivery of security assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

The Quartet condemned continuing rocket attacks from Gaza on southern Israel, including against Sderot and Ashkelon, as well as the terrorist attacks at a seminary in Jerusalem on March 6. The Quartet also expressed deep concern at Palestinian civilian casualties, including the recent death of a mother and four of her children in Gaza. It called for an end to all violence and terror and urged all parties to take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of affected civilians in accordance with international law.

Noting its deep concern over humanitarian conditions in Gaza, the Quartet called for continued emergency and humanitarian assistance and the provision of essential services to Gaza without obstruction. The Quartet expressed its continuing concern over the closure of major Gaza crossing points given the impact on the Palestinian economy and daily life. The Quartet condemned the terrorist attack on Nahal Oz fuel terminal on April 9, and noted that such attacks on the Gaza crossings interfere with the supply of essential services and undermine the interests of the Palestinian people. Principals strongly encouraged Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt to work together to formulate a new approach on Gaza that would provide security to all Gazans, end all acts of terror, provide for the controlled and sustained opening of the Gaza crossings for humanitarian reasons and commercial flows, support the legitimate Palestinian Authority government, and work towards conditions that would permit implementation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

Looking forward to a productive meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, the Quartet encouraged all parties to do their part to support Palestinian institutional capacity building and economic development. The Quartet called for all donors to follow through on pledges made at the December 2007 Paris Donors' Conference. Underlining the crucial role of Arab States in support of the peace process, and the importance of the Arab League peace initiative, the Quartet encouraged the Arab States to fulfil both their political and financial roles in support of the Annapolis process.

The Quartet also discussed the proposal for an international meeting in Moscow to lend continued support to the parties in their negotiations and efforts on the ground.

...

(AFP, AP, [www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu))

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee of donors to the Palestinians met in London. The meeting was a follow-up to the ministerial level donor meeting in New York in September 2007 and the Donor Conference in Paris in December 2007. The meeting, which was chaired by Norway, was attended by PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner, High Commissioner for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and Quartet Representative Tony Blair. ([www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no))

A spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Matthias Burchard, said rising prices and funding shortages had forced the United Nations to stop providing emergency food aid to more than 13 per cent of the 750,000 Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip.

He said that UNRWA had over the last few weeks gradually reduced the number of Palestinian refugees to whom it distributed packages of basic foods to some 650,000. "Soaring food prices, transport and fuel costs are forcing us to reduce what we can give ... In the past we have provided 60 per cent of the recommended calorie intake and now we are providing about 50 per cent," he said, adding that the cost of food parcels had increased by 235 per cent in the last two years. (AP)

3

Some 480 Palestinian police headed to Jenin in the West Bank to deploy there as part of the PA's security plan. Their commander, Suleiman Amran, said that it was an important day for Jenin and there was "no chance for troublemakers to return to Jenin." The operation would encompass close to 50 villages and was scheduled to last three months. The forces, some of whom received US-funded training in Jordan, would focus on capturing criminals, primarily car thieves. Israel had welcomed the Palestinian efforts, but continued to conduct frequent arrest raids in the West Bank. (Haaretz)

The Palestinian Centre for Prisoners' Defence reported that the IDF had arrested 363 Palestinians in the West Bank in April. Most of the arrests, 128, were in Nablus. The IDF declined to confirm or deny the report. (Haaretz)

4

Hamas threatened an "unprecedented escalation" against Israel if it did not agree soon to the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire offer. Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri said that Hamas was ready to deal with one of the two possibilities: pacification or escalation. (The Jerusalem Post)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with PA President Abbas in Ramallah. Ms. Rice said that the US regarded the issue of settlements and roadblocks as "particularly problematic to the atmosphere of trust that is needed" during peace talks. But she added that a peace agreement was still achievable this year. In Jerusalem, Ms. Rice met with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. At a news conference, Ms. Livni said, "There is no new building of new settlements" and that the Government had "no hidden agenda." She pointed out that Israel's 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was proof that settlements were "not obstacles" to peace.

Ms. Rice also met with Prime Minister Olmert before departing from Israel. (AP, BBC, Haaretz)

Egypt said that it would send Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman to Israel to convey an offer for a truce between Israel and Palestinian factions. Several factions were

reportedly equivocal in their support for the truce, stating that they reserved the right to retaliate against Israeli attacks. (Haaretz)

PA President Abbas reiterated his call on Hamas to reverse its Gaza Strip takeover and agree to early elections. Hamas refused to step down, citing its victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections. (Haaretz)

5

At least seven Qassam rockets were fired into the western Negev. One person suffered from shock as a rocket struck the Sha'ar Hanegev industrial zone, and later sustained minor injuries as he fled the scene. Another man suffered light shrapnel wounds in a separate attack. Two rockets hit the industrial zone causing damage to a water pipe. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Palestinian officials said that a Gaza man had been killed after a cross-border smuggling tunnel collapsed on him. The Gaza Health Ministry said that five more people were wounded in the collapse and one was still missing. (AFP, Ynetnews)

Israel imposed a complete closure on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which would remain in force through the Israeli Memorial and Independence Days on 7 and 8 May. (Haaretz)

PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met for two hours in Jerusalem. Mr. Olmert expressed readiness to make "tangible" changes in the West Bank, telling President Abbas that he understood that their months of peace talks must be accompanied by action on the ground. Mr. Olmert's office said significant progress had been achieved on the issue of permanent borders of a future Palestinian State and the security arrangements such a development would entail. No progress was reported on the issues of Jerusalem and Palestine refugees. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

The United States said that it would send monitors to study whether the removal of Israeli roadblocks was making life easier for Palestinians in the West Bank. US Secretary of State Rice spent much of her fourth trip to the region this year discussing steps to dismantle some of the hundreds of checkpoints, manned roadblocks and other barriers Israel had erected across the West Bank. After Ms. Rice's last trip in late March, Israel said that it planned to remove 61 barriers in the West Bank. But a UN survey found that only 44 obstacles had been scrapped -- and that most of those were of little or no significance. She said that the monitors would talk to villagers and ask about how the roadblocks affected them. (Reuters)

UNRWA announced that it would again suspend distribution of food aid to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip because of fuel shortages. The suspension would begin late in the day when supplies were expected to be completely exhausted. The suspension would mean some 650,000 refugees would go without essential services aside from food aid. The Nahal Oz crossing used for fuel transfer had been closed by Israel. (BBC, Ma'an News Agency)

Israel transferred 200 litres of diesel fuel and 30,000 litres of gasoline to UNRWA for its work in the Gaza Strip which, according to Israeli officials, was enough supply for about a month. For days the Agency had been concerned with the lack of fuel for its operations. Israel, however, said that it could not transfer more fuel until Hamas emptied the depot to which the fuel was delivered, thereby creating space for new deliveries, which it did on 5 May. The fuel transfer, however, was interrupted after a few hours by Palestinian mortar fire on the depot. (Haaretz)

6

Israeli forces seized an Islamic Jihad member and a teenager near Nablus. Near Tulkarm, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian after inspecting and ransacking several houses in the neighbourhood. (Ma'an News Agency)

An Israeli Air Force (IAF) strike on a mortar launching squad near the town of Beit Lahiya killed a member of Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, and wounded three others in northern Gaza, according to Palestinian officials. Muawiya Hasanain, Gaza director of ambulance and emergency services, said that 23-year-old Hisham Shumar was killed and 25-year-old Omar Hammad was critically injured. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

A Palestinian civilian was severely wounded and two militants were hurt in a gunfight between Palestinian security forces and gunmen in Qabatiya, in the West Bank, witnesses and hospital officials said. (AFP)

Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said that marked differences still remained over key issues in peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, despite reports of progress at the meeting between Israel's Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas. The official spokesman of the PA Presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, said that differences on the issue of final-status borders remained, despite an in-depth debate over it.

