

Division for Palestinian Rights
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine**
 Monthly media monitoring review
March 2007

Monthly highlights

- World Bank reports Palestinian Authority faces a fiscal crisis that could threaten its existence. ([7 March](#))
- PA President Abbas and PA Prime Minister Haniyeh agree on a National Unity Government. ([15 March](#))
- UN convoy carrying senior UNRWA official is ambushed in the Gaza Strip. ([16 March](#))
- Palestinian Legislative Council overwhelmingly approves new Palestinian Unity Government. ([17 March](#))

1

Palestinian gunmen shot and wounded an Israeli settler driving through the occupied West Bank, medical sources said. The 55-year-old man from the "Tzofim" settlement, near Qalqilya, was "evacuated to a hospital with light to moderate wounds", said Yerucham Mandola, spokesman of the Magen David Adom rescue services. (AFP)

IDF snipers wounded an armed Palestinian in the Fara'a refugee camp, northeast of Nablus. (Ha'aretz)

The IDF arrested and beat six farmers as they were working on their farms in Kherbat Tama east of Nablus, local sources said. The soldiers detained the farmers until dawn at al-Hamra Israeli checkpoint. (Wafa)

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) voiced deep concern about the arrest by the IDF of a local television director and the harassment of several journalists during a military operation in Nablus. In a statement, the CPJ revealed that Israeli soldiers had detained Nabegh Break, owner and managing director of the local *Sanabel* television station, after raiding his home in Nablus' Old City. Mr. Break was taken to Israel's Hawara detention centre, south of Nablus, where he remained held without charge. (Wafa)

Israeli troops left Nablus after five days of searches during which they killed one Palestinian and arrested several "suspected" militants, Palestinian eyewitnesses and officials said. An Israeli army spokeswoman did not confirm whether the operation, code-named "Hot Winter" and the largest in the West Bank in months, had ended. (DPA)

Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, in an interview with the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Ayyam*, said that Israel could not accept the 2002 Arab League peace initiative in its current formulation. Ms. Livni said that the issue of borders must be resolved through negotiations, not to be determined in advance. As for the Palestinian refugees proposal, she said it was unacceptable to Israel. Ms. Livni said Israel's stance on the new Palestinian unity government would depend on the extent to which the new government meets the three demands of the Quartet. (Ha'aretz)

The Tel Aviv District Court convicted three Israelis of manslaughter for transporting the suicide bomber who struck outside Netanyahu's HaSharon Mall in July 2005, killing five people and wounding over 90. Shani Saif Azzam of Taibeh, Abd Abu Mukh of Baka al-Garbiyeh and Kfir Levi of Ramat Gan were also convicted of causing injury to those wounded in the attack. Messrs. Azzam and Levi were found to have assisted the terrorist cross the Green Line to Taibeh, from which point Mr. Abu Mukh transported him to Netanyahu. (Ha'aretz)

Israel was expecting the League of Arab States to adopt the "Arab Initiative", an improved version of the Saudi peace plan, at the League's forthcoming summit meeting at the end of this month in Riyadh, senior Israeli Government sources said. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that first and foremost, Israel objected to the section of the document on the Palestinian refugees, which was not part of the initial Saudi draft but had been added at the 2002 Arab League Summit in Beirut. "A new summit is in the offing, and they ought to know which parts [of the plan] are acceptable to Israel and what seems to us like an absolute red line," she explained in an interview with *Channel 10* television. Ms. Livni said that the original draft presented by Saudi King Abdullah called for a full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders in exchange for peace and normalization with the entire Arab world. The new article inserted at the 2002 Beirut Summit demanded a "just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, to be agreed upon in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194," and that resolution calls for allowing the refugees to return to Israel. It contradicts Israel's vision of a two-State solution, which, explained Ms. Livni, called for a Jewish national homeland alongside a Palestinian national homeland, with the latter serving as the solution for the Palestinian refugees. (Ha'aretz)

2

At least 10 activists were wounded in clashes with the IDF when Israeli soldiers fired rubber-tipped bullets at protestors who hurled stones at them at the weekly protest against the separation fence in the West Bank village of Bil'in. Protestors said soldiers also targeted youths who did not take part in the violent exchange.

Meanwhile, dozens of Palestinian youths clashed with IDF soldiers near the Qalandiya refugee camp roadblock just north of Jerusalem. Two protestors were shot in the leg and were rushed to hospital to receive treatment. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

Israeli forces reinvaded Nablus and took positions in the Old City. Three Palestinians were injured in clashes and three others were arrested. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces arrested three Palestinians in Bethlehem and two others in Beit Rima, north-west of Ramallah. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for launching two home-made projectiles at the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon.

(Ma'an News Agency)

Fatah and Hamas said that they needed more time and would not announce a line-up of ministers for a unity government today as planned. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had asked the two parties to submit names ahead of a planned meeting the following day with PA President Mahmoud Abbas in the Gaza Strip. "We know that both Hamas and Fatah are serious about speeding up the presentation of their chosen candidates for ministerial posts and they could do so within the next two

days," said Mr. Haniyeh's aide, Ghazi Hamad. (Reuters)

The Israeli army closed off the Gaza Strip and the West Bank until the evening of 5 March for security reasons during the upcoming Jewish Purim festival on 4 and 5 March, a military statement said. (AFP)

An Associated Press television footage showed a young Palestinian man dressed in shorts and a T-shirt one morning as he walked in front of heavily-armed Israeli soldiers on a door-to-door sweep of three apartments in a crowded West Bank neighborhood in Nablus on 25 February. The man led the soldiers to the homes of a number of Palestinian suspects. The footage raised questions about whether the Israeli army was still using Palestinian civilians as human shields during military operations, despite an Israeli Supreme Court order barring the practice. Human rights groups called the tactic a violation of local and international law that placed innocent civilians in the line of fire. In a statement the Israeli army pledged it would "pursue a thorough inquiry" into the case. (AP)

Thousands of Palestinians rallied in Gaza City in support of the Islamic Jihad, setting fire to Israeli and US flags as they vowed to carry out attacks in Israel. The rally marked the first anniversary of the death of Khaled al-Dahduh, a former leader of the Islamic Jihad's armed wing, when a car blew up in Gaza City. The Islamic Jihad blamed Israel for the attack, although Israel had denied involvement. (AFP)

Qatar's Ambassador to Egypt, Muhammad Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, told the London-based paper *Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat* that Qatar had handed over a cheque for \$22 million to the general secretariat of the Arab League for the benefit of the Palestinian education sector. The grant was intended to cover the salaries of 40,000 Palestinians working in the state education sector. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Japanese Government decided to extend Emergency Grant Aid of \$ 7.2 million to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in order to improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians. (Ma'an News Agency, www.mofa.go.jp)

3

The PLO's Department for National and International Relations said in a report that between 29 September 2000 and the end of February 2007, Israeli troops had killed 4,698 Palestinians, including 899 children, 296 women and 360 members of the Palestinian security forces. Of those, 491 were killed in extrajudicial assassination operations, 146 died at Israeli military checkpoints or barriers because the Israeli army obstructed their passage, and 65 were killed by Israeli settlers. During the period, 38,689 Palestinians were injured. More than 50,000 Palestinians were arrested, of whom 10,700 remained in Israeli jails, including 112 women and 383 children. Also, 65,728 houses were partially destroyed during the period, of which 7,795 were totally destroyed. Israeli forces uprooted some 1,300,000 trees and confiscated some 300,000 dunums of Palestinian land for settlement construction. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres said that Israel could remove dozens of Jewish settlements from the West Bank. "Yes, settlements will be removed, not all the settlements, and I'm not even sure most of the settlements," Mr. Peres told Israel's *Channel Two* television. Asked if the Palestinian Government could hold talks with Israel on the settlement evacuations and thus affect their scale and pace, Mr. Peres said, "If Hamas is willing to negotiate, recognize Israel and achieve peace, then definitely, yes. ... We will implement it according to actions [by the Palestinian government]." (Reuters)

4

A 54-year-old Palestinian woman was seriously injured in the face when Israeli soldiers hurled a sonic bomb at her after breaking into her home in Qarawat Bani Hassan, south-east of Qalqilya. (Ma'an News Agency)

The International Solidarity Movement said that a 47-year-old resident of Nablus had died of a heart attack after a tear gas canister was fired into his home. Israeli forces prevented an ambulance sent by the Red Crescent Society from evacuating him. (Wafa)

Israeli forces arrested two "wanted" Fatah activists in Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

Armed Israeli settlers stormed Khirbat Safa, north of Hebron, firing towards houses. No casualties were reported. (Wafa)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for launching three home-made projectiles at the southern Israeli town of Sderot and the western Negev. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas held inconclusive talks on forming a national unity government with Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, and officials said that the process might take longer than expected. (Reuters)

In remarks to a meeting of Arab foreign ministers, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said that Arabs would relaunch the 2002 peace initiative in an effort to end the conflict with Israel at a summit later this month, but without changes Israel had been pushing. "The Arab peace initiative expresses an Arab consensus and will not be redrafted as demanded by some foreign powers. ... Manoeuvring and watering down [the initiative] will be a strategic mistake. ... It perhaps will lead to new bloodshed," Mr. Moussa said. (AP)

In a letter addressed to German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, PA President Abbas' chief of staff Rafiq Hussein said, "At a time when the Palestinian people are at the threshold of a historic national consensus ... such Israeli actions only serve to derail efforts to support forces of moderation," noting the Israeli incursion into Nablus and the archaeological excavation near Al-Haram Al-Sharif/The Temple Mount. Mr. Hussein suggested that despite Israel's violations and its refusal to participate in dialogue with the Palestinians, it enjoyed close relations and financial ties with the EU, unlike the Palestinian Authority, which was under an international embargo. He called for the end to "this glaring injustice" and the adoption of a "more balanced" approach by the Council of Ministers and the international community. (Ha'aretz)

The World Food Programme (WFP) [said](#) that 80 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza received food aid from the WFP or from UNRWA. WFP spokesperson Kirstie Campbell said that the dozens of labourers who used to cross into Israel every day to work also found themselves unemployed as a result of laws prohibiting them from working and the construction of the separation barrier. According to WFP figures, 34 per cent of residents of the Palestinian Territory suffer from food insecurity, which the agency defines as the inability of a household to produce and/or access at all times the minimum food needed for a healthy and active life. In the Gaza Strip, where four out of five Palestinians live below the poverty line, the figure is 54 per cent. (Wafa)

5

Israeli forces arrested three "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency, www.idfil)

In an argument over the control of a nearby training compound, members of a Hamas militia engaged in a daytime gun battle with security officers in Gaza City in the worst outbreak of internal violence since rival Palestinian factions agreed to form a national unity government last month, security officials said. (AP)

A Swede seconded from the Foreign Ministry to work with the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) as an observer was wounded by a settler. He was rushed to a hospital after bleeding heavily when hit on the side of the face by a large stone. TIPH condemned the incident, which it said was only the latest in a number of serious assaults on its observers in the area, and urged the Israeli authorities to "take all necessary steps to put an end to these attacks." (AFP)