He added that both sides were unhappy about a request by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that both sides prepare a memorandum of understanding on the progress of their final-status negotiations to date before US President Bush arrived the following week. The memorandum was meant to demonstrate to the international community that the negotiations were indeed progressing. (Haaretz)

The European Commission [announced](#) that 74,000 Palestinian public service providers and pensioners would receive a total of €35.5 million (New Israeli Sheqalim 195 million) through PEGASE, the European mechanism for support to the Palestinians. The PEGASE contribution would be added to this month's payment of salaries and pensions by the PA Ministry of Finance, thus helping to ensure the continued delivery of essential public services, the Commission said. ([www.delwbhg.ec.europa.eu](http://www.delwbhg.ec.europa.eu))

The head of the PA Civil Liaison Department, Hussein Al-Sheikh, said that the Israeli authorities had approved a portion of the list of Palestine refugees seeking to be reunified with their families living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The list included the names of 10,000 individuals living as refugees in countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. Others on the list included those already living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory without "legal status." (Ma'an News Agency)

The PLO Executive Committee affirmed that ongoing Israeli settlement activities caused the main danger for the future of the Palestinian people and the entire peace process. In a meeting in Ramallah chaired by PA President Abbas, the Committee rejected all Israeli pretexts to justify settlement expansion, calling on the US Government to exert efforts to halt settlement activities and implement the Annapolis understandings. (Wafa)

7

An Islamic Jihad militant was killed and nearly 20 people were wounded during an Israeli incursion into the southern Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian medics and witnesses. Israeli armoured vehicles and bulldozers, backed by aerial drones, entered the region east of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. Hamas confirmed that 10 of the wounded were fighters from its armed wing. A Palestinian woman was found dead inside her house in Abasan, east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, after the Israeli forces withdrew from the town. Muawiya Hasanain, director of ambulance and emergency services, said that 23-year-old Wafa' Ad-Daghma had received a gunshot in the head. During the incursion, vast areas of agricultural land were razed. An Israeli army spokesperson said that troops "had opened fire near Khan Yunis against armed Palestinians." (AFP, AP, Ma'an News Agency)

Undercover Israeli forces infiltrated Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, stormed a water pumping station and seized one employee after damaging part of the facility. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces conducted a raid into Jenin, just days after the Palestinian Authority had carried out a plan to resume security control of the city. No arrests were reported in connection with the incursion. (Ma'an News Agency)

At a press briefing at the White House, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley said, in response to a question regarding Hamas:

"Question: There really doesn't seem to be any progress, though, on negotiating with Hamas. So how do you believe that you can make forward progress if you can't somehow include them?"

Mr. Hadley: Well, I think -- the President's theory, as you know, is that if the Palestinian Authority and the Israelis can come to agreement for a framework for a two-State solution and for the outlines of a Palestinian State that will open the door for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. And at that point, President Abbas will be able to go to the people in Gaza and say, you have a choice: You can have the kind of life that you have under the oppression, really, of Hamas -- and as we all know how difficult the situation is for a Palestinian in Gaza -- or you can be part of a Palestinian State, which is what we want and what Palestinians want. And at that point, the people of Gaza will have a choice to make."

([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov))

8

Four Palestinians were critically injured when Israeli missiles struck a civilian car in Jabalya in the northern Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Two Qassam rockets fired from the Gaza Strip landed in the western Negev causing no injuries or damage. Palestinian sources reported that four Islamic Jihad operatives were injured in an Israeli air strike in northern Gaza. The IDF confirmed it had struck a Qassam cell. Shortly after the air strike, Palestinians fired six mortar shells, which landed in open areas near the Gaza Strip-Israel fence. No injuries or damage were reported. (Ynetnews)

US President Bush's second trip to the Middle East this year would not see him hosting a joint session with leaders of Israel and the PA. National Security Advisor

Stephen Hadley said, "This did not seem the time for a big, high-level, three-way event." (*Haaretz*)

PA President Abbas received in Ramallah Middle East Quartet Representative Tony Blair. The President briefed Mr. Blair on the latest developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the economic situation. PA Minister of the Interior Abd Ar-Razaq Al-Yahya also held a meeting with Mr. Blair. They discussed the importance of stability of the security situation and its impact on economic development. President Abbas also received Jacob Wallace, US Consul General in Jerusalem. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas was still awaiting Israel's response to the Egyptian-proposed ceasefire accepted by the Palestinian factions, Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan said, warning that "Hamas' patience will not last forever." Israel continued its incursions into Gaza, while Hamas had limited itself to defensive operations, he said. (*Xinhua*)

A national day of mourning was held across the Occupied Palestinian Territory to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Palestinian *Nakba*. Palestinian and black flags were raised on rooftops of buildings and a partial public strike was conducted in the afternoon. In addition, demonstrations were held in cities across the West Bank. PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad attended the announcement of the beginning of activities, along with other dignitaries in Ramallah. All activities were held in a special camp named "Al-Awda" near the PA compound (*muqataa*). The Higher Committee for commemorating the sixtieth *Nakba* anniversary supervised the establishment of the camp, which included a studio built by *Ma'an News Agency*, in cooperation with *Palestine TV*, and Badil Center for Palestinian Refugee Rights. The studio would transmit live interviews with political, social and literary dignitaries from Ramallah, Gaza, Nazareth, Damascus, Beirut and Amman. Several tents and posters had been erected representing Palestinian cities and villages whose residents had been displaced in 1948. A group of craftsmen in Bethlehem have been working on what they said is the biggest iron key in the world, representing the Palestine refugees' homes left behind, with the inscription "Not for Sale." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

After receiving several complaints from UN officials about the treatment they received at Israeli military checkpoints, *Ma'an News Agency* sent a reporter to monitor West Bank checkpoints. The reporter found that Israeli soldiers deliberately undermined UN employees and impeded their activity. In March 2008, Israeli soldiers had begun a new way of checking UN employees, ignoring all the immunities and privileges that UN staff enjoyed. According to a UN source, the UN had lost more than 4,000 working hours or 600 working days during March due to inspections at Israeli checkpoints at the entrance to Jerusalem. (*Ma'an News Agency*) The Bulgarian Council of Ministers allocated the equivalent of \$69,000 for the training of PA police and security service officers. The course would be organized by the Interior Ministry Academy. (*Xinhua*)

The PLO Executive Committee said in a statement that the Israeli decision to transfer part of its security command to the "E1" area near East Jerusalem was a prelude to settlement expansion in this vital region, leading to the division of the West Bank into two parts and making impossible the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. "Israel transforms the negotiating process into the greatest cover for the looting of the Palestinian land and... the settlement project," the Committee said. It called on all parties, especially the United States, to fulfil their promises to the PA to stop the "E1" settlement project. (*Ma'an News Agency, Wafa*)

9

Israeli gunboats opened fire towards fishing boats off the Gaza Strip coast near Rafah. (*Wafa*)

A rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in the Eshkol region of southern Israel without causing damage or injuries. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Palestinian witnesses said that a Palestinian had been shot dead in a clash with Israeli settlers. The Israeli military confirmed the shooting involving settlers and a Palestinian but had no further details. It said that it was still sorting out conflicting reports on the deadly clash. According to Israeli media, settlers said they had returned fire at the Palestinian who had fired at them. Palestinian villagers said he had apparently been hunting when the settlers killed him. (*AP*)

A 19-year-old Palestinian, Jamil Abu Anza, died from serious injuries he had sustained in an Israeli attack east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on 7 May. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Mortar shells from the Gaza Strip crashed into a southern Israeli community of Kfar Aza, killing a 48-year-old Israeli man as he worked in his garden and wounding three other people. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack. (*AP*)

Israeli aircraft fired missiles at two Hamas police stations in the southern Gaza Strip, killing five militants, Hamas and Gaza health officials said. The Israeli military confirmed the air strike and said that it had been responding to attacks on Israel, including the deadly mortar fire on Kfar Aza. (*AP*)

Dozens of Israeli settlers blocked a road junction south of Hebron in protest against IDF plans to remove the roadblock there and open the route to Palestinians.

(*The Jerusalem Post*)

The Rafah terminal would be reopened for three days, Hamas official Ayman Taha said. Sick Gazans would be allowed to cross into Egypt the following day and Egyptian and other foreign passport holders will be allowed to leave the Gaza Strip on 11 and 12 May. EU Border Assistance Mission officials said that they would not be present to monitor the crossing. (*Reuters*)

10

Two Palestinian fighters were injured while attempting to confront an Israeli incursion east of Khan Yunis, medical sources said. Thirteen Israeli armoured vehicles entered the area at dawn, firing heavily at fighters and civilians, witnesses said. Israeli forces bulldozed swaths of agricultural land during the incursion. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Six Palestinians were injured in stone-throwing clashes with Israeli soldiers, medics said. According to Palestinian security officials, when Israeli army jeeps entered the northern West Bank town of Jaba, Palestinian youths threw rocks and firebombs at them. The army fired rubber-coated steel pellets and live rounds, lightly wounding the six Palestinians. (*AP*)

A Palestinian from the Al-Shati refugee camp near Gaza City, Hamdi Eshbeer, died of wounds he had sustained four days before in an Israeli air strike on Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli soldiers beat a 31-year-old Palestinian man at a checkpoint at the entrance to the village of Azzun Atma near Qalqilya, severely wounding him. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

At least 21 rockets fired from the Gaza Strip struck Israel's western Negev region, lightly hurting five people and damaging buildings. (*Haaretz*)

The Gaza Strip's only power plant was shut down because of a fuel shortage, cutting off electricity to an estimated 800,000 people, the plant's director Mujahed Salama said. He said that Israel had not delivered industrial diesel fuel needed to operate the plant since 7 May. An Israeli military spokesperson said that Israel had stopped deliveries because the border crossing at Nahal Oz, normally used for oil transport, had been attacked again during the week by Palestinian militants.

(*DPA*)

Israeli settlers seized a Palestinian house in Artas village near Ramallah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

11

Undercover Israeli forces killed Usama Al-Astal, a 23-year-old member of Hamas' armed wing, the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, east of the town of Al-Qarara in the southern Gaza Strip, witnesses and medical sources said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired three rockets at Israel's western Negev region. There were no injuries, but several people were treated for shock. (*Haaretz*)

Egypt opened the Rafah border crossing to allow hundreds of Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip for advanced medical treatment. "We will transport 550 patients in 40 Palestinian ambulances and five trucks. All of them have official medical referrals from the Health Ministry," director of Gaza emergency services, Dr. Muawiya Hasanein, said, adding that the patients included 200 people wounded in Israeli military operations and 70 children under the age of 16. (*AFP*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert stated at the beginning of the weekly Cabinet meeting, "The reality that prevails today must change. Either there is quiet or the State of Israel will take the steps that it must in order to ensure quiet. This will not end in a day or a week. We never promised this; we cannot promise this. But I promise one thing: Either there is quiet or the State of Israel will take strong action that will - in the end - bring quiet." ([www.pmo.gov.il](http://www.pmo.gov.il))

The Jerusalem Municipality said that its planning commission had approved the route of a new bridge to a hilltop in the Old City holy to both Muslims and Jews. It was to be built on columns, above archaeological sites discovered when the old bridge was destroyed. (*AP*)

UNRWA spokesman Christopher Gunness said, "We're calling on the Israelis for an impartial investigation," into the death of a Palestinian teacher employed by the agency who had been killed in her home during an Israeli raid in the Gaza Strip a week earlier. A spokesman for the IDF said they were looking into the matter.

(*Haaretz*)

12

A 25-year-old Palestinian, Mu'ataz Abu Anza, died of wounds he had sustained during an Israeli incursion into the town of Khaza'a in the southern Gaza Strip on 7 May, bringing the death toll during the incursion to seven. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces seized overnight six Palestinians in Jenin, Ramallah and Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Two rockets fired from the Gaza Strip landed in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. A woman was treated for shock, and damage was caused to some homes. (*Haaretz*)

A 71-year-old Israeli woman was killed in a rocket attack in Moshav Yesha, 15 kilometres east of the Gaza Strip, considerably farther away than the usual targets of rockets fired by Gaza militants. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

US President Bush said that the peace process was not dependent on a single individual, responding indirectly to reporters' questions on whether the investigation of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert could derail peace talks. He said, "This is not an Olmert plan; this is a plan of a Government. [Israeli Foreign Minister] Tzipi Livni is handling the negotiations ... [Defence Minister Ehud] Barak is involved." (*AFP, Haaretz*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert told visiting Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman, during their meeting in Jerusalem, that Israel would not agree to the Egyptian proposal for a truce in the Gaza Strip unless it included the issue of arms smuggling and the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. (*Haaretz*)

Israel resumed fuel shipments to the Gaza Strip's main power station, a senior generating plant official said, adding that he expected the deliveries would be enough to run the facility for about three days. (*Reuters*)

13

A Palestinian was killed in an IAF air strike, according to Palestinian doctors. The IAF confirmed the attack, which took place in the Gaza Strip, across from Kibbutz Ein Hashlosa. Earlier, two rockets struck south of Ashkelon, sparking a fire in an open area. One woman was treated for shock. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli forces arrested two Palestinians affiliated with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the village of Beita near Nablus. Palestinian security sources said undercover Israeli forces infiltrated the village and entered a house where they made the arrests. The soldiers were accompanied by five military jeeps and an armoured personnel carrier. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA Minister of the Interior Abd Ar-Razaq Al-Yahya visited Jenin for a briefing on the latest security and political developments in the district. He met with security officials in the city's headquarters. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas said Palestinians might accept a framework agreement for a peace treaty with Israel if a final deal was unreachable by the end of the year, according to Nimr Hammad, political adviser to Mr. Abbas. "It is not what we want and does not meet our expectations, it however will keep things moving and this means pressure on Israel," Mr. Hammad said. He said the issue would be discussed at a three-way meeting Mr. Abbas would hold with US President George Bush and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm-el-Sheikh on 17 May. (*DPA*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said at an event organized by the National High Committee for the Commemoration of the *Nakba*: "I say to the Israeli people in particular, how can you celebrate [Independence] while the people of Palestine are groaning under your settlements, the crimes of your settlers, the siege of your State and the occupation practices of your army ... We are addressing the international community which turned a blind eye to the *Nakba*, saying to them today you cannot turn a blind eye what is happening in Palestine ... Israeli actions threaten what is left of Palestinian lands and the life of Palestinians. The intervention of the international community becomes more necessary than ever to prevent the addition of a new chapter to the *Nakba*." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahhar said that the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit would not be included in any truce deal with Israel, as suggested by Egyptian mediators and demanded by Israeli officials. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said, "If Israel does not agree to the ceasefire, all means are open to us."

(*Haaretz*)

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi told Parliament that Italy would defend "the existence and the historic identity of Israel, whose right to peace goes hand-in-hand with the undisputed right of Palestinians to the building of an independent State and a democracy capable of eradicating all forms of extremist intolerance and violence." (*AFP*)

At a press conference in Jerusalem, Quartet Representative Tony Blair unveiled an agreement between Israel and the PA, which included a package of steps designed to allow greater movement in the West Bank, and help the Palestinian economy grow in a way in which he said would be consistent with protecting Israeli security.

Mr. Blair added that Israel had agreed to remove four West Bank roadblocks, and ease restrictions on eight others. The roadblock known as "sheep roadblock" would be removed by the end of the week, followed by Shavei Shomron, Mehola and Halhul roadblocks. Mr. Blair said, "It would make a marked improvement," adding that the changes would, over time, significantly improve north-south and east-west movement in the West Bank. He also said he wanted to turn part of the West Bank into a showcase for easing Israeli movement restrictions and development of the Palestinian economy. (*AP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

Egypt closed its border with the Gaza Strip, a security official said, after opening it for three days to allow in Palestinians in need of medical treatment. About 1,433 Palestinians had crossed from the Gaza Strip into Egypt. (*AFP*)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Roberterry welcomed the announcement by the Quartet Representative Tony Blair of an initial package of measures to improve the social and economic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and in particular the package's focus on improving movement and access and opening up trade routes. He added that he hoped this would mark the beginning of improved mobility, economic growth, security and confidence.

According to Mr. Blair's announcement, among other things, Israel had agreed to remove some checkpoints across the West Bank. It had also approved thousands of entry permits to Israel for Palestinian workers. Both sides had also agreed to facilitate access to and from Bethlehem, which should have positive effects for both the Palestinian and Israeli tourism sectors. (*UN News Centre*)

14

Five Palestinians were killed and more than 15 injured in several Israeli air and ground raids in the Gaza Strip. Among the dead were two Hamas members and two civilians. In a separate incident, IDF soldiers shot dead an 18-year-old Palestinian during an incursion near the Jabalya refugee camp. In the West Bank, the Israeli Army arrested 12 Palestinians. (*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua*)

Two Palestinian militants from the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, were killed while three others were injured when Israeli military tanks targeted a group of fighters in the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood of Gaza City. Israeli artillery fired another shell at an open agricultural area near the American School in the northern Gaza Strip. No casualties were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hundreds of Palestinians clashed with IDF soldiers at military checkpoints in the West Bank. Some six people were reported injured at the Qalandiya checkpoint, north of Jerusalem, as protestors threw stones at IDF troops, who responded with rubber bullets and tear gas. Palestinian local leaders called on the Palestine refugees to march to the homes their parents and grandparents had lost 60 years ago. (*DPA, Haaretz*)

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for firing two rockets at an Israeli army base near the southern Gaza Strip. Another rocket fired from the Gaza Strip exploded in a shopping centre in the city of Ashkelon, wounding at least 10 people. (*Haaretz*)

A senior Israeli Defence source emphasized that "Israel is on a collision course with Hamas in Gaza that is reaching its conclusion." Meanwhile the contacts over a temporary ceasefire in the Gaza trip were expected to continue. Israel had not ruled out such an agreement and Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman was expected to return to Israel shortly to discuss the details of his initiative vis-à-vis Hamas in light of the new Israeli demand that the agreement include significant progress toward the release of abducted soldier Gilad Shalit. At the same time, a senior Israeli Government official said: "Any [broad] operation in Gaza will lead to the freezing of negotiations, and we want to make sure we will not be viewed as guilty [for the freeze]." (*Haaretz*)

IDF troops arrested 19 Palestinians during operations in the West Bank overnight. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Following his meeting with US President Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel was intent on abiding by the time frame set at the Annapolis Conference to achieve an agreement with the Palestinians by the end of the year. Mr. Olmert added that Israel was making enormous efforts to resolve the contentious issues of borders, refugees and security, and laying the groundwork for discussing the issue of Jerusalem in the future. He also said that Israel would not tolerate attacks by Hamas. (*Haaretz*)

Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak met with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, discussing, among other things, the attack on Ashkelon and Sderot. He invited her to view the situation from up close and to see how the people in the area lived. Mr. Barak also discussed with Secretary Rice the situation in the West Bank, saying that Israel planned to further ease restrictions on the Palestinian population there shortly, particularly in the northern West Bank. (*Haaretz*)

Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman had invited Hamas officials to Cairo to hear Israel's response to the proposed Egyptian truce with Israel in the Gaza Strip.