PA President Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh agreed to resume dialogue the next day to discuss the details of the establishment of the national unity government. They agreed on the specifications of candidates for Minister of Interior. Both approved Ziyad Abu Anro for the "exterior post" and assured that both Hamas and Fatah would support the independent candidates. Mr. Haniyeh told a cabinet meeting in Gaza on his talks with President Abbas: "We did not conclude the consultations to form the government and we will not announce it before the end of next week." (AP, Reuters, Ma'an News Agency)

Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin said that Hamas had sent dozens of militants to Iran for training. He was quoted as saying, "If the build-up continues ... we will have to do something about it." (Ha'aretz, The New York Times)

EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU would maintain its wait-and-see policy towards a Palestinian unity government until Hamas and Fatah agreed on a division of cabinet posts and finalize a policy towards Israel. "We have to see results. ... we have been waiting for so many months to have a national unity government ... a few more weeks will also be borne by us," Ms. Ferrero-Waldner said on the sidelines of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels. She dismissed suggestions from France and others that the EU should move more quickly to offer early encouragement to the new Palestinian Cabinet, perhaps even without the condition that Hamas fulfil international demands on recognizing Israel. "We simply cannot decide yet when or even if we will be able to re-engage with the new Palestinian government of national unity because we will need to see its programme and we will need to see its actions". (AFP, AP)

6

Israeli forces arrested three Palestinians, two of them members of the Islamic Jihad, in a clash with armed Palestinian factions in Jenin. The soldiers also carried out a search campaign in several other houses in Jenin and a refugee camp. (Ma'an News Agency)

Two Qassam rockets were fired from the northern Gaza Strip towards the Israeli city of Ashkelon. One of the rockets landed in Ashkelon's southern industrial zone, lightly injuring four workers and slightly damaging a building. The second rocket landed in an open area. (*Ha'aretz, Xinhua*)

Israeli forces raided the village of Zawata, north-west of Nablus, and arrested three Palestinians. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel eased a closure imposed on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the Jewish holiday of Purim, which started on 2 March. A limited number of Palestinian workers with special permits were to be allowed through Israeli checkpoints to reach their jobs in Israel today. (*DPA*)

A major struggle was reported to be unfolding over control of Fatah's Grass-Roots Committee between jailed PLC member Marwan Barghouti and Gaza-based Mohammed Dahlan. The crisis reportedly broke out following the announcement by President Abbas of the creation of a Grass-Roots Committee, which would serve the overall leadership of Fatah in the West Bank. (*Ha'aretz*)

A senior Hamas official told *Ha'aretz* that the Palestinians would "offer a promise from Hamas and Fatah of a total ceasefire with Israel, including a complete halt to Qassam [rocket] fire and suicide bombings", if Israel agreed to persuade the international community not to boycott a new Palestinian unity government. PA President Abbas planned to deliver this offer at his upcoming meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, Palestinian sources said. (*Ha'aretz*)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal received a pledge from Iran to fund his movement to compensate for the West's financial blockade of the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Mashaal, who arrived in Tehran, told a press conference with Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki that Iran was giving financial and political support to the Palestinians. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also met Mr. Mashaal, urging him to keep resisting Israel. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

At the closing of the 102nd session of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held in Riyadh, Foreign Ministers of the GCC called on the international community to exert efforts to lift the siege imposed on the Palestinian people and support the forthcoming national unity government. The GCC also called on the Israeli Government to stop its provocative policies and aggressions against the Palestinian people, and voiced deep concern over the excavations near the Al-Aqsa Mosque. (*Wafa*)

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem reported that over the years, there had been numerous instances wherein Israeli police officers and soldiers were abusive against Palestinians in Israel who did not have a work permit. A harsh routine of violence and abuse included illegal damage to property, use of illegal force to extract information and unlawful use of firearms. The report said security forces frequently beat Palestinians working illegally in the country, sometimes severely, and detained them for hours without food and water. Israeli security officials said troops were operating under tough conditions to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers from infiltrating the country and that any abuse violations were investigated. In interviews with dozens of workers, B'Tselem found that beatings were common, resulting in severe injuries. (*AP, Ha'aretz, www.btselem.org*)

In its country [report](#) on human rights practices - 2006 - for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the US State Department said: "The [Israeli] Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas, including serious abuses by some members of the security forces against Palestinian detainees. Poor conditions and improper application of security internment procedures persisted in some detention and interrogation facilities." (*Ynetnews, www.state.gov*)

7

Israeli forces surrounded the Palestinian military intelligence headquarters in Ramallah, detaining 18 Palestinians who heeded their call through loudspeakers to surrender. Palestinian security sources said that the men belonged to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and were also members of the Palestinian security services. The Israeli army said that the 18 had been involved in shooting attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers and in attempts to kidnap Israelis. No one was hurt in the raid. (*Reuters*)

Israeli forces arrested at least 13 schoolboys from the Al-Arroub refugee camp, north of Hebron, as they were heading to school. Also, Israeli soldiers stormed a kindergarten south of Bethlehem, destroying its two main gates. (*Wafa*)

At the Huwara military checkpoint, south of Nablus, Israeli forces arrested a 21-year-old Palestinian from the Balata refugee camp. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for launching two home-made projectiles at the Israeli town of Netiv Ha'asara, north of the Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Aide to PA President Abbas, Yasser Abed Rabbo, said that Mr. Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert would meet in Jerusalem on Sunday, 11 March. (*AFP*)

The World Bank said in a [report](#) that the Palestinian Authority faced a fiscal crisis that could threaten its existence in large part because it kept expanding the public payroll despite sharply reduced revenues. The Palestinian economy declined further in 2006 from an already low level, and the per capita gross domestic product dropped by at least 8 per cent. The Bank said that the current method of assistance, by circumventing the Palestinian Government, had undermined a key element of fiscal reform, the single Treasury account established several years ago to end corruption and aid efforts to monitor the money flow. The report recommended that, "when circumstances allow," donors should stop sending money to PA President Abbas and instead deal again with the Palestinian Authority. The Bank suggested, however, that such a change would have to wait. "There are hopes that this slide (in reforms) may be reversed if a broader political compromise is obtained and donor funding resumes through normal channels," it said. (*AP*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II told a joint meeting of House and Senate members of the US Congress that the United States must take the lead in creating conditions for a permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinians, citing the risks of further delay. He said that history had shown that progress in Middle East peacemaking was impossible without American leadership. "We look to you to play a historic role," he said, adding that results were needed "not in one year or five years, but this year. ... No more bloodshed, no more lives pointlessly taken," he said. (*AP*)

8

Israeli forces apprehended 25 "wanted" Palestinians in several cities in the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The An-Nasser Salah Addin Brigades, the armed group of the Popular Resistance Committees, launched a home-made projectile at the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Islamic Jihad, said that its snipers had shot at an Israeli soldier while he was carrying out a search operation in the area of the Al-Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. The group said that the soldier had fallen to the ground after being shot. Meanwhile, the Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for shooting an Israeli soldier in the central Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Border Police fired stun grenades to break up a demonstration of women at the Qalandiya checkpoint between Ramallah and East Jerusalem, injuring an AP cameraman. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld denied that reporters had been deliberately targeted. (*AP*)

Flocking to a rare opening of the frontier, some 6,000 Palestinians turned up at the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt and tried to force their way through the crossing, creating a crush at the terminal that Palestinian security forces could not control. Some travellers said tempers flared after Palestinian policemen brought their friends and relatives to the head of the line ahead of people who had been waiting for hours. Omar Qazaa, a 61-year-old Palestinian who had been waiting at the crossing since the previous night, suffered a fatal heart attack as the crowd surged forward. As travellers continued to push towards the border, a gunfight erupted between PA President Abbas' presidential guard and Palestinian policemen. Witnesses said that at least five people, including two of the presidential guards, were wounded. (*Reuters*)

After talks with PA Prime Minister Haniyeh, PA President Abbas said that a Palestinian national unity government was "99 per cent" agreed but would not be announced until next week. (*Reuters*)

"There are many ways whereby [the Palestinian National Unity Government] can express the recognition of Israel," EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Javier Solana told AP. "I am not going to define what is the manner that would be the most appropriate, that's for them to decide, but in any case it has to be sufficiently clear that statement can be read and not only imagined." (*AP*)

B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights group, said that during the Israeli army's operation in Nablus in late February, soldiers had used two Palestinian children, a 15-year-old boy and an 11-year-old girl, and a 24-year-old man as human shields. (*Ma'an News Agency, www.btselem.org*)

Abu Muhammad, a Gaza Strip spokesman for the Islamic Jihad, said that his organization had manufactured rockets that could travel up to 14.3 miles into Israel. (*Ynetnews*)

Fatah activist Taha Abu Alya was arrested in Bethlehem by a special IDF force. He had been involved in a number of shooting attacks and production of explosive devices, the IDF alleged. (*Ynetnews*)

Israel would for the time being not transfer any more of the PA tax revenues it had been withholding, *Israel Radio* reported. Mr. Olmert's spokesperson would only say that Israel was checking reports that the \$100 million transferred in January "did not reach those it was supposed to reach." (*DPA*)

The [conclusions](#) adopted by of the European Council Summit held in Brussels said: "The European Council welcomed the fact that an agreement has been reached in Mecca on 8 February on the formation of a Palestinian national unity Government... The EU stands ready to work with a legitimate Palestinian Government that adopts a platform reflecting the Quartet principles." (www.consilium.europa.eu)

The IDF said it would launch a "thorough enquiry" into allegations by B'Tselem that troops had used two Palestinian children, aged 11 and 15, as human shields during an operation in Nablus. (*AP*)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that he would visit Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory on his way to the Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia.