The delegation would also hold more talks with Egyptian leaders on the proposed truce, spokesman Ayman Taha said. (*AFP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

The Jerusalem municipality had begun the process of approving a plan for a new housing project, including a synagogue, in the heart of Silwan, south of the Old City. The plan, submitted by the Elad Association, included 10 apartments, kindergarten classrooms, a library and underground parking for 100 cars. A municipal spokesman said that Elad had leased the land, and therefore the plan did not require Israel Land Administration approval. The area slated for the new project was located 200 metres from the Old City walls. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert promised to build about 600 apartments in West Bank settlements. The announcement came shortly before President Bush arrived in

Israel. A Shas Party official affirmed that the Prime Minister agreed to new construction in the Betar Illit settlement near Jerusalem. "I am happy that they will approve the construction," Shas leader Eli Yishai told *Israel Radio*. The plan had not been announced officially. (AP)

15

Three Qassam rockets were fired in the evening into the town of Sderot in the western Negev. One of the rockets struck the yard of a pre-school institution adjacent to a synagogue, causing extensive damage but no casualties. Several persons were treated for shock. Earlier in the day, three rockets hit the Sha'ar Hanegev regional council. No injuries or damage were reported. (Haaretz)

IDF troops fired in the air and used tear gas to disperse dozens of Palestinian stone-throwers in a confrontation at the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing. There were no immediate reports of injuries. (The Jerusalem Post)

Muhammad Najjar, a 40-year-old Palestinian, died in an Israeli hospital where he was being treated from serious wounds he sustained in an Israeli strike on his house in Khuza'a in the southern Gaza Strip on 4 May. (Ma'an News Agency)

Reuters renewed its demand for a prompt explanation from the Israeli Army for firing at its cameraman Fadel Shana, a month after he was killed by an IDF tank crew in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Shana had been filming about 1.5 km from two Israeli tanks. The IDF army said that it had completed an initial field investigation that had determined that the soldiers had followed orders and acted appropriately. But military lawyers still had to study the case before the army could give a full account.

(Haaretz)

In a televised address on the day commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the *Nakba*, PA President Abbas said, "On this good and beloved land live two peoples.

One celebrates its independence and the other grieves in the commemoration of its *Nakba*." He also said that the security of Israel was linked to "our independence and security", but only ending the occupation could bring security for both peoples. He said it was time to end the catastrophe of the Palestinian people and for Israel to respond to the call for a just and comprehensive peace and achieve a historical compromise between the two peoples. (AFP, Wafa)

Thousands of Palestinians converged in the centre of Ramallah at midday for a demonstration to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Palestinian *Nakba* and to demand the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes in Israel. The demonstrators first gathered at a mock refugee camp, dubbed "Awda" [Return], set up across the street from the *Muqata'a*, the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians from all over the West Bank braved long waits at military checkpoints to attend the demonstration. Palestinian President Abbas' televised address was piped to the assembled crowd through a loudspeaker. Palestinian youths blocked the Jerusalem-Ramallah road with burning tires, metal dumpsters and large rocks, and threw stones at the Israeli soldiers, who responded with rubber-coated metal bullets and sonic bombs. Israeli military jeeps then forced the youths off the street and into the alleyways of the Qalandia refugee camp. (Ma'an News Agency)

At the start of a five-day tour of the Middle East US President George W. Bush addressed Members of the Knesset. He said, "We also believe that nations have a right to defend themselves and that no nation should ever be forced to negotiate with killers pledged to its destruction." He went on to say, "This struggle is waged with the technology of the twenty-first century, but at its core it is an ancient battle between good and evil. The killers claim the mantle of Islam, but they are not religious men. No one who prays to the God of Abraham could strap a suicide vest to an innocent child, or blow up guiltless guests at a Passover Seder, or fly planes into office buildings filled with unsuspecting workers. In truth, the men who carry out these savage acts serve no higher goal than their own desire for power. They accept no God before themselves. And they reserve a special hatred for the most ardent defenders of liberty, including Americans and Israelis. And that is why the founding charter of Hamas calls for the 'elimination' of Israel. And that is why the followers of Hezbollah chant Death to Israel, Death to America." Mr. Bush then expressed the hope that Palestinians "will have the homeland they have long dreamed of and deserved -- a democratic State that is governed by law, respects human rights, and rejects terror." (www.whitehouse.gov)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert stated at the Knesset session attended by US President George W. Bush that he was working on the US vision of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. He said that he was committed to carrying out President Bush's vision of forming an independent Palestinian State next to Israel. And when a deal was reached, Mr. Olmert said that he was certain that a majority of lawmakers and civilians would approve the motion. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

At a rally in the West Bank city of Ramallah, PA President Abbas called for an end to the occupation, stating that "It's time to end the *Nakba* of the Palestinian people." (Haaretz)

Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni said that the Palestinians would be able to celebrate their independence day on the same day that the word *nakba* or catastrophe was erased from their lexicon. (Haaretz)

16

Israeli Air Force airplanes carried out two raids on Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip. No casualties were reported. Three civilians were wounded, one of them seriously, during a third raid on the same area. (Wafa)

Unknown assailants detonated a bomb outside a Christian school in Gaza City, without causing injuries. The same school had been ransacked in June 2007.

(Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Dozens of settlers from the "Yitzhar" settlement in the West Bank rioted in the Asira al-Kabaliya village, causing extensive damage to property and beating up several Palestinians. According to the settlers, Palestinians from a nearby village provoked the clash. A similar incident had taken place two weeks earlier. (Ynetnews)

Israeli forces detained a Palestinian, 22-year-old Ahmed Nasser Abu Al-Kalbat, in Nablus. (Ma'an News Agency)

*Israel Radio* reported that Israel had asked Egypt to incorporate a deal to free Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in the ceasefire talks with Hamas being mediated by Egypt, which were due to resume the next week. A spokesperson for Hamas, Aiman Taha, confirmed that Hamas had delayed its visit to Cairo in connection with the ceasefire negotiations mediated by Omar Suleiman, Egypt's Intelligence Chief. He added that Hamas had not ruled out releasing Cpl. Shalit but that this involved conditions that differed from those currently set out in the ceasefire negotiations. In Gaza, Hamas spokesman Farzi Barhoum said that the organization was ready to conclude talks on releasing Shalit as soon as possible but that the issue was unconnected to the Gaza ceasefire. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad stated that the Palestine Investment Conference, to be held in Bethlehem from 21 to 23 May 2008, promised to be a historic event.

Mr. Fayyad said that it would jumpstart a process of integrating Palestine into the global economy. He said that the conference would also provide an opportunity to showcase the many promising investment opportunities in Palestine while strengthening public-private partnerships and reforming the economy. (www.pic-palestine.ps)

Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev stated, "This demand, which does not exist under international law, for the [Palestine refugees'] right of return, is the ultimate deal breaker. You cannot have peace and this demand at the same time." Mr. Regev acknowledged the suffering of Palestine refugees but insisted that PA President Abbas must abandon their claims if he wanted a Palestinian State. He said: "The so-called right of return is antithetical to a two-State solution."