"I'm looking forward to, first of all, a meeting with leaders in the region and making myself available for any consultation and to make a contribution to the peace process," he said. (*AP*)

10

About 20 members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades opened fire at PA security headquarters in Jenin and forced Government offices to close, demanding that they receive overdue salaries promised by the Government, witnesses said. (*AP*)

An attack on the convoy of PA Prisoners' Affairs Minister Wasfi Kabaha in the village of Tubas north of Nablus left one of his bodyguards injured. Two of the attackers were also injured in the shootout and another two were arrested, PA security sources said. "The people who fired at the minister are from the ranks of Fatah," a Hamas statement said. (*AFP*)

PA Minister of Information Yusuf Rizqa told reporters that the European Council's position on the Palestinian Unity Government "is more flexible than [that of] the Quartet itself." (*Xinhua*)

11

Three Palestinians were wounded when the Israeli navy opened fire on their fishing boats off the coast of the Gaza Strip, Israeli and Palestinian sources said. (*AFP*) One Palestinian was killed and seven wounded in an overnight clash between supporters of the Hamas and Fatah factions in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanoun, medical officials said. (*AFP*)

Prime Minister Olmert told a cabinet meeting: "We hope very much that during the meeting of the heads of Arab States that will be held in Riyadh, the positive elements expressed in the Saudi initiative will be validated and perhaps will enable the strengthening of the chances for negotiations between us and the Palestinians." Political sources in Israel confirmed that the US Administration was holding separate talks concerning the initiative with Israel and Saudi Arabia, but refused to give details. (*Ha'aretz*)

Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas met in Jerusalem for more than two hours. The two leaders agreed to continue meeting on a regular basis in order "to discuss issues related to security, the war on terrorism, and improving the conditions in which Palestinians live," the Prime Minister's Office said. Mr. Abbas' aide, Mohammed Dahlan, said the meeting had been difficult and produced no agreements. The Palestinians had called on Mr. Olmert to ease travel restrictions in the West Bank and to release sick and elderly Palestinian prisoners, but Mr. Olmert had made no promises except that beginning at the end March, the Kami crossing would begin operating on extended hours. According to sources in the Prime Minister's Office, Mr. Olmert had told Mr. Abbas that Israel would not discuss expanding the truce to the West Bank until it was fully implemented in the Gaza Strip. Not only would Israel not recognize the national unity government unless it agreed to the Quartet demands, but Israel would also not hold contacts with Fatah Ministers serving in it. (*Ha'aretz*)

Hamas rejected accusations by Al-Qaida's Ayman al-Zawahiri that it was surrendering to Israel by agreeing to form a national unity government. "These are unjust accusations without consequences for the policies of Hamas, which knows how to read the international and regional situation," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum told *AFP*. (*AFP*)

Israel released Saleh al-Aruri, a senior leader of Hamas, who had been sentenced to 10 years in prison and then held in administrative detention for a further 5 years. (*AFP*)

"We will announce the Government on Wednesday or Thursday and we will then ask for a vote of confidence in Parliament on Saturday," Prime Minister Haniyeh said in an interview on *Palestine TV*. (*Reuters*)

12

PA security sources said that the Israeli army had arrested more than 25 people in Jenin, most of them members of Hamas' student wing at the American University. Israeli troops also detained 12 Palestinians in Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Tulkarm. In Ramallah, they arrested Ahmed Mubarak, a Hamas PLC member. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli forces killed a Palestinian in the village of Al-Zababteh, south of Jenin, during a clash with gunmen, a Palestinian security official said. The Israeli army said in a statement that Palestinian gunmen had opened fire at a force operating in the area, which returned fire. The army said none of the troops had been wounded. (*Reuters*)

A 22-year-old Palestinian was hit in the back with a live bullet and seriously wounded by Israeli forces in Abu Dis, near East Jerusalem. (*Wafa*)

Israeli forces arrested Anwar Mara'beh, assistant under-secretary in the PA Ministry of Islamic Endowments, at a checkpoint south of Qalqilya. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, claimed responsibility for launching two home-made projectiles at the Israeli community of Meir Akiva. Also, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for launching three home-made projectiles at the southern Israeli town of Sderot. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A BBC correspondent, Alan Johnston, was kidnapped in the Gaza Strip by unknown assailants, Palestinian officials said. (*Reuters*)

Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said Israel expected PA President Abbas to implement a promise to secure Cpl. Gilad Shalit's release before the Fatah party entered the Government. (*DPA*)

"The [Abbas-Olmert] meeting was disappointing," Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan told reporters in the Gaza Strip. "Olmert insists on putting pressure on the Palestinians by putting conditions regarding the formation of the unity government," he added. "Israel is the only beneficiary from this meeting because it is the more powerful..." said Khaled al-Batsh of the Islamic Jihad. "For us, the meeting did not prevent the detention of Mujahideen [holy warriors] and did not open crossing points," he added. (*Xinhua*)

The director-general of marketing and crossings in the PA Ministry of Agriculture, Khaled Zureid, said that the closing of the Kami crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel had resulted in an estimated loss of \$1 million per day for the agricultural sector. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

"The final statement of the [European Council] Summit was positive, despite conditions," Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad told reporters in Gaza, calling for "the opening of dialogue between the Europeans and the Palestinian Government." Israeli Foreign Minister Livni said: "The Europeans expect any Palestinian Government to meet the Quartet conditions. Europe is a partner in the Quartet... At the moment Europe has not changed its position, and I hope it will not do so soon." (*AP, Xinhua*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Livni said that the issue of the right of return was Israel's main point of contention with the Arab Peace Initiative. Speaking on *Israel Radio*, she said that "the Saudi initiative is based on a very positive idea ... [but] unfortunately, other sections were added to this initiative" that placed unrealistic demands on Israel. (*Ha'aretz*)

US Vice President Dick Cheney told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee 2007 Policy Conference: "The President has been clear and forthright about his vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. He remains committed to the achievement of that vision, nor has he compromised the basic principles he has stated from the very beginning: Peace requires a Palestinian Government that recognizes Israel's right to exist, accepts the validity of past agreements and renounces violence and terrorism totally and completely." (www.whitehouse.gov)

Israeli forces arrested seven Palestinians in Ramallah, Tulkarm, Nablus and Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for launching a home-made projectile towards the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A 35-year-old Hamas military commander, Abu Obeidah, was killed in a shootout with Fatah gunmen in Gaza City. At least seven people were wounded in the gun battle. (*AP*)

Israeli Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres told reporters in Tokyo on the Saudi proposal to restart peace efforts: "As an Arab position, it is progress, and we would like to continue negotiations. ... But it is the opening position, not yet the fallback." He added that any final agreement would be different from the original proposal. (*AP*)

During a meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, David Welch, and a number of officials from US embassies in the Middle East and South Asian countries, Jordan's King Abdullah II said: "The US commitment to realize peace, which was articulated by US President George Bush and his Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, offers a great opportunity to end the soaring conflict in the region for decades." The King warned that failure in the peace process would contribute to the escalation of violence and extremism and weaken forces of moderation in the region. He added that work was under way with support from the United States to create the appropriate climate for the Palestinian and Israeli sides to return to negotiations. (*Petra*)

At a news conference with visiting EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said: "We only hear of conditions from Israel about everything, but no acceptance. You cannot have negotiations like that. You accept the proposals, then you talk about this. ... This seems a ludicrous way of doing business." Vice President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Farouk Sharaa, said after meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak: "We have the Arab peace plan and we are committed to it as a whole. Talk of amending it is baseless." Mr. Mubarak's spokesman, Suleiman Awwad, said, "Israel cannot pick and choose from the initiative and then jump into establishing normal relations with Arabs." Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit told reporters in Cairo, after Israeli Ambassador Shalom Cohen had presented his country's proposals, that there would be "no change and no going back." (*AFP, Ha'aretz*)

Israeli media sources reported that a tripartite meeting would be held among Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, PA President Abbas and US Secretary of State Rice, adding that Ms. Rice would arrive in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory on 24 March as part of her regional tour. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

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Israeli forces arrested seven Fatah and Hamas members in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces demolished two houses in Sur Bahir, south-east of East Jerusalem, because they did not have licences. One of the buildings was inhabited by six families of more than 40 people. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas officials said that PA President Abbas and Prime Minister Haniyeh had agreed to bring their national unity government to the Palestinian Legislative Council for a vote of confidence on 17 March. (*Reuters*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II endorsed the call for Arabs to relaunch their 2002 initiative for peace with Israel at their summit this month. In a statement after talks with the Foreign Ministers of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the King said that the items on the agenda for the summit in Riyadh on 28 and 29 March were so important that they require that "all the Arab countries work together to unify their positions, especially to revive the Arab peace initiative." (*AP*)

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe [briefed](#) the Security Council on "the situation in the Middle East." (*UN News Centre, UN press release SC/8969*)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in its biweekly report on the Agreement on Movement Access (AMA): "The international crossing point at Rafah continues to not operate as required under the AMA, open just 21 per cent of scheduled days and 11 per cent of scheduled working hours." (*www.ochaopt.org*)

Israel, the Palestinians and Jordan launched a peace initiative led by Japan intended to spur economic cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians as part of efforts to build confidence between the two sides. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso said during a meeting in Tokyo that it was important that the four parties implement the initiative "Concept for Creating the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" and produce "specific results soon." The meeting was attended by Israeli Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat, and special adviser to the King of Jordan, Farouk Kasrawi. Under the initiative, Japan would join hands with Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians in spurring the regional economy through such steps as setting up an agro-industrial park in the West Bank and facilitating the transportation of goods. Mr. Aso said that during the talks, the four parties had agreed that when Japan sent a study mission in late March to the West Bank, they would work together to select a candidate site for the agro-industrial park to be used to process citrus fruits for shipment to Arab nations, adding that the four parties had also decided to hold a working-level meeting in June to study details on the initiative. (*AP*)

Peace Now said in a report that 32.4 per cent of the lands held by Jewish settlements in the West Bank were privately owned by Palestinians. (*Reuters, www.peacenow.org.il*)

15

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh presented the final Palestinian Unity Government cabinet list to PA President Abbas which would be submitted on 17 March for parliamentary approval. "I have handed over to the president the candidates for the new coalition. He has accepted that," Mr. Haniyeh said. He said that he had received signals that the Europeans were ready to work with his new Government, but acknowledged that winning US and Israeli support would be difficult. According to Hamas, the new platform states that, "The Government confirms that the resistance is a legitimate right for the Palestinian people. ... halting resistance depends on ending the occupation and achieving freedom and [the right of] return and independence." The platform also states, "The Government abides by the protection of the higher national interests of the Palestinian people, and the protection of its rights ... and on the basis of that, respects international resolutions and agreements signed by the PLO." To that end, the manifesto states, "the Government will work with the international community to end the occupation and to return the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." The platform also touches on the issue of Palestinian refugees. According to Hamas, the Government "holds fast to the rights of Palestinian refugees and the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their land and belongings." (*Ha'aretz*)

The first Israeli response to the Palestinian National Unity Government's platform came when a senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, called it a major step backward for peace prospects, and said that Jerusalem would lobby the international community not to work with the new Government. The Israeli official said: "Anyone who looks carefully at the document will see that there is a regression on a number of important issues." He noted the platform's call for the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel and its affirmation of the Palestinian right of resistance against Israel. He added that the language was even tougher than the original Palestinian power-sharing deal reached in Mecca last month. (*Ha'aretz*)

The United States withheld judgement on the newly announced Palestinian National Unity Government. "We will wait until the Government is actually in place and we have an understanding of what their platform will be before we make any final judgements about it," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said. (*AFP*) Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa commended the formation of a Palestinian National Unity Government and urged the international community to lift a year-old aid boycott. "It is an important step towards ending political tensions, which will allow Palestinians to focus on their main cause: the creation of a Palestinian State with [East] Jerusalem as its capital," Mr. Moussa said in a statement. "The formation of the Palestinian National Unity Government is crucial to achieving stability and taking forward the peace process, which President Mahmoud Abbas leads in the name of every Palestinian," Mr. Moussa added. He called on the Quartet and the international community to immediately lift the blockade and put an end to all forms of boycott on the Palestinians. (*AFP*)