(Reuters)

*Israel Radio* reported that the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations sought clarifications regarding the use of the word "*Nakba*" by a spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General at a press briefing. She is reported to have said that the Secretary-General had telephoned PA President Mahmoud Abbas to express his empathy with the Palestinian people on the day they mark the *Nakba*. Israel's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations was quoted as saying that the term was a tool of Arab propaganda used to undermine the legitimacy of the establishment of the State of Israel and must not be a part of the lexicon of the United Nations. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

17

Israeli Public Security Minister Avi Dichter told *Israel Radio* that Israel must destroy Hamas arsenal, saying it was almost on par with that of a sovereign State. In a separate interview, the outgoing Air Force Chief, Maj. Gen. Eliezer Shkedi, said that in a future war, Israel would come under heavy rocket attack, including from Hamas. (AP)

Abu Obeida, a spokesman for Hamas' military wing, said: "I think the occupation cannot carry out a wide ground operation in the Gaza Strip but it can shell the houses from the sky and cause casualties." He added that Hamas was prepared for any Israeli military escalation. Abu Ahmad, the spokesman for the Islamic Jihad's armed wing, said that it was ready to "face any aggression or new invasion against the Gaza Strip... There is an attempt to build pressure on the Palestinian resistance and terrify it," he said. (Xinhua)



President Bush told a news conference after meeting PA President Abbas in Sharm el-Sheikh: "I told the President that I am absolutely committed to working with him and his negotiators, as well as the Israelis, to get a State defined... The President and his team are committed to peace. They stand squarely against those who use violence to stop the peace process." Mr. Abbas said: "We are very delighted that the President is following all the details of everything and every discussion that is taking place in the Palestinian negotiations, as well as issues in the region." ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov))

18

A rocket fired from Gaza struck south of Ashkelon. No one was injured. (*Haaretz*)

The Israeli Army removed a major roadblock south of Hebron. Dozens of settlers from Hebron and the surrounding area protested against the move and demanded that Israeli and Palestinian motorists drive on different roads "for security reasons," Israel's *Public Radio* reported. (*AFP*)

A number of former Israeli army and security officials sent a letter to Prime Minister Olmert and other top ministers which said: "Recognizing that ending the Hamas regime in Gaza is not a realistic goal... non-public negotiations should take place with Hamas through Egypt or anyone else acceptable to both sides." Signatories included ex-Mossad Chief Ephraim Halevi, former Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and the former commander of Israeli troops in Gaza, Shmuel Zakai. (*Haaretz*)

"We are convinced that in no way can we allow the situation in the south to continue as it has in the past few months," Prime Minister Olmert told a meeting of his Cabinet. "The decisive crossroads regarding how to handle things is very close." (*AP*)

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit's talks with his Israeli counterpart had focused on the ongoing efforts to establish calm in the Gaza Strip and the latest developments concerning the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Egyptian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hossam Zaki said. A Hamas delegation was scheduled to meet in Cairo on 20 May with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman to hear from him the Israeli response to the truce proposal. (*Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas told reporters in Sharm el-Sheikh during the World Economic Forum: "[US President] Bush's speech in front of the Knesset angered us... We don't want the Americans to negotiate on our behalf... All that we want from them... is a minimum level of neutrality." (*AFP*)

President Bush told the World Economic Forum on the Middle East: "Last year at Annapolis, we made a hopeful beginning toward a peace negotiation that will outline what this nation of Palestine will look like a contiguous State where Palestinians live in prosperity and dignity... And I firmly believe that with leadership and courage, we can reach that peace agreement this year... Palestinians must fight terror and continue to build the institutions of a free and peaceful society. Israel must make tough sacrifices for peace and ease the restrictions on the Palestinians. Arab States, especially oil-rich nations, must seize this opportunity to invest aggressively in the Palestinian people and to move past their old resentments against Israel. And all nations in the region must stand together in confronting Hamas, which is attempting to undermine efforts at peace with acts of terror and violence." Egyptian President Mubarak noted in his opening address that the "international atmosphere has not supported Middle East peace effectively." Anyone who believes that cover will be provided for an agreement that does not fulfil the demands [of the Palestinians] is mistaken," he added. Jordan's King Abdullah II declared that after years of delay progress was possible in the Middle East process. "How much further ahead we would be if extremists forces had not had this issue to manipulate," he said. (*AFP*, [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org), [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov))

US National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley said that President Bush was open to a return trip to the Middle East though none was on the schedule. He said, "I think the President will come back here when there is work for him to advance the process." "We are not at the point where the President is going to have a meeting with President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert to try to declare a vision," he added. (*AFP*, *AP*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters that Palestinian and Israeli negotiators were holding serious discussions in private and these talks would likely intensify in the coming months. "They are not going to talk in front of the cameras about what it is they're doing, and if they did, the negotiations would be dead on that day," she said. (*AFP*)

The Israeli army evacuated a settlement outpost near Nablus. Several settlers who refused to leave were arrested. (*AFP*)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh reiterated the demand that Israel release 450 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. "Those who kidnapped Shalit maintain their demands on the number and identities of the Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Shalit," he said in a televised speech. (*AFP*)

19

Israeli forces arrested 25 Palestinians in Ramallah, Jenin, Qalqilya and a village near Nablus, PA security sources said. (*Xinhua*)

The IDF announced that they had killed an armed Palestinian man at the Hawara checkpoint near Nablus, who they said was pacing back and forth at the checkpoint and who had an object that appeared to be an explosives belt strapped to his body. When he lowered his hands suddenly toward the explosives, the IDF troops fired at him. A taxi driver who witnessed the scene stated that the troops had asked him to lift his shirt and raise his arms and they then shot him. It was reported that an IDF investigation revealed that the youth had been carrying three pipe bombs which were later detonated by the army. A Palestinian security source indicated that the person in question was 16-year-old Fahmi Dardouk from Nablus. (*Haaretz*, *Ma'an News Agency*, *The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak will discuss the Gaza Strip ceasefire with Egyptian President Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh, and is set to tell him and Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman that Israel is prepared to stop its military activities in Gaza if Hamas stopped firing rockets at Israel. Israel will also try to get Egypt to step up efforts to stop weapons smuggling. Mr. Barak is also expected to say that Israel would lift the blockade only if progress is made on talks aimed at releasing captive IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Israel had eased criteria for the release of prisoners with "blood on their hands," Israeli security sources said, and the gap on the prisoner swap was slightly smaller than it had been a few months ago. (*AP*, *Haaretz*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni suggested, during talks with the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, that Israel and the Palestinians were not likely to reach an agreement on the core issues in 2008. Ms. Livni said, "The time frame in which an agreement will be reached is important, but its contents are even more important. Strict timetables may create expectations, disappointment and violence. As a lesson from the past, we must give the sides the room and the time to reach an agreement. We also know that agreements that lack in clarity only perpetuate the conflict, not bring it to an end." (*Haaretz*)

France had had informal contacts with Hamas, Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said, confirming a report in the daily *Le Figaro* that quoted a retired French diplomat as saying he had met with Hamas leaders Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and Ismail Haniyeh a month ago. "These are not relations, they are contacts. We must be able to talk if we want to play a role," the Minister said, adding that Hamas was "more flexible than before" but for the moment did not recognize the State of Israel.

Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip Sami Abu Zuhri confirmed the contacts with France, adding that other European countries had also spoken to Hamas. (*AP*, *Ynetnews*)

Israel's Vice Premier Haim Ramon told a Kadima faction meeting: "We are conducting negotiations with Hamas in contrast to the Government's decision, which has determined that it will only be possible to deal with Hamas after it accepts the conditions of the Quartet." (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli authorities allowed a small shipment of fuel into the Gaza Strip, according to Ahmad Ali, the head of the Palestinian Oil Corporation Gaza. "The Israelis shipped two truckloads of cooking gas and two others of industrial diesel for running the power generating station. No benzene [gasoline] or ordinary diesel was shipped," he said. He explained that the power plant consumed between 500,000 and 600,000 litres of diesel fuel per day, and Israel was allowing just two million per week. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

20

The IAF confirmed launching three air strikes in which four Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip. They included a farmer, identified as 32-year-old Ali Ad-Dahdouh, and a 13-year-old, both in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip. The Izzad Din Al-Qassam Brigades (armed wing of Hamas) and Palestinian medical sources said that two militants, one of whom was identified as 25-year-old Muhammad 'Udah, had been killed and others injured in Israeli shelling in the Zaytoun neighbourhood of Gaza City. The IAF said that it had fired at persons launching rockets or planting explosives. (*AP*, *Haaretz*, *Ma'an News Agency*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Ynetnews*)

A senior Egyptian official said that Israel had accepted in principle a proposal for a truce in the Gaza Strip. "Israeli leaders [have informed us] of their support for and understanding of the Egyptian proposal for a truce." Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman reportedly relayed the news to a Hamas delegation from the Gaza Strip earlier in the day. Mark Regev, spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said, "As far as we are concerned, we can only indicate that contacts are continuing." Meanwhile, Israeli Cpl. Shalit's father, Noam, said Mr. Olmert had personally promised him in a telephone conversation that his son would be included in any agreement or arrangement reached with Hamas. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli defence officials stated that a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas could take effect in the coming days after Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak had cleared the way by easing a previous demand that the ceasefire be conditioned on the release of soldier Gilad Shalit. Under the initial ceasefire agreement, both sides would stop attacks against each other. Mr. Shalit's release and an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip would be discussed later. (*AP*)