The *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* published the following names of the members of the new Palestinian Unity Government cabinet, to be presented to parliament for ratification in two days: Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh (Hamas); Deputy Prime Minister, Azzam al-Ahmad (Fatah); Finance Minister, Salam Fayyad (Third Way Party); Foreign Minister, Ziyad Abu Amr (Independent); Interior Minister, Hani al-Kassami (Independent); Tourism Minister, Kholood Deibes (Independent); Health Minister, Radwan al-Akhras (Fatah); Labour Minister, Mahmoud al-Aloul (Fatah); Transport Minister, Sa'di al-Kronz (Fatah); Prisoners Affairs Minister, Suleiman Abu Sneinah (Fatah); Education Minister, Nasser al-Deen Asha'er (Hamas); Telecommunications Minister, Yousef al-Mansi (Hamas); Moslem Properties Minister, Hussein al-Tartoori (Hamas); Planning Minister, Samir Abu Eisha (Hamas); Sports Minister, Bassem Naime (Hamas); Justice Minister, Ali Sartawi (Hamas); Agriculture Minister - Mohamed el-Agha (Hamas); Municipal Affairs Minister, Mohamed al-Barghouthi (Hamas); Culture Minister, Bassam al-Salhi (People's Party); Information Minister, Mustafa al-Barghouti (Independent Palestine); Economics Minister - Zeyad al-Zazza (Hamas); Social Welfare Minister, Saleh Zeidan

(Democratic Front); Public Works Minister, Sameeh el-Abbed (Fatah); Without Portfolio, Wasfi Qubaha (Hamas); and Women's Affairs Minister - still be chosen. (DPA, Ma'an News Agency)

The BBC said that there was still no word on the whereabouts of its correspondent, Alan Johnston, abducted in Gaza three days ago, and made a fresh appeal for his safe return. PA Prime Minister Haniyeh had condemned the abduction and said he had ordered security forces to search for the kidnappers. (AP)

16

A member of the Palestinian military intelligence was killed in unknown circumstances in the Gaza Strip. Another member was seriously wounded. Both men were shot by unidentified gunmen near the Deit Al-Balah cemetery in the central Gaza Strip. Both men were reported to be loyal to PA President Abbas. (Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

Masked gunmen ambushed and opened fire on a three-vehicle UN convoy in the Gaza Strip shortly after it left the crossing point with Israel carrying a senior official of UNRWA. All passengers and drivers escaped injury. The director of the UNRWA Field Office in Gaza, John Ging, was leaving the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing point for Gaza City when a vehicle blocked the convoy about one kilometre to the south. Three of the attackers attempted to open the doors of the middle car in the convoy and finding the doors locked, opened fire directly on the car, leaving 11 bullet holes on its side. UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd condemned "this unprecedented attack on UN staff in Gaza" and urged that those responsible be identified and brought to justice. No one claimed responsibility for the attack which both Fatah and Hamas had condemned. (Ha'aretz, UN News Centre)

The Israeli army said that it was investigating the alleged use by soldiers of Palestinian civilians as human shields during a recent incursion in Nablus on orders of Brig-Gen. General Avihai Mandelblit. B'Tselem had earlier charged that soldiers used two Palestinian children, a boy aged 15 and a girl aged 11, and a 24-year-old man as human shields. (AFP)

Abu Majahed, a spokesperson for the Popular Resistance Committees in the Gaza Strip, said that dramatic developments had occurred in negotiations over the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, held captive in the Gaza Strip since 25 June last year. He said that the prisoner exchange would include all the leaders of Palestinian factions jailed in Israel, including Marwan Barghouti of Fatah, Ahmed Sada'at and Abd Al-Rahim Maluah of the Popular Resistance Committees and leaders of Hamas. Mr. Majahed said that the exchange would be carried out shortly if agreed to by Israeli Prime Minister Olmert. (Ha'aretz)

An Egyptian official at the Rafah Crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt reported that the crossing had been closed after two days of being opened to allow Palestinians on both sides to cross. The official said, "Israel informed the Egyptian side that the crossing is closed without giving any dates for its reopening."

He pointed out that there were dozens of Palestinians stuck on both sides of the crossing. (Ma'an News Agency)

The IDF conducted a drill this week simulating the takeover of a Palestinian village at the hands of a reserves unit. For the third time this month, the army conducted a takeover exercise of Beit Lid, a village near Tulkarm. In these exercises, the troops were commanded to take over the village, even though the villagers were not considered especially hostile and with no warnings of militants hiding among them. The human rights group Yesh Din demanded an investigation into the matter, saying that the exercises could endanger both Israeli and Palestinian lives. (Ha'aretz)

Reacting to the programme of the incoming Palestinian Unity Government, Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh said Israel would boycott the "coalition between Hamas and Fatah" and would explain to Governments that they could not work with this Government. He also said Israel should circumvent the new Government and try to strike a peace agreement with PA President Abbas. (Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency)

It was reported that French Foreign Minister Phillipe Douste-Blazy had sent a letter of congratulations to PA Foreign Minister designate Ziad Abu Amar, inviting him for a meeting either in Paris or in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Italian Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Massimo D'Alema, expressed satisfaction at the news on the formation of a new National Unity Government and said Italy would work to aid the Middle East peace process. Egypt and the Arab League welcomed the creation of the new Government. (DPA, Ha'aretz)

US and EU officials said that they were waiting for the final outcome of the unity talks before deciding whether to lift economic sanctions imposed on the outgoing Palestinian Government. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mikhail Kamynin welcomed the development, stating that "it is inarguably an important event in terms of the consolidation of the Palestinian ranks." The German Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Berlin was waiting for the formation of the Government to be completed to see what its political programme looked like. (BBC, DPA, Ha'aretz)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed the "need for an Israeli-Arab reconciliation to accompany ... the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had earlier said that Arab leaders should not wait for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before they establish relations with Israel and said normalization with Israel could contribute to solving the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict. (Ha'aretz)

17

UNRWA official John Ging called on the PA to track down the assailants who had attacked the UN convoy he had ridden in a day earlier. Palestinian security officials said they were looking into a possible Al-Qaida link to the attack but did not provide evidence of the suspicion. "We are looking into all possibilities," the security official said. (AP)

PA President Abbas swore in the new Palestinian Government hours after the Palestinian Legislative Council overwhelmingly voted 83-3 in favour of approval. The ceremony was held simultaneously in Gaza City and Ramallah, with a video link, due to the Israeli travel ban preventing the Government ministries from gathering in one place. President Abbas said the Palestinians were "extending our hand wide open, calling for peace of equality" with Israel. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said that the new Government "stresses that resistance in all forms is a legitimate local right of the Palestinian people, granted and secured under all international conventions and agreements" and would work to expand its ceasefire with Israel. Mr. Haniyeh also said that his goal was the creation of a Palestinian State that included lands occupied by Israel in 1967. (BBC, Ha'aretz)

Incoming PA Finance Minister Salam Fayyad warned that the new Government would not be able to function for long unless the international community lifted its aid boycott and increased assistance. He said the sanctions dismantled his proudest achievement as finance minister under PA President Arafat - setting up a single Treasury account to bring reckless public spending under control. "We will try to do our best to restore the system and repair it. The system suffered badly because of attempts to bypass the Government," he said. (Ha'aretz)

Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said that Norway would re-establish political and economic relations with the new Palestinian Unity Government. He said that the Hamas-Fatah coalition was taking steps towards complying with international demands. He said: "Norway expects the Palestinian authorities to respect basic international standards as regards compliance with previously concluded agreements, renunciation of violence and recognition of Israel's right to exist." He also called on Israel to "take a constructive approach to the Unity Government, for example, by releasing withheld Palestinian revenues from taxes and fees and by increasing the freedom of movement for the Palestinian population." (Ha'aretz)

18

Two Qassam rockets landed in the Negev, causing no injuries or damage. One rocket landed south of Ashkelon, and the other landed in an open field in the western Negev. In Nablus, an IDF soldier was lightly wounded when a bomb exploded next to a military jeep in the Balata refugee camp. (Ha'aretz)

The new Palestinian Cabinet held its first session in Gaza City and by video link in Ramallah. The Government pledged to tackle rampant lawlessness and end the international aid freeze. PA President Abbas appointed Mohammed Dahlan, a senior member of Fatah, as national security adviser. (BBC)

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called for the international community to reject the new Palestinian Government. He said Israel could not cooperate with the new Government unless it renounced violence. He called the Government "very problematic." (Ma'an News Agency)

During an Israeli cabinet meeting, Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz demanded the immediate opening of talks with PA President Abbas, regarding the final solution. He said: "A step of this kind will return the political initiative to Israeli hands and facilitate the implementation of an agenda in preparation for the imminent Arab Summit in Riyadh at the end of the month." (Ma'an News Agency)

19

Hamas claimed responsibility for a shooting attack that moderately wounded an Israeli civilian near the Al-Muntar (Kam) entrance to the Gaza Strip. The man was shot by a sniper near a gas terminal. (AP, Ha'aretz)

An explosion ripped through the house of an Islamic Jihad member in the central Gaza Strip, killing him and injuring 20 others, Palestinian security officials said. Ala Al-Hessi, 30, was killed when explosives he was handling went off. (Ha'aretz)

BBC said it had no official information about who might be holding its reporter, Alan Johnston, who disappeared on 12 March. Middle East Bureau chief Simon Wilson said, "Over the past week we have worked intensively with the authorities here in Gaza and elsewhere to try to locate Alan, and we continue to receive assurances that everything possible is being done. However, it is disappointing that, after seven days, we still have no firm word either about his whereabouts or about his condition." (BBC)

New PA Information Minister Mustafa Barghouti said international sanctions were no longer justified. He said that the government programme presented by Prime

Minister Ismail Haniyeh was "very flexible, very democratic and very peaceful. Mr. Barghouti, who also serves as government spokesperson, said the Government "has met every condition and provided every necessary step to end the siege." (DPA)

A US consular official in Jerusalem said that the US would maintain contact with Palestinian ministers it felt it could work with. (BBC)

Salah Bardawil, spokesperson for the Hamas in the PLC, confirmed that Hamas opposed the appointment of Mohammed Dahlan as the President's national security advisor. He said there was an exception for PLC members nominated for ministerial posts, but that "Dahlan is a provocative personality and we have just escaped a critical internal situation, involving infighting and the killing of people. He was one of the most noticeable figures during the fighting." (Ma'an News Agency)

The national security command had decided to unite three PA security bodies in the Gaza Strip into one body to be called the National Security Forces. The decision stipulates that members and officers of the general staff of the national security forces, members of the public security and members of the "higher movement committee" would become part of the National Security Forces. The decision reportedly came from President Abbas, in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, to reform the national security forces. The three bodies would meet a special committee set up for the purpose of unifying the three bodies. The members would be sent to Ansar training camp, in the south of the Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johansen met with PA Prime Minister Haniyeh, marking Norway's restoration of political and economic ties with the Palestinian Government. (AP)

The Quartet held a conference call to discuss its approach to the new Palestinian Unity Government. A statement will be issued. (AP)

In Washington, D.C., in a press conference with Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, and EU Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said: "I would put the question to the Palestinian Government because after all for a generation now -- well, a political generation, the Palestinian leadership has adhered to the principles that would undergird a two-State solution, including renunciation of violence and the willingness to live side by side with Israel. It is in the road map. It is the foundation really of Oslo. And so I'm not going to try to interpret what the right of resistance means, but I'll tell you, it doesn't sound very good to me, when one talks about all forms of resistance. So I would put the question to the Palestinian Government and to its Prime Minister: Do you mean the right of resistance by violence and let's get an answer". Ms. Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU wanted to reduce the suffering of the Palestinian people. "It is very important that in this delicate moment, we at least can go on with our temporary international mechanism and that we prolong this for another three months in order to see that the Palestinian people will not suffer in this period where we have to, of course, make a judgment on the National Unity Government," she said. (US Department of State, Wafa)

20

Israeli gunboats arrested five fishermen fishing off the Rafah shore, south of the Gaza Strip and brought them into an unknown location. (Wafa)

Israeli bulldozers demolished a two-level house belonging to Ibrahim Hasan Abu Yousif in Halhul, north of Hebron. Confrontations erupted between Palestinians and the IDF during the demolition after which the IDF fired live ammunition into the crowds to disperse them. Three Palestinians were injured. The Israeli authorities had handed the owners of six houses in Halhul demolition notifications claiming that the houses were in area C, which was under Israeli security supervision. The owners had appealed to the Israeli courts and the cases were still under consideration. In Jerusalem, Israeli bulldozers demolished a Palestinian house in Sheikh Jarrah belonging to Mohammad Hanak. (Ma'an News Agency)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon viewed the establishment of the new Palestinian Government as "an important and positive step forward" and wanted to encourage that process, his spokesperson emphasized. She explained that Mr. Ban had earlier expressed disappointment regarding the new Government's programme "because he would like to see the programme of the National Unity Government fully reflect Quartet principles." (UN News Centre)

In a press release, and on the occasion of Mother's Day, which is celebrated in the Middle East on 21 March, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics said that there were 112 Palestinian female detainees at Israeli jails, including 32 mothers, and 5 of whom were serving life sentences. (Wafa)

Jacob Wallis, the US Consul General in Jerusalem, met in Ramallah with the designated PA Finance Minister, Salam Fayyad, said PA Information Minister Mustafa Barghouti. Israel had said it would not have contact with any member of the new Hamas-Fatah Unity Government. The United States, however, had indicated it would maintain contact with moderates, such as Mr. Fayyad. "This is part of the ordinary meetings that Palestinian ministers are conducting with the international community," Mr. Barghouti said. (AP)

In Amman, visiting League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa urged Israel to be more proactive in restarting the stalled Middle East peace talks following the creation of the Palestinian Unity Government. "We expect an offer by Israel," Mr. Moussa told reporters after talks with Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdul-Ilah al-Khatib. He did not provide details on the kind of initiative the Arab League hoped for from Israel. "Insofar as peace is concerned, we fail to see any offer, any serious talk of peace," he said of Mr. Olmert's Government, adding, "what we see is the same old policy of building settlements, procrastination, of resorting to tricks one after the other in order to waste time." Israel had rejected the Arab peace initiative but in recent weeks said it could support it with some amendments. But Mr. Moussa ruled out any revisions to the plan, saying, "We are not ready to enter into any changes or any futile discussion about the contents of the initiative". "The Arab initiative is supported by the European Union, the United States and all other international powers," Moussa said, adding, "only Israel is trying to avoid it as much as it can and is trying to get some support from some countries," (AP)

After conferring with Arab League Secretary-General Moussa, King Abdullah II of Jordan "urged the world community, particularly the United States and the European Union, to adopt the Arab initiative as a basis for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State as well as a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East." (DPA)

The spokesperson of the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, confirmed that EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Marc Otte had held talks in Gaza City with PA Foreign Minister Ziyad Abu Amr. He is expected to meet PA Finance Minister Salam Fayyad. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

A poll conducted by Near East Consulting revealed that 80 per cent of Palestinians felt that the chances of a civil war had receded after the Mecca agreement between Hamas and Fatah. The poll, which queried 802 respondents across the OPT, found that 69 per cent were optimistic that the new Unity Government would succeed in lifting international donor sanctions. A majority of 52 per cent of respondents gave credit to Hamas for moderating their political stance. But this did not prevent PA President Abbas from enjoying a slight advantage over Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, with 54 per cent of respondents now trusting Mr. Abbas, Near East Consulting said in a press release. About 29 per cent said they feared economic hardship and insecurity. The majority of respondents felt that restoring security (59 per cent) and enforcing the law (18 per cent) should be the focus of the new Government. Only 12 to 15 per cent of those polled felt that economic revival should be a priority. Only 4 per cent saw peace with Israel as being in the realm of either priority or possibility, though overall support for peace remained high at 68 per cent. (Wafa)

The Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate was due to launch a strike for two hours on the following day protesting the abduction of BBC reporter Alan Johnston in Gaza a week ago. In a press conference, the head of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate, Na'eem al-Toubasi, said that foreign media were intending to boycott news coverage in the OPT as long as Mr. Johnston was still detained. He added, "The continued abduction of foreign journalists is a severe blow against Palestinian relations with the world". (Wafa)

Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johansen said that Israeli Government officials had cancelled planned meetings as a sign of displeasure the day after he met with Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and other PA Government officials. Mr. Johansen's visit the previous day to Palestinian leaders made him the first high-ranking Western official to visit Hamas leaders. He said that Israeli Foreign Ministry officials had called off a planned morning meeting over what they said were scheduling problems, and a meeting later in the day with Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh had also cancelled on the orders of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office. "Of course we regret that, and I hope that I will have the opportunity [in the future] to engage and discuss with the Israelis," Mr. Johansen said by telephone before leaving for Germany. (AP)

The French Government wanted to renew political contacts with members of the new Palestinian Government that are not members of Hamas, said Jean-Baptiste Mattei, a spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry. He said Paris was in favour of renewing direct financial aid to the new Government and would try to convince other European nations of that position. (DPA)

In separate statements from their foreign ministries, France signaled it would meet "moderate" ministers, while Austrian Foreign Minister, Ursula Plassnik, invited her Palestinian counterpart, Ziyad Abu Amr, to visit. (AFP)

The Lebanese Army tightened its security measures around the Nahr el-Bared Palestine refugee camp where clashes between Fatah and a rival group had led to one death and the wounding of four, Lebanese security sources said. (DPA)

Dozens of Israeli settlers escorted by Israeli security forces moved into a vacant four-storey building in Hebron. The settlers claimed they had purchased it legally, but the Palestinian owner denied he had sold it. (Ha'aretz)

A delegation of Turkish archeologists and historians was headed to Israel to inspect excavation work near a Jerusalem holy site that had sparked clashes between police and local Palestinians and touched off fierce criticism throughout the Islamic world. Muslims said that the Israeli excavations would harm Islamic shrines at the site, which is known as the Temple Mount to Jews and the Noble Sanctuary to Muslims (home to the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, Islam's third holiest shrine), and whose fate is central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel Antiquities Authority spokeswoman Osnat Guez said the Turkish delegation would make an official one-day examination of the site the following day to see the work first-hand. Ms. Guez said that the Turkish visit to the site would not be open to media coverage but could be monitored through Antiquities Authority cameras set up at the site, which relay real-time pictures to the Authority website, http://www.antiquities.org.il/home_eng.asp. (AP)

Noam Shalit, the father of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, said after meeting the French Ambassador to Israel, Jean-Michel Casa: "As a French-Israeli citizen... I am asking the French Government, together with the entire EU, to demand the end to Gilad's captivity before any French recognition or financial or other aid is given to the new Palestinian Government." (Ha'aretz)

21

IDF troops killed a Palestinian during an exchange of fire in Nablus, PA security sources said. Four Palestinians were arrested in the Nablus raid and a total of 20 suspected militants were arrested in all of the West Bank, the IDF said. (AP)

The Quartet issued the following statement:

The Quartet Principals – Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner – discussed by telephone today the situation in the Middle East and, in particular, the establishment of a Palestinian National Unity Government.

The Quartet reiterated its respect for Palestinian democracy and the agreement reached in Mecca on 8 February 2007, which laid the foundation for Palestinian reconciliation. The Quartet expressed hope that the establishment of a new Government on 17 March 2007 would help end intra-Palestinian violence and ensure calm. The Quartet reaffirmed its previous statements with regard to the need for a Palestinian Government committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map, and encouraged progress in this direction. The Quartet agreed that the commitment of the new Government in this regard would be measured on the basis of not only its composition and platform, but also its actions. The Quartet expressed its expectation that the unity Government would act responsibly, demonstrate clear and credible commitment to the Quartet principles and support the efforts of President [Mahmoud] Abbas to pursue a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, thereby achieving the peace, security and freedom the Israeli and Palestinian people desire and deserve.

The Quartet reiterated the continuing need to coordinate and mobilize international assistance in support of the Palestinian people and endorsed the continuation of the Temporary International Mechanism for a three-month period, while it evaluates the situation and the international community works to develop a more sustainable international mechanism for support to the Palestinians.

The Quartet expressed its strong support for Secretary Rice's efforts to further facilitate discussions with President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert with the aim of defining more clearly the political horizon for the establishment of a Palestinian State and an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Quartet agreed to meet in the region soon to review developments and discuss the way ahead.

(UN press release [SG/2125-PAL/2071](#))

Jordan's King Abdullah II and King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia said in a joint statement: "The two leaders considered the formation of the Palestinian Unity Government an important step towards closing Palestinian ranks and ending the state of anarchy that swept the Palestinian territories over the past few months... They also expressed hope that the new Palestinian Cabinet will work with the world community towards the fulfilment of the Palestinian people's aspirations." (DPA)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said that Palestinians had launched a diplomatic offensive aimed at "establishing a Palestinian State with 1967 borders and Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the right of return and freedom for all prisoners." "Palestinian officials were ... calling, with a single voice, for the lifting of the embargo imposed on the Palestinian people," he said. (AFP)

"Israel is ready to make big and painful concessions in order to encourage" peace negotiations, Prime Minister Olmert said in a speech to members of the kibbutz movement. "The Saudi initiative is interesting and contains many parts I would be ready to accept ... not all of them," Mr. Olmert said. "It could certainly form a convenient basis for future talks between us and moderate Arab elements." "The Arab Initiative represents a constructive Arab position and a serious peace offer," Jordan's Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib said. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

"We will evaluate and have working contacts with the new Government, and that is why I'm going down there," Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt told reporters in Stockholm. He said he would meet PA President Abbas and two Cabinet Ministers during his trip to the Middle East starting on 24 March. Mr. Bildt would not meet Hamas members of the Palestinian Unity Government, a spokesman said. Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht is expected to meet PA Foreign Minister Ziyad Abu Amr on 23 March. (AP, AFP, Ha'aretz)

International aid to the Palestinians grew from about \$1 billion in 2005 to more than \$1.2 billion in 2006, according to Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs figures. "More money was spent in a less coordinated manner," said Pierre Bessuges, the Office's Deputy Director in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Mario Mariani, Director of the Temporary International Mechanism, said that total European aid had come to about \$930 million in 2006, an increase of more than 30 per cent from the year before. (AP)

Hamas condemned the kidnappers of the British reporter Alan Johnston, warning that his abduction only served the goals of the Israeli occupation which sought to block any news coverage of Palestinian suffering. (BBC)