The Islamic Jihad said that it expected Israel to try to crush resistance in the Gaza Strip before announcing its acceptance of a ceasefire. Islamic Jihad leader Khaled Al-Batsh said that the Israeli operation against the Gaza Strip was expected to be "limited" and that the ceasefire would be delayed until it had been completed. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian and international officials began arriving for a three-day Palestine Investment Conference to be held in Bethlehem from 21 to 23 May 2008. Dr. Hasan Abu Libda, the Director of the Conference, did not expect the event to bring about tangible changes on the ground but expressed the hope that "light could be shed" on the opportunities and capabilities of the Palestinian economy. He said that the Palestinian private sector might be able, through the Conference, to establish and maintain economic ties with the rest of the Arab world and other regions. Dr. Abu Libda said that among the business proposals to be presented at the Conference was a major contract between a Palestinian businessman and Arab investors which could create 10,000 jobs. PA Minister of the Economy Kamal Hassuna stated that the main objective of the Conference was to get the visitors to learn about the Palestinian economy first-hand and create an "atmosphere of cooperation" between them and the Palestinian private sector. ([www.pic-palestine.ps](http://www.pic-palestine.ps), Ma'an News Agency)

21

Five Palestinian children were wounded in an Israeli air strike on a car in the northern Gaza Strip, Palestinian health officials said. Those hit included two babies less than a year old and children aged 5, 12 and 14. Earlier, an Israeli artillery shell landed in the east of Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, moderately wounding a Palestinian teenager, paramedics said. (AFP, AP, Xinhua)

An IDF soldier was slightly wounded when a mortar shell fired by militants in the Gaza Strip exploded near him at the Zikim military base. Another soldier was slightly injured when a Palestinian driving a car ran him over near Tulkarm in the West Bank. (Haaretz)

The IDF arrested six Palestinians in overnight raids in the West Bank. (Haaretz)

A Palestinian teenager, Khalid Abdul Hadi, died of the wounds sustained when he was shot by Israeli troops in the central Gaza Strip in the previous month. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Palestine Investment Conference opened in Bethlehem, bringing together more than 1,000 business persons and Government officials from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Arab world and beyond. Asked how the success or failure of the conference would be defined, Director of the Conference Hassan Abu Libdeh said, "For a first conference ... the fact that we are meeting here, that we have about 500 participants from outside Palestine, it is a true measure of success for this conference. The success, as far as we are concerned, is to have those investors come, meet with our colleagues, have some networking, business-to-business meetings, maybe strike some deals, maybe do some shopping and go home." Fifteen countries sent official delegations, including the United Arab Emirates, led by the Undersecretary of the Economy, and a leading member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family. Attending also were PA President Abbas, Quartet Representative Tony Blair, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, and the Jordanian Minister of Industry and Trade. More than 100 investment projects, worth over \$1.0 billion, would be introduced. (AP, Ma'an News Agency)

A Saudi company planned to invest in a \$250 million construction project in the West Bank, Palestinian officials said. The company, identified as Al Ard Al Qabeda, was to join with the Palestine Investment Fund to build residential and office towers, malls and a hotel in the West Bank town of Al Bireh, near Ramallah. (AP)

A study by the Palestinian Centre for Communications and Development Studies reported that Hebron was now facing a more than 70 per cent increase in poverty due to the continuing Israeli closures. The poverty rate had now risen to 77 per cent. Head of the Centre Jamil Ad-Derbashi said most of the city's residents depended on trade and commerce, both of which have decreased precipitously. The turnover from trade used to reach \$75 million a month, but now was only \$5 million a month, seriously affecting Hebron residents. (Ma'an News Agency)

Egypt opened the Rafah crossing for the return of 22 Gazans treated in Egyptian hospitals. (Haaretz)

The Israeli Housing Ministry announced its plan to build 286 new houses in the "Beitar Illit" settlement, near Bethlehem. (AFP, Haaretz, Reuters)

22

A suicide bomber driving a truck loaded with at least four tons of explosives tried to ram the Erez crossing between Gaza and Israel, killing himself but causing no other casualties. A spokesman for Islamic Jihad said that his group carried out the attempted attack in cooperation with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Israeli troops opened fire into a crowd protesting against the siege on the Gaza Strip at another border passage near the Kami crossing several hours later, killing Abdel Karim Ahel, 22, and wounding 17, some of them seriously. The rally, started off by midday prayer, was organized by Hamas, with the presence of about 2,000 protesters. Over the past two days, Hamas had been calling on its supporters to march towards the crossing to "break the siege." (AFP, AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

Israeli forces shot dead a 62-year-old Palestinian farmer, Salim Al-Bahaysa, during an incursion into the central Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces arrested three Palestinians in the village of Burqin, west of Jenin. (Ma'an News Agency)

"The Palestinian groups will not give a truce to Israel if Israel does not accept our demand to end the closure, open borders and stop aggression," Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said in a statement. (AFP)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert told visiting French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner that Israel intended to conduct negotiations on both the Syrian and the Palestinian tracks, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's office. The Prime Minister also said that Israel "aspires to reach peace with the Palestinians in the coming year." Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev told Xinhua that the "coming year" might be a mistranslation and it should refer to the current year of 2008. (Xinhua)

PA President Abbas told a joint news conference with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner in Ramallah: "We discussed the peace process, and we say frankly that we want Europe to have a role. We insist on it. ... It's true that Europe offers economic support, but we also want it to play an important political role. It is geographically the closest to the Middle East and best understands the region." Mr. Kouchner told the news conference that the EU "must not just play the role of cashier to dispense money" in aid to the Palestinians. "We must stand by the side of our Palestinian and Israeli friends to participate in progress in the peace process ... to be positive and to help, not to be anti-American," he said. Mr. Kouchner, who had met earlier in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni, said: "France's position is clear. ... We are completely against the creation of new settlements and have always insisted to our Israeli friends that this must stop. We restated this position yesterday and today in Israel," he said. He played down recent contacts between France and Hamas. "There was only one meeting, you know about that and it is over. ... It was a simple contact aimed at gathering information on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

It was not a political negotiation," he said of talks a senior retired diplomat had with Hamas leaders. (AFP)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, speaking on the second day of the Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem, told hundreds of foreign investors that investing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would be an investment in peace. "The Palestinian economy, despite the difficulties we face, has great potential to grow and develop in the future ... The Palestinian economy will revive with the creation of a free, competitive and diversified market." The Prime Minister also said that more efforts should be made "to overcome the (Israeli) restrictions on the movement of people and merchandise and access to resources." Conference Director Hassan Abu Libdeh said that 109 projects costing \$2 billion would be presented by Palestinian business leaders to the investors. In an interview with Al-Ayyam, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said that to achieve economic growth of six to eight per cent annually, Israel must withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and stop building settlements. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency)

At the Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem, World Bank Managing Director Juan Jose Daboub said, "You may have several justified questions about the viability of commercial activities here under the current circumstances, with the number of checkpoints riddling the Palestinian Territories, and with the security incidents often taking place. And rightly you should. Analysis by the World Bank has shown that while economic growth will be modestly positive this year, this trend would have been much higher in the absence of the current movement and access restrictions." He said the World Bank was devoting a total of \$3 billion to the Palestinians through various means. (AFP, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org))

At the Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem, a group of entrepreneurs announced the establishment of a new \$100 million capital holding company, Watan, to focus on building three factories for cement, steel and bricks production, according to Michael Sayegh, a Jordanian entrepreneur, one of the founders and main shareholders. He said that the new holding company, with 15 shareholders, mainly Jordanian and Palestinian, would start in a few months a process to establish an affiliate public shareholding industrial company to build the three factories. The cement factory alone would cost about \$380 million. Another joint project worth \$12 million would witness the construction of a farm for hatching and breeding turkeys and a slaughterhouse in the Jordan Valley area. (DPA)

US Overseas Private Investment Corporation presented a political risk insurance programme to help finance investments in the West Bank, part of an international



effort to help develop the local economy and pave the way for an independent Palestinian State. The measure, announced at the Palestine Investment Conference, was meant to allay concerns by investors about risking their money in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. A Qatari and Saudi company signed two separate construction deals with Palestinian partners for a total of \$ 550 million. The Qatari company signed a deal for building a new town in the West Bank, the first planned community in the West Bank. PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said that PA President Abbas had signed a new law regulating companies. "This is just part of several laws aimed at reducing the tax burden and encouraging investment," he said. US Treasury Deputy Secretary Robert Kimmitt, who led a six-member presidential delegation to the conference, said that he would urge US companies to consider investment opportunities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (AP, Haaretz)