PA Finance Minister Salam Fayyad said that he would visit Norway and other European countries to discuss ways of resuming aid to the PA. Deputy Prime Minister Azzam al-Ahmad and Minister of Culture Bassam al-Salhi would embark on a European tour to promote the new Government's agenda. Their first stop will be in Germany. (Xinhua)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Alvaro de Soto met in Ramallah with PA Finance Minister Fayyad. "I am very pleased to meet Minister Fayyad, who is someone with whom the international community can work very well and a man of ideas and integrity," he told reporters. The two men discussed "some ideas about how the international community, especially the United Nations, can be helpful," he said. "We have never interrupted our dealing with Palestinian Governments through agencies and programmes." (AFP)

European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner called [PA Finance Minister] Fayyad to "congratulate him on his nomination". "He suggested visiting Brussels, and this was likely in coming weeks," her spokesperson said. (AFP, Reuters)

US Security Coordinator Lt-Gen. Keith Dayton said that the growing military strength of Hamas, if left unchecked, would erode PA President Abbas' already limited ability to enforce any ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and increase the chances of Israeli military intervention. He delivered his assessment in a series of closed-door briefings late last week to congressional leaders and staff, sources familiar with the discussions said. (Reuters)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said after meeting King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia: "The world should deal with this unity Government without discriminating between ministers ... and lift the financial blockade on the Palestinian people... We hope these Arab positions will be translated into action at the Arab summit." (Reuters)

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics said that Israeli settlements in the West Bank had consumed about 2.2 million cubic metres of water in 2006, nine times more per capita than the Palestinians. ([www.pcbs.org](#))

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A Palestinian was shot to death in the Gaza Strip during a showdown between his family and members of a Hamas militia, Hamas officials said. (AP)

Masked gunmen carjacked an UN-marked vehicle in Gaza City, an UNRWA spokesman said. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

A Hamas-affiliated university professor kidnapped by gunmen in Gaza City earlier was released, officials from Hamas said. (AP)

The death toll due to renewed clashes between Fatah and Hamas supporters in the Gaza Strip, which began the previous day, rose to three when a 2-year-old child died of his wounds. Security sources reported that the child had been injured by a gunshot while in his house, which was near the home of Fatah leader Samih Al-Madhoun. Another child, aged 12, suffered moderate injuries following an arson attack. There had also been a series of tit-for-tat incidents between the rival factions. Both Hamas and Fatah leaders, meeting at the home of PA Interior Minister Hani Al-Qawasmī, had agreed to end the tension and withdraw their gunmen from the streets. (Ma'an News Agency)

"We cannot be but happy that the international community does not accept the programme of the Palestinian Government and continues to demand acceptance of the three conditions that it imposed," Israeli Government spokeswoman Miri Eisin told AFP. In Ramallah, a spokesman for PA President Abbas, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, told AFP the Quartet statement "reflects an evolution of its positions, but this remains insufficient." (AFP)

"The [Palestinian Unity Government] programme does not go as far as we would like," said a spokesperson for EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. "Let's see what they do with the programme. The EU policy is one of proactive wait-and-see. We will continue to engage with the President and those ministers that we have been able to work with in the past." (Reuters)

In the latest opinion poll, 52 per cent of Israelis said that the Israeli Government should have regular contacts with the Palestinian Unity Cabinet, compared with 36 per cent who said no, *Israel Public Radio* said. (AFP)

A two-day UN International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, convened under the aegis of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, opened at the Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome. The speakers at the opening session included Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO; Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and representative of the Secretary-General; Paul Badji (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; and Qais Abdul-Kareem, Head of the Social Affairs Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Representative of Palestine to the Meeting. A session (Plenary I) was held in the afternoon which discussed "Peace in the Middle East: a key to the advancement of the dialogue between cultures and civilizations." (UN press release [GA/PAL/1042](#))

John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, cited his report when he told the Human Rights Council that "anyone who experienced apartheid has a sense of déjà vu when visiting the OPT." Mr. Dugard said he had previously refrained from using the term apartheid "on account of the sensitivity of the issue." He added: "Can it seriously be denied that such acts are committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over another racial group." His comments drew an immediate rebuke from Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, who said that the report was "utterly one-sided, highly selective and unreservedly biased." (AP)

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Three Israeli border policemen who were caught on camera abusing a Palestinian teenager on 21 March in the Hawara village, near Nablus, were questioned by the Police Investigation Unit in Tel Aviv. Villagers in Hawara had been complaining that violence by border guard had been making their life a nightmare. Border Guard Chief Hassein Fares ordered the three policemen suspended. Hindawi Qawarik, the Palestinian teen, would be summoned to give testimony. According to Qawarik, the two policemen "starting hitting me in the legs with a rifle, punching me, slamming my head against the door of a nearby container, pushing me to the floor and hitting me in the head." (Xinhua, Ynetnews)

Ibrahim Hamad, the highest-ranking Hamas member wanted by Israel, was charged recently by the military court in Judea with the murder of 36 Israeli civilians in a string of attacks since the beginning of the second intifadah. (Ha'aretz)

Political sources in Jerusalem denied that Prime Minister Olmert had reached a deal with the Palestinians on the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. PA President Abbas had told Israel's *Channel 1* a day earlier that a framework agreement had been reached on a prisoner exchange involving Mr. Shalit, adding that the two sides still needed to work out the details of the agreement. (AP, Ha'aretz)

Israel released on bail Qassam Barghouti, the son of PLC member Marwan Barghouti, who remained in an Israeli prison. Qassam was arrested in late 2003 after crossing from Jordan into the West Bank. Israeli security officials had accused him of complicity in Palestinian militant attacks, a charge his lawyer denied. "Bail was posted, and Barghouti is required to stay in the area of Ramallah and report to our Binyamin station once a week," according to Prisons Service spokesperson Oril Stelzer. (Ha'aretz, The Financial Times)

A PA presidential aide said that every possible effort was being made to secure the release of BBC Gaza correspondent Alan Johnston, who disappeared on 12 March. Palestinian journalists, legislators and Gaza residents staged more protests a day earlier calling for Mr. Johnston's release. The Arab League, the EU and the UK Government, as well as international journalists' groups, have also demanded that he be freed immediately. (BBC)

Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht said the new Palestinian Government was more moderate than its predecessor and urged it to secure the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, halt all violence and bring its security forces under a single authority. He held meetings with PA President Abbas and Foreign Minister Ziad Abu Amr in Ramallah. (AP)

UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd told Reuters that conditions for Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would worsen further unless Israel lifted the embargo and allowed people and goods to move more freely. "Everybody is just in bad shape now with the whole economy going down so badly. They just don't have opportunities," she said, citing the high unemployment and shortfalls in wage payments over the past year. (Reuters)

A poll conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip reflected that an overwhelming majority was satisfied with the make-up of the Unity Government but that the public was split into two equal halves with regard to the acceptance of the Quartet conditions and almost three quarters were in favour of the Saudi [Arab] Initiative. The total size of the sample was 1,270 adults interviewed face-to-face in 127 randomly selected locations. The margin of error was 3 per cent. (The Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research)

At FAO Headquarters in Rome, the UN International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace held its closing session after two days of deliberations and produced a final document. In that document, participants welcomed the formation of a Palestinian Government of National Unity and expressed the hope that the development would allow the international community to restore much-needed economic and humanitarian assistance and help to move the peace process forward. They also expressed the view that the international community had an obligation to support the new Government without preconditions and to lift the aid restrictions imposed on it. (UN News Centre)

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In Cairo, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met President of Egypt President Hosni Mubarak. The Israel-Palestinian conflict and other crises in the region were discussed during the meeting. (UN News Centre)

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PA President Abbas met in Ramallah with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. In a joint press conference after the meeting, President Abbas said he had emphasized to Ms. Rice the need to activate the Arab initiative and the peace process in the Middle East. Secretary Rice said: "It is extremely important to establish a common agenda to move forward toward the establishment of a Palestinian State," adding, "I think it can help all of us to have a destination in mind. I think this time it is best to talk about that political horizon in parallel. But I sincerely hope in the future the parties themselves can talk about the political horizon themselves." (Wafa)

US Secretary of State Rice held talks with Egypt's President Mubarak in the Egyptian city of Aswan as part of her Middle East tour to revive peace in the region. (DPA)

League of Arab States Secretary-General Amr Moussa urged Israel to accept the 2002 Arab peace initiative as a basis for peace negotiations, and insisted that Arab leaders meeting in Saudi Arabia later this week not alter the proposal's land-for-peace offer. (Ha'aretz)

Prime Minister Olmert said before a weekly Cabinet meeting that PA President Abbas had "blatantly violated" a promise to free an abducted Israeli soldier before forming the Palestinian Unity Government. "We cannot ignore the fact that the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority blatantly violated a series of commitments to Israel, especially the commitment that no national unity government would be formed before Gilad Shalit's release," Mr. Olmert said. (AP)

PA President Abbas said that he was "sure" abducted IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was alive and in good condition and said that the Palestinians had a "responsibility" to keep him alive and to return him to his family. "We have a responsibility to keep him alive," Mr. Abbas told a joint news conference with US Secretary of State Rice, adding that the soldier's release must be met by the release of Palestinian prisoners. (Ha'aretz)

In Ramallah, PA President Abbas met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. At a joint press conference after the meeting, President Abbas said, "On behalf of the leadership and Palestinian people, I asserted our strategic commitment to reach a comprehensive peace based on the international resolutions, including Security

Council resolutions 242 and 338, and other relevant resolutions". Mr Abbas said that he had briefed the UN Secretary-General about the unendurable circumstances of the Palestinian people as a result of the siege and the Israeli practices of occupation. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon offered full support for plans by President Abbas for achieving statehood, and stressed that the current critical juncture opened a window of opportunity for peace in the region. "President Abbas, you have shown an unwavering commitment to achieving the self-determination and an independent State for the Palestinian people," Mr. Ban said, adding, "I encourage this new Government, and I very much hope that its actions will show a genuine commitment to the basic principles not only of the Quartet, but of peace". Mr. Ban said: "Its [the Unity Government] immediate priorities should be to stabilize the situation in Gaza through releasing the captured Israeli soldier, consolidating the ceasefire and bringing law and order back to the streets. Such steps would address vital Palestinian interests and would be strongly welcomed by the international community." Addressing himself to the Palestinian people, Mr. Ban pledged the continued support of the United Nations. "I have seen for myself the challenges that the Palestinian people face every day, and I have been moved by what I have seen this morning," he said after having visited the Aida refugee camp and parts of the separation wall. (UN News Centre, Wafa)

In an interview with *Ha'aretz*, UN Secretary-General Ban said that the Quartet was planning to invite to its next meeting Israel, the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. Mr. Ban said that the issue had been discussed with US Secretary of State Rice in a meeting the day before, in which they exchanged their impressions of meetings held with leaders in the region. Mr. Ban said the meeting with Ms. Rice had been good, and he expressed the hope that the international community would be able to take full advantage of the diplomatic momentum that is currently being created. (Ha'aretz)

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt affirmed that the Swedish Government would deal with the Palestinian National Unity Government and would not differentiate between one minister and another. In a joint press conference with Information Minister Mustafa Barghouti in Bireh, Mr. Bildt said that he had met with the PA Ministers of Information, Finance and Foreign Affairs, pointing out that Swedish aid had increased 25 per cent in 2006 compared with 2005. (Wafa)

The United States was planning to hold separate talks with Israel and the PA aimed at achieving an accord that would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

In Jerusalem, visiting US Secretary of State Rice said during a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert that the United States would hold separate negotiations with Israel and the Palestinians, present questions and request clarifications regarding their positions in an effort to reach an agreed-upon agenda for the renewal of peace talks. According to Ms. Rice, it was possible to learn from the experience that had accumulated since the end of negotiations in 2000, particularly with regard to security arrangements. She pointed to the management of the border crossings at Kami and Rafah in the Gaza Strip as examples that should be studied closely.