The International Labor Organization (ILO) issued a new [report](#) on the situation of workers of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, depicting a much degraded employment and labour situation that had deteriorated alarmingly in a number of aspects. The report said that only 130 working industrial establishments remained in Gaza and all 120 construction businesses had closed at a cost of around 42,000 jobs. ILO official Philippe Egger told journalists, "What we are witnessing in Gaza is a very, very serious social situation with high levels of poverty and very high levels of desperation, frustration and anger ... The cause of this massive economic decline is not globalization, it is not cyclones, it is not drought or climate change, it is military occupation." He added that "Palestinians suffer massive discrimination in all walks of life and have scant hope that their situation will improve any time soon ... When you see cars of settlers flying through checkpoints and the Palestinians taking four hours to pass from one part of the city to another, one begins to ask major questions. ... What we have found in talking to Palestinian employees and workers is a huge credibility gap between the ongoing peace negotiations and the daily lives of Palestinians." Commenting on the announcement made by Quartet Representative Tony Blair that Israel had agreed to remove some checkpoints across the West Bank, Mr. Egger said, "We have spoken to his team in Jerusalem ... but our assessment is that there's been absolutely no progress whatsoever." (AFP, DPA)

The PA Civil Affairs Department announced that the Israeli authorities had approved 152 applications of Palestine refugees seeking to be reunited with their families in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (Ma'an News Agency)

23

Israeli troops killed five Palestinian militants during raids into the Gaza Strip. An Israeli air strike on gunmen east of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip killed three Hamas militants, medical workers said. An Israeli army spokesperson confirmed that a strike had been carried out against militants who had fired an anti-tank missile at troops, moderately wounding a soldier. Separately, Islamic Jihad said that two of its fighters had been killed by Israeli soldiers in the central Gaza Strip. According to an Israeli army spokesperson, soldiers fired at a group of gunmen who had tried to plant a bomb near the border fence with the Gaza Strip. Medical workers said that soldiers had arrested about 30 Palestinians during the raid. (Reuters)

Israeli forces arrested four Palestinians in Ramallah and Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinians fired two Qassam rockets towards Israel's western Negev region, causing no injuries. One of the rockets landed in a greenhouse area near Sderot, causing fire in a nearby wheat field. The second rocket landed in an open area. (Ynetnews)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said that the Palestine Investment Conference had helped raise investments for projects worth \$1.4 billion, which included housing, high-tech and telecommunications. The investments could create as many as 35,000 jobs, Mr. Fayyad said at the end of the three-day conference, adding that more than \$500 million was in real estate and \$65 million in high-tech. Wataniya Mobile planned to invest \$650 million to set up a second mobile phone service in the Palestinian areas, and announced the day before that it had received assurances that it would soon be assigned the necessary frequencies for operations. The closing session was attended by French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, who criticized Israel's network of roadblocks and checkpoints. "The restrictions on access and mobility are still significant. ... They have not yet been alleviated as they should have. Israel should and Israel can exert more efforts in this regard without endangering its security," Mr. Kouchner said. He also said, "Nothing justifies the settlement expansion, which constitutes an impediment to peace, as well as an obstacle obstructing the development of the Palestinian economy." (AP)

At the conclusion of the Palestinian Investment Conference, a [declaration](#) was adopted expressing the joint strategic vision of the Palestinian Authority and the private sector, not only to institute the coordination and complementarity between them, but also to create an organized and institutional relationship, in order to invigorate the Palestinian economy and support the leading role of the private sector within the process of economic development. ([www.pic-palestine.ps](http://www.pic-palestine.ps))

The Department for International Development [said](#), that Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for International Development of the United Kingdom, announced a £3 million initiative to support small businesses in the Occupied Palestinian Territory at the Palestinian Investment Conference. ([www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk))

24

In the Gaza Strip, the Jihad Jibril Brigades, a group linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command, launched four projectiles from the Gaza Strip into the Israeli town of Netivot. Separately, a group called the Al-Asifa Brigades of the Martyr Dalal Al Maghrebi claimed responsibility for launching two homemade projectiles at the Sufa military installation. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Saraya Al-Quds Brigades (armed wing of Islamic Jihad) claimed responsibility for launching two projectiles at Miftahim, an Israeli town to the east of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip. The Brigades said in statement that the operation was in response to the ongoing attacks against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency)

25

The IDF attacked and wounded five activists demonstrating against the separation wall, and arrested three others during a peaceful demonstration in the West Bank village of Ni'lin, local sources said. The IDF troops fired tear gas, sonic grenades and rubber coated bullets at civilians, including international activists, wounding five of them. Three participants were arrested, including two internationals. (Wafa)

The IDF seized three Palestinian youths from the northern West Bank village of Zeita, north of Tulkarm. (Ma'an News Agency)

A group calling themselves the Abu Ammar Brigades, a military wing of Fatah, claimed responsibility for launching one homemade projectile at the Israeli town of Sderot. Separately the Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for launching two rockets at Sderot. (Ma'an News Agency)

In Cairo, Amos Gilad, a senior aide to Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak, met Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman for the latest round of talks with Egyptian mediators attempting to forge a truce with Hamas. (AFP)

Palestinian officials close to peace talks said that Israel had offered a West Bank withdrawal map that leaves about 8.5 per cent of the territory in Israeli hands, less than a previous plan, but still more than the Palestinians were ready to accept. Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, and other PA officials, however, said that the report was unsubstantiated. Meanwhile, PA President Abbas was quoted as saying that the negotiations had achieved no progress since they were restarted last November. (The Jerusalem Post)

Former US President Jimmy Carter said that the United Kingdom and other European Governments should break from the US over the international embargo on the Gaza Strip. Mr. Carter described the EU position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as "supine" and its failure to criticize the Israeli blockade of Gaza as "embarrassing". He said that the blockade on Gaza, imposed by the US, EU, UN and Russia after the Hamas election victory in 2006, was one of the greatest human rights crimes on Earth, since it meant the imprisonment of 1.6 million people, 1 million of whom were refugees. "Most families in Gaza are eating only one meal per day. To see Europeans going along with this is embarrassing," Carter said. He called on the EU to reassess its stance if Hamas agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza. "Let the Europeans lift the embargo and say we will protect the rights of Palestinians in Gaza, and even send observers to Rafah gate [Gaza's crossing into Egypt] to ensure the Palestinians don't violate it." (The Guardian)

26

At a closed meeting at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, said that the PA was prepared to accept limitations on the degree to which the security services of the future Palestinian State would be armed. "We don't need tanks or planes, but we will not relinquish our self-respect," he said. "But it's clear to everyone that on the security issue, the [peace] agreement cannot be implemented without the prominent intervention of America as a third party." (Haaretz)

Speaking at a Knesset Foreign Affairs Committee meeting, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said that only delusional people believed it was possible to hold onto the greater Land of Israel, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Six-Day War. He also said that the notion of Israel becoming a State "of all its citizens" was gaining credence within elites in the United States. He was speaking of what would be, in effect, a one-State solution whereby Palestinians receive Israeli citizenship.

"This is a very dangerous process that endangers the continuation of our existence as a Jewish State," he said, warning that if Israel did not reach an agreement with the Palestinian Authority it would eventually face a Hamas leadership in the West Bank, as opposed to the more moderate Fatah faction. (*Haaretz*) Hamas confirmed that it had held contacts with the Arab League and Qatar to achieve reconciliation with Fatah. Ahmed Youssef, an adviser of former PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, said that Hamas' Political Bureau Chief Khaled Masha'al asked Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa and the Qatari Prince to arrange for the reconciliation. Mr. Youssef said, "The responses were positive and they promised to look into the request after consultations with all parties, including the Palestinian Presidency." (*Xinhua*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II met with visiting US Congressional aides in Amman. During the meeting he emphasized the importance of finding a just and lasting settlement for the Palestinian issue, as the core issue underlying the conflict in the region. He also said it was important that the international community keep its support for the Palestinian Authority, to strengthen its institutions and mitigate the suffering of Palestinians and establish its independent State. (*Wafa*)

PA President Abbas received officials from Hamas in the Presidential compound at the Muqataa in Ramallah, Palestinian sources said. The Hamas delegation delivered a letter from Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails calling for unity. According to the source, the delegation included former Minister Nasr al-Sha'ir, Sheikh Hamid Al-Bitawi and Samir Abu 'Eisha. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, meeting in Brussels, adopted [conclusions](#) on the Middle East peace process in which it made a commitment to support the parties in the ongoing negotiations on all outstanding issues; emphasized the need for swift and tangible results on the ground in order to sustain Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; expressed deep concern about the recent accelerated settlement expansion; condemned the continued firing of rockets from Gaza on southern Israel; called for the progressive removal of Israeli restrictions on movement and access in order to improve the situation on the ground and living conditions in the West Bank and revitalize the Palestinian economy; expressed deep concern about the unsustainable humanitarian situation in Gaza; and made a commitment to assisting Palestinian State-building efforts across a broad range of areas. The Council welcomed the Palestinian Authority's efforts to develop an effective and reformed security sector and encouraged ongoing efforts towards the fulfilment of its road map obligations in that field; and underlined the need to deliver on pledges made at the International Donor's Conference in Paris in December 2007. ([www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu))