The Secretary of State also said that she intended to request clarifications from Israel as to how it intended to implement the vision of a territorially contiguous Palestinian State in the West Bank. (Ha'aretz)

PA Minister of Health Radwan al-Akhras (Fatah) called on the Israeli Government to immediately halt screening of Palestinian passengers travelling through al-Karama crossing border in the West Bank by using the controversial naked spy machine known technically as "Safe View Millimetre Wave Radar". "This machine is very dangerous. The Israeli authorities had used it at the Rafah crossing border and several international human rights organizations and a health ministers conference convened in Geneva in 2004 had called for it to be dismantled and not used it at crossings because of its potential danger," Mr. al-Akhras said. (Wafa)

In an interview with *Palestine Voice* radio, Sheikh Mohammed Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem, warned that the continuing excavations near the Al-Aqsa Mosque were just a part of the Israeli extremists' plans for imposing new de facto realities inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque. (Wafa)

In a statement, the Nafha Society for the Defence of Prisoners' Rights called for the release of Palestinian prisoners, particularly female prisoners, who were incarcerated in Israeli prisons. The Society said that 128 female prisoners were being held behind bars in Israel, of whom 62 had been sentenced, 63 detained and 3 administratively detained. "It should be noted that the Israeli prison administration violates all human rights of female prisoners during interrogation. More than once they sprayed tear gas on them and exposed them to beatings and isolation, which could last up to a month. They also were prevented from daily breaks, in addition to the individual punishments, such as denial of family visits and the imposition of fines that might reach NIS 400 shekels as well as ongoing inspections by the department of rooms," according to the statement. (Wafa)

Israeli army commander for the West Bank region, Maj. Gen. Yair Naveh, cancelled a ban on Palestinians riding with Israelis or foreigners in cars in the West Bank, Israeli media reported. The ban, which came under criticism from human rights groups, had never been implemented. (AP)

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A Palestinian shepherd was stabbed to death outside the West Bank town of Aqraba, a Palestinian official said. Jawdat Bani-Jaber, Mayor of Aqraba, accused West Bank settlers of being behind the killing. The shepherd disappeared with his flock of sheep late last night and his body was found today in a valley outside of Aqraba, south of the West Bank city of Nablus. Yishai Hollander, a spokesman for the Yesha Council of Settlements, said he was not familiar with the incident.

Israeli police opened an investigation. (Ha'aretz)

Arab Foreign Ministers agreed to re-launch the Arab Peace Initiative, including the establishment of a working group to begin negotiations on the plan with "all parties concerned", according to reports from Riyadh. "The initiative includes a mechanism to promote it and gain its acceptance and especially registering it officially at the United Nations," Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal told reporters. An official travelling with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called it "a very positive and welcome development," while an Israeli official said that setting up the working group was significant and could be a breakthrough in the peace process. Both spoke on condition of anonymity. (AFP)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert in Jerusalem. Speaking at a joint press conference Mr. Olmert said that he maintained ongoing contact with PA President Abbas and that the road map would be the basis for any new negotiations. (Ha'aretz)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggested that a meeting grouping Israel, the Palestinians, Arab States and the Quartet was a good option to jump-start the peace talks. A four-way meeting was "a very interesting and useful idea to consider, but we need more consultations," he said. "If such an invitation would come my way ... I would not hesitate to participate," Prime Minister Olmert said. "The only decision taken by the Quartet is that we would meet at some point in the region. Precisely what geometry we might use has not been decided or really fully considered by the Quartet or by the parties," US Secretary of State Rice told reporters.

(AFP, www.state.gov)

Jordan's King Abdullah II urged Israel to "respond positively" to an Arab peace plan, saying that Israel and the Palestinians should seize the moment to make peace.

King Abdullah made the comments during talks with visiting US Secretary of State Rice, who was touring the region urging Arab leaders to amend their 2002 peace plan so that it could be a basis for a new push for the peace process. King Abdullah said that the plan laid the "basis for pushing ahead with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel." He said it was comprehensive because it "addresses all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict." In a separate statement on the King's talks with PA President Abbas, the palace quoted Abbas as expressing optimism following talks with Ms. Rice. "Things are moving forward," Mr. Abbas said. (AP)

PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said, "There will be no negotiations with Israel over the [Arab Peace] Initiative. There is also no demand to alter it by any of the parties," he added. (Ha'aretz)

The first 100 of what settler activists hope would be more than 5,000 marchers arrived at the site of the evacuated settlement of "Homesh" in an effort to repopulate it.

Prime Minister Olmert vowed that Israel would not allow them to re-occupy the site. "We have no intention of reoccupying settlements that were dismantled as part of the disengagement," he said, referring to the forced evacuation of all Gaza settlements and four in the northern West Bank, "Homesh" among them, in 2005." Mr. Olmert said: "We are certainly committed to carrying out the Israeli promise to dismantle the unauthorized outposts, so we are not now in the process of creating new unauthorized outposts at a time when we want to dismantle the existing outposts. (Ha'aretz)

Speaking at the Al-Quds Foundation in Algiers, Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said, "The Arab summit in Riyadh needs to decide to break the isolation of the Palestinians and recognize the Palestinian National Unity Government," adding, "things are evolving in the favour of Arabs and Muslims, who should take advantage of the [current] situation" in the Middle East. (AP)

A World Bank [report](#) called for the opening of the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt to exports and imports to try to stem the Occupied Palestinian Territory's economic collapse. The report put forth a gradual plan for the reopening of the crossing for the passage of goods, beginning with exports and later on adding imports into the Gaza Strip. The report said that time and cost-effectiveness should play a major role in the planning of logistics and security arrangements, since the Rafah crossing must not only serve as an outlet for goods and a port for the entry of supplies into the Gaza Strip, but also function as a major leverage for the failing Palestinian economy. (The World Bank)

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Israeli forces killed two Palestinian militants in Nablus in an exchange of fire, witnesses and paramedics said. They were members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades,

security sources reported. The IDF had also arrested at least five Palestinians in other towns of the West Bank in overnight raids. (*Xinhua*)

Gunfire erupted as the convoy of PA Interior Minister Hani al-Kassami arrived at the scene of a large sewage spill in the northern Gaza Strip, which had killed at least three people and forced thousands of residents to evacuate the village of Umm Nasr. Several major sewage treatment projects funded by foreign donors, including the one in Umm Nasr, had been frozen in the past year. (*AP*)

Clashes erupted between a group of Palestinian youths and Israeli squatters on the ruins of the evacuated West Bank settlement of "Homesh". (*Ha'aretz*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told a press conference in Jerusalem: "President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have agreed that they will meet biweekly."

In addition, Ms. Rice would meet regularly with both Mr. Abbas and Mr. Olmert, "sometimes together, sometimes separately." She said that the talks would concentrate not only on immediate concerns, including restrictions on Palestinian movement, rocket fire from the Gaza Strip and weapons smuggling, but also on the development of a "political horizon." She stressed that "we are not yet in the final status negotiations." Instead, she described the talks as initial contacts aimed at building confidence. (*BBC, DPA, www.state.gov*)

The Arab Peace Initiative could be Israel's last chance to live in a "sea of peace" and should not be squandered, PA President Abbas told *Reuters*. (*Reuters*)

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister told the *Daily Telegraph*: "If Israel refuses [the Arab peace initiative], that means it does not want peace and it places everything back into the hands of fate. They will be putting their future not in the hands of the peacemakers but in the hands of the lords of war." (*The Daily Telegraph*)

The military wing of Hamas called for cancelling the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire in response to "the ugly crime that the Israeli army committed in Nablus." (*Xinhua*)

Israeli and Palestinian officials would meet on security issues in Cairo later this week, a senior US official said. US and Egyptian representatives would join the talks. "It is really important during this period of calm that we have now between the Palestinians that Hamas not take advantage of that to rebuild its [military] capability," said the official, who asked not to be identified. (*AFP*)

PA Prime Minister Haniyeh and Norway's Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre had met in Riyadh, a PA official said. The issue of IDF Corporal Gilad Shalit was raised. "It was agreed that that matter should be resolved and that Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails should be freed," he added. (*AFP*)

The US Administration planned a revised aid package, totalling \$59.36 million, for the PA security forces, and an additional \$1.7 million to help "pre-position" USAID "to respond with support for any future electoral events in the West Bank and Gaza, including the next round of municipal elections", according to US Government documents obtained by *Reuters*. (*Reuters*)

After having experienced a modest recovery in 2003-2005, the Palestinian economy suffered another decline in 2006, as a result of the domestic and international political difficulties, an IMF-World Bank report said. Although hard data were scarce, real GDP was estimated to have fallen 5 to 10 per cent in 2006 less than initially had been feared, but still leaving it at almost 40 per cent below its 1999 level. Stronger than expected official and private inflows helped prevent a much sharper GDP decline. But with a large decline in investment, a further "hollowing out" of the Palestinian economy and an increase in its dependency on foreign aid was expected in 2007. (*www.imf.org*)

The EU would highlight its support for the Arab peace initiative by sending EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to the Arab Summit in Riyadh. He would also hold bilateral meetings with several leaders, including PA President Abbas, his spokesperson Cristina Gallach said. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Dato' Seri Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, would attend the Arab Summit to be held in Riyadh. He is expected to hold a series of meeting with prominent leaders from the Middle East to discuss the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Arab-Israel conflict and the situation in Iraq, the Foreign Ministry said. (*www.kln.gov.my*)

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Seven Qassam rockets landed in open fields near Ashkelon and Sderot, causing no injuries. The Islamic Jihad's military wing claimed responsibility. (*Ynetnews*)

A member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades was killed by Israeli troops in a predawn raid in Jenin, PA security sources said. The IDF said 37 "wanted" Palestinians had been arrested in the West Bank. (*AFP*)

Factional violence erupted in the Gaza Strip, leaving eight Palestinians injured in two separate shooting incidents. The car of the leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, Iyad Shanbari, was targeted, injuring his wife, two children and a bystander. Three Fatah members were shot in the Jabalia refugee camp. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli air force carried out an attack against Palestinians launching Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip, the first such offensive mission for a number of months. Military sources said that IDF forces identified three Palestinians getting ready to launch Qassam rockets against Israel, near the northern coast of the Gaza Strip, in the ruins of the evacuated settlement of "Dugit". Palestinian sources said there were four people in the area and that two had suffered serious injuries, while the others had been lightly injured. At least seven rockets were launched against targets in Israel, four striking agricultural areas. (*Ha'aretz*)

Hundreds of Israeli riot police cleared Israeli squatters from the ruins of the evacuated "Homesh" settlement in the West Bank. (*AP*)

The wife of a Hamas militant and their two children were wounded on Wednesday along with a passer-by after gunmen opened fire on his car in central Gaza City, medics and witnesses said. (*AFP*)

Members of PA security forces eligible for US-funded training and equipment would be screened in advance for militant ties, US documents showed. (*Reuters*)

The IDF would have to confront the strengthening of Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip, Chief of Staff Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi was quoted as saying. (*AFP*)

According to *Yediot Ahronot*, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Israel had held secret talks to formulate a new diplomatic-financial initiative aimed at resolving the Palestine refugee problem, by offering compensation to the refugees willing to stay in their countries of residence. (*Ynetnews*)

PA Prime Minister Haniyeh told *Reuters* that Hamas would not oppose the Arab peace initiative but would not compromise on the refugees' right of return. (*Reuters*)

President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, told reporters: "I think the most important thing is the resumption of the [Israeli-Palestinian] negotiations. It is not necessary to start with any pre-condition, which could disturb the start of the negotiation itself," he said. (*Xinhua*)

King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud told the Arab Summit: "It has become necessary to end the unjust blockade imposed on the Palestinian people as soon as possible." (*Reuters*)

The PA expected to receive a pledge of \$2.7 billion in aid at the Arab Summit, Finance Minister Salam Fayyad said. (*AFP*)

The leader of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi, said he believed that the only solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was to build one State for the two people. He said that he was planning to send all the Palestinians living in his country – some 30,000 – to the Occupied Palestinian Territory to prove that there was no solution to the conflict. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

UNRWA is [working](http://www.unrwa.org) to set up an emergency camp for the Palestinians made homeless by the sewage spill in the northern Gaza Strip. (*www.unrwa.org*)

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Ahmed Ibrahim Asa'sa, 16, was killed after throwing stones at soldiers in the village of Shuhada, south of Jenin. Iyad Mazen Hatoub, 21, was also killed during an Israeli incursion into Jenin. Two other Palestinians were injured during the confrontations. The IDF also broke into the house of Rabi' Asa'sa of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the military wing of Fatah, who managed to escape, but his brother Amjad Asa'sa was arrested. In the Gaza Strip, medical sources announced that Sa'id Saber Abu Wardeh, 20, died from wounds he sustained during the Israeli bombardment of the As-Sudaniya area. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The 7-year-old son of a Hamas operative was killed in the Gaza Strip when a hand grenade went off inside the family home. Fighting between Hamas and Fatah members continued in the northern Gaza Strip, with Hamas gunmen ambushing and wounding a detachment of seven Fatah men. (*Ha'aretz*)

Fatah and Hamas officials agreed that the Interior Ministry would appoint a committee to examine the latest events in the Gaza Strip. The committee would report to the Ministry on who was involved in these incidents and to bring them to justice, Hamas representative in the joint committee Ayman Taha said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

At the 19th Arab Summit in Riyadh, Arab leaders relaunched a plan for peace with Israel, endorsing the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. An excerpt below from the Riyadh Declaration refers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

"Affirm the option of just and comprehensive peace as the strategic option for the Arab Nation; in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative that draws the right path for reaching a peaceful settlement for Arab-Israeli conflict based on the principles and resolutions of international legitimacy, and the land for peace formula."

(BBC, Reuters, www.spa.gov.sa)

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal said that Saudi Arabia had done what it could in regard to influencing the Arab world. Now it was the time for the other side to agree to peace, he said. "What we have the power to do in the Arab world, we think we have done ... So now it is up to the other side because if you want peace, it is not enough for one side only to want it. Both sides must want it equally", he told London-based *Daily Telegraph*. He added that "if Israel refuses the Arab initiative, this means it does not want peace". (Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas warned of violence if Israel rejected a Palestinian "hand of peace" and called for an international conference on reaching a final agreement with Israel. Speaking at the Arab League Summit, President Abbas said Israel was evading peace by demanding that Arab States alter a land-for-peace initiative. "Demanding that amendments be introduced to the Arab initiative, is seeking to avoid the realization of peace ... We should not waste any more chances in the history of this long and painful cause ... We hope our summit would result in a formation of an Arab committee headed by the Saudi Arabian monarchy, the head of the summit, to follow up the implementation of the Arab initiative", Mr. Abbas said at the closing ceremony. He also called for a "negotiated settlement that will be sponsored by the international community and within the framework of an international peace conference in the region". (Al Bawaba, Reuters, Wafa, Ynetnews)

Israeli Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Israel had rejected the Arab initiative in its present form, noting the need to conduct negotiations between the Arab and Israeli parties. "The only way to overcome our disagreements is through negotiations". (Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on the Arab Summit in Riyadh. It said, "Israel is sincerely interested in pursuing dialogue with those Arab States that desire peace with Israel ... the peace process with the Palestinians is founded upon fundamental principles, the most central of which is the existence of two nation-states, with each state addressing the national aspirations of its people ..." (www.mfa.gov.il)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said that "peace is possible in the coming five years as there are many things which are going on and have never happened before and we should take this opportunity." Mr. Olmert called for a dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other "moderate" countries in the Arab world. On the Arab peace initiative, he said that he did not agree to all of it but was "ready to discuss things with the Saudis and to hear from them." He also said that Saudi Arabia was the country that would eventually determine Arabs' ability to reach a compromise with Israel. Speaking to *The Jerusalem Post* earlier, Mr. Olmert said he would "never accept a solution that is based on their [Palestine refugees] return to Israel, any number ... I will not agree to accept any kind of Israeli responsibility for the refugees." (BBC News, Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz said, "We must view any Palestinian who clearly accepts the Saudi initiative as one who has taken an important step toward a dialogue with Israel." He added that the Arab initiative was a basis for discussing the permanent agreement. He reiterated the need for Israel to launch its own diplomatic initiative, to discuss the principles for a permanent agreement with PA President Abbas. Officials at the Prime Minister's office were said to be sticking to their traditional stance, which was to reject the Arab initiative, and did not accept Mr. Peretz's stance. (Ynetnews)

PA Minister of Information Mustafa Barghouti arrived in Canada, the first visit by a member of the Palestinian Unity Government to North America. According to Dr. Barghouti, "The Canadian Government has informed the PA that they do not boycott the Palestinian Unity Government, but they are still figuring out their stance." (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi said, "It seems that we shall be obliged to undertake military action against Hamas in the Gaza Strip". The Palestinian resistance factions responded saying that Israel would have to deal with a fighting apparatus which they have previously not experienced in the Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian sources said negotiations on the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit had hit a bump and were now back to the starting point. According to sources, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, headed by Ahmed Jabri, thwarted the deal. Sources said Mr. Shalit's captors had expressed fear of Israeli reprisal if Mr. Shalit was released. (Ha'aretz)

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal condemned the kidnapping of BBC Gaza correspondent Alan Johnston, who had disappeared 19 days earlier. Prince Saud said nobody could approve of the abduction of a man who was only doing his job and hoped that Mr. Johnston would be released soon. (BBC News)

PA Palestinian Minister Salam Fayyad was scheduled to visit Brussels on 11 April to discuss ways of resuming frozen European Union aid to the Palestinian Authority, EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said. EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said that the Quartet hoped to meet with Israel before the summer for the first time. He also said that the Quartet wanted to engage in talks with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the next few weeks. "What we would really hope to do before summer is to get the Quartet together with these countries and the parties to the conflict – a meeting with Israel and a meeting with Palestine, he told the European Parliament. (Ha'aretz)

The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reported that the area of built-up land in Israeli settlements in the West Bank totalled 187,100 thousand dunums (187.1 square kilometres) in August 2005. According to a press release on the occasion of "Land Day", PCBS said the largest area was in Jerusalem Governorate with 44.4 square kilometres, representing 12.9 per cent of the total area of the Governorate, followed by Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate at 30.3 km², representing 3.5 per cent of the total Governorate. According to 2005 data, the number of Israeli settlements in the West Bank was 144 settlements, 26 settlements in Jerusalem, and 24 settlements in Ramallah and Al-Bireh. Data indicated that the number of settlers in the West Bank reached 451,441 settlers of which 246,843 settlers were in Jerusalem. (Wafa)

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Explosives detonated accidentally at a training camp in the southern Gaza Strip used by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. One person was killed and at least ten others were injured. A Hamas source said the blast was the result of a "work accident" during training at a facility in the village of al-Qawara near Khan Yunis. (Reuters)

Sheikh Adnan Manasreh, a prominent member of the Salafi branch in the Gaza Strip, was killed by masked gunmen in Gaza City. Two of his relatives were wounded. (The Jerusalem Post)

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, speaking for the EU Presidency, said, "Our commitment to the peace process remains one of the most important policy priorities of the European Union." The EU hailed the renewed Arab peace initiative, calling it encouraging, but indicated it would stick with the aid scheme that bypassed the PA to go directly to the people. EU Foreign Ministers would continue to evaluate the intentions of the new Hamas-Fatah government. (AP)

The European Commission (EC) was to distribute over €21 million to Palestinian public service providers and pensioners. The EC said that more than 77,000 workers and pensioners would benefit from social allowances through TIM. The beneficiaries would include public sector employees who had not received salaries since February 2006 due to the aid embargo on the PA. (Ma'an News Agency)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was embarking on a three-day visit to the Middle East. Her trip included talks with PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. PA Foreign Minister Ziad Abu Anr was expected to meet with French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy on 2 April and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin a day later. (AP)

According to the residents of the village of Um Nasser in the Gaza Strip, the environmental disaster that occurred three days earlier had been expected, but the PA had done nothing to prevent it. The bursting of a cesspit near the village had destroyed most of the houses in Um Nasser with floods of sewage water. Five Palestinians were killed and 35 injured during the floods and the damage done to property mounted to millions of US dollars. Villagers called on the PA to find a suitable solution to the problem and appealed to officials to solve the problem of families who were now living outdoors. At least 250 houses had been destroyed. (Ma'an News Agency)

Prime Minister Olmert said in an interview with *Time Magazine* that PA Prime Minister Haniyeh had "just lately ... transferred over a million dollars for a group of terrorists to carry out terrorist actions against Israeli citizens ... You have a terrorist who is Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority." Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad rejected the charges as "false and groundless." (AFP, Time.com)

US Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY), Chair of the House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, said that she would lift a hold she had placed on the \$59 million the US Administration had requested for training and equipping the PA Presidential Guards. (Reuters)

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Former PA Foreign Minister and a senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar said: "There are differences between the political platforms of the new Unity Government and the Hamas movement ... We would never ever recognize the right of Israel to exist on one inch of the land of Palestine." (*Xinhua*) Prime Minister Olmert said that he was not ready to order a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip, despite the IDF's warnings of a Hamas arms build-up. Hamas had smuggled in large numbers of anti-tank missiles and 30 tons of weapons-grade explosives and nearly doubled its number of fighters to 10,000, Israeli security officials said on condition of anonymity. (*AP*)

Following the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Bremen, Federal Foreign Minister Steinmeier [stated](#) at the final press conference that the EU wanted to meet PA Government representatives who accepted non-violence, the agreements concluded with Israel, and Israel's right to exist. This was the shared understanding, he said, although no concrete decisions had been taken. (www.eu2007.de)