Ayman Daraghma, a Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), said PA President Abbas had told a Hamas delegation at a meeting in Ramallah that "it is necessary to work on overcoming the internal Palestinian impasse." Meanwhile, Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar was reported to be going to Qatar to look into a possible Hamas-Fatah meeting for reconciliation. (*Xinhua*)

The International Committee of the Red Cross called on Israel to allow Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to visit relatives in Israeli jails, a practice suspended a year ago after Hamas took over the Strip. Christoph Hamisch, head of the ICRC's delegation in Israel and the Palestinian territories, said in a statement, "While we acknowledge Israel's security concerns, we strongly believe that they alone cannot justify the all-out suspension of family visits to detainees. This measure is depriving both detainees and their relatives of an essential life line," Mr. Hamisch said. (*Haaretz*)

Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip said in a report that Israel had arrested more than 2,700 Palestinians in 2008, most of them in the West Bank. The report stated that 255 children under the age of 18 had been arrested as well as 14 women. There were medical patients, senior citizens, national movement leaders and mayors among those arrested. Hebron had the largest share of the arrests, with 700 people detained in 2008, the report said. Six hundred of the detainees came from the Gaza Strip. Twenty-eight Israeli jails and detention centres were full of Palestinian prisoners. He said that the total number of Palestinian detainees in Israel's custody exceeded 11,700. The report also said that Israel was increasing the use of administrative detention, under which prisoners could be held without charge or trial virtually indefinitely. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

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The IDF wounded 15 children and arrested 9 Palestinians in Qalqilya, emergency and aid sources said. The troops fired tear gas and rubber coated bullets towards children between 10 and 15 years of age whose wounds were reported to be light to moderate. (*Wafa*)

At least 30 anti-wall demonstrators, including an *Al-Jazeera* journalist and a *Watan TV* cameraman, were wounded in a peaceful demonstration in Ni'lin village in the West Bank, Anti-Wall Popular Committee Coordinator A'hed Khawaja said. (*Wafa*)

28

An Israeli air strike in the southern Gaza Strip killed two Hamas gunmen firing mortars at Israeli forces and wounded four others, Hamas said. An earlier Israeli strike had wounded four militants from the Islamic Jihad. The IDF confirmed both air strikes, saying they targeted militants firing mortar shells, one of which had struck directly a western Negev home. (*AP, Haaretz*)

The IDF arrested nine Palestinians in Nablus, Bethlehem and Jenin, PA security sources said. (*Wafa*)

The first battalion of more than 600 members of the PA National Security Force trained in Jordan under a United States programme returned to their base in Jericho, Western officials said. The men will undergo additional US-sponsored training and receive new equipment before being deployed in the West Bank in August. (*Reuters*)

Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, described the latest meeting between the Palestinian and Israeli sides as serious. He told reporters that the meeting covered all final status issues, but no progress was achieved. He said that the Palestinians raised the issue of settlement expansion, including that of "Beitar Ili", affirming that those activities undermined stability and peace in the region. (*Wafa*)

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for PA President Abbas, said after Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak had called on Prime Minister Olmert to step down over corruption allegations: "No doubt, what's happening will leave a negative impact on negotiations." (*Reuters*)

Leading a Human Rights Council-mandated fact-finding mission to the Gaza Strip to investigate the killing of 19 Palestinian civilians in 2006 by an Israeli artillery attack, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu listened to members of the Assama family tell what had happened on that day. Archbishop Tutu had met the day earlier with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh urging him to put an end to rocket attacks by militant groups against Israel. Archbishop Tutu also said he was moved to tears by the "unacceptable" situation in the territory which was under a tight Israeli blockade, which he condemned. He said: "The incident we are meant to investigate was a violation of human rights in the fact that civilians were targeted." (*AFP*)

Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert H. Serry [briefed](#) the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. (*UN press release SC/9341*)

The University and College Union in England passed a motion at its annual conference calling on academics to "consider the moral and political implications of educational links with Israeli institutions, and to discuss the occupation with individuals and institutions concerned." (*Haaretz*)

29

A mortar shell fired from the Gaza Strip directly hit a home in Israel, but did not explode. Earlier, Gaza militants had fired five mortar shells and three rockets into the western Negev; two rockets struck just south of Ashkelon. No injuries or damage were reported in these strikes. (*Haaretz*)

A Palestinian died due to major injuries he had sustained in an Israeli incursion the previous day, Palestinian medical sources announced. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A 70-year-old Palestinian woman was shot some 300 yards from the Gaza-Israel fence by Israeli forces during a raid of the Khaza'a area, east of Khan Yunis. She died of her wounds the following day. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

The IDF arrested 60 Palestinians east of Beit Hanoun when Israeli military vehicles raided the area under cover of intensive gunfire. Bulldozers razed agricultural areas. (*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces raided the village of Ni'lin, west of Ramallah, detaining four men from the village. The mayor of Ni'lin said that the incursion and detentions were aimed at suppressing planned activities against the construction of the separation wall on the lands of the village. Israeli forces also arrested three Palestinians from the refugee camp of Nur Shams near Tulkarm. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

From 4 September 2007 to 29 April 2008, there was an overall increase in the number of roadblocks in the West Bank, from 566 to 607, the May 2008 [OCHA Closure Update](#) said. The net increase of 41 resulted from the construction of 144 (11 staffed and 133 un-staffed) obstacles alongside the removal of 103 (11 staffed and 92 unstaffed). ([www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org))

Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar said that Qatari-mediated talks between Hamas and Fatah were scheduled to take place soon. He had met with Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani in an earlier visit to Qatar. Mr. Al-Zahhar, however, expressed doubts on whether reconciliation attempts would be successful,

saying: "Abu Mazen [PA President Abbas] will not take a single step closer to Hamas" until US President Bush's term was over. (*Ma'an News Agency*)  
South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu told a press conference as he concluded the Human Rights Council-mandated fact-finding mission to the Gaza Strip: "My message to the international community is that our silence and complicity, especially on the situation in Gaza, shames us all... Gaza needs the engagement of the outside world, especially its peacemakers." Professor Christine Chinkin who accompanied him said: "I think what we've seen shows plenty of evidence of at least the possibility of war crimes that needs much further independent investigation... I would certainly say the concept of collective punishment in a situation of occupation constitutes the notion of war crimes and possibly of a crime against humanity." (*AFP*)

30

At least seven Palestinians were injured, two critically, when Israeli troops opened fire at a demonstration of some 10,000 Palestinians at the Sufa crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel. The protestors called for an end to the blockade. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post*)

Two Qassam rockets struck the western Negev. No injuries or damage were reported. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert requested a meeting with PA President Abbas, before Mr. Olmert's departure for Washington on 2 June. (*Ynetnews*)

The US State Department withdrew the Fulbright grants of eight Palestinian students from the Gaza Strip because they had been denied exit visas by Israel. US Secretary of State Rice, travelling in Stockholm, said that she was not aware of the matter and would look into it. US State Department Spokesman Tom Casey said, "We are trying to revisit this issue with the Israeli Government." (*AP, Haaretz, Reuters*)

Israel issued tenders for the construction of 120 homes in the "Har Homa" settlement in East Jerusalem. (*Haaretz*)

31

The Israeli Army said that a Thai agricultural worker had been wounded by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip. The military wing of Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the rocket fire, which had struck the Israeli village of Miftahim. Meanwhile, the National Resistance Brigades, the military wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, claimed responsibility for shelling Sderot and the military base of Zikim with three missiles. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas threatened to escalate its measures to break the blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip. Hamas spokesman in Gaza Sami Abu Zuhri said, "The threat to carry out measures to break the siege came after the Egyptian efforts to reach a truce with Israel had failed... because Israel wants calm without ending the blockade, and imposes new conditions on reaching a truce." He stressed that "The aim of the truce efforts was to end our people's suffering." (*Xinhua*)

Fatah called on the Security Council to work for lifting the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. Fatah spokesman Ahmed Abdel Rahman told *Voice of Palestine* radio: "There are people dying now in the Gaza Strip ... Where is the Security Council?" He appealed to international human rights groups and the Quartet to pressure Israel to reopen the crossing points into Gaza and suggested that the Security Council should take control of the crossings, adding, "The black coup by Hamas can not be taken as a pretext to keep the siege which turns the Strip into a collective detention camp." (*Xinhua*)

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