



## Security Council SC/8596

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Security Council  
5337<sup>th</sup> Meeting (PM)

### **IN DELICATE PERIOD PRIOR TO ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS VIOLENCE MUST**

### **BE MET WITH CONCRETE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC ACTIONS, SECURITY COUNCIL TOLD**

### **Under-Secretary-General Says in Coming Weeks Parties Must Strive for Calm, Ensure Voices for Peace, Moderation Heard, Heeded**

In the present delicate period leading up to both Palestinian and Israeli elections, the forces of violence and despair must be met with concrete political and economic action – action that will build a foundation in which the “agenda of peace” could be made stronger than the “agenda of conflict”, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, told the Security Council this afternoon.

In his first regular briefing to the Council since 30 November, the Under-Secretary-General said the past month had seen some positive developments, but violence had continued. In the coming weeks, the parties must strive for a return to calm. An atmosphere of stability and restraint would help ensure that voices of peace and moderation were heard and heeded during the crucial election period. He recalled the comments of the Quartet Special Envoy, James Wolfensohn, who said at the recent donor meeting in London that the immediate aftermath of the elections would be a critical moment of opportunity, which neither the parties nor the international community could afford to miss.

With the [Road Map](#)’s target date for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict just 10 days away, Mr. Gambari said it was obvious that, despite some very important progress, the destination would not be reached on time. “Let me be clear: This does not in any way detract from the centrality of the Road Map. It remains the agreed framework for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East”, he stressed.

He said, however, that the imminent deadline was surely an occasion for all parties to reflect on what more they could do to ensure that the Road Map obligations were met, so that genuine progress was made towards the goal of two States, Israel and an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders.

He said the Palestinian Authority’s inability to exercise control over its territory remained a source of great concern. The Quartet encouraged and supported the Palestinian Authority’s efforts to take immediate steps to prevent armed groups from acting against law and order and against the policies of the Authority, itself.

Further, he said that Israel’s continued policy of settlement expansion and barrier construction, not only undermined Palestinian leaders who were seeking election on a platform of peaceful negotiation with Israel, but that also undermined efforts to achieve a viable two-State solution, with a contiguous West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and meaningful linkages between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The meeting was called to order at 3:25 p.m. and adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

#### **Briefing by Under-Secretary-General**

IBRAHIM GAMBARI, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said this month had seen some positive developments, notably steps toward the implementation of the Access and Movement Agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. But violence had continued, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in Israel and Lebanon. That violence undoubtedly raised tension in the region at a time when the political situation was evolving rapidly. In the coming weeks, the parties must strive for a return to calm. An atmosphere of stability and restraint would help to ensure that voices of peace and moderation were heard and heeded during the crucial electoral period.

At the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting held in London on 14 December, donors, the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel met to discuss the economic, fiscal and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to assess progress in Palestinian reform. The Palestinian Authority presented an update on its precarious fiscal situation, and shared with donors the main elements of the Medium Term Development Plan for the next three years.

The meeting adopted a revised donor structure that strengthened the role of the Authority. That enhanced role in aid management constituted an important step towards the assumption of some recipient State functions by the Authority.

The need for the Palestinian Authority to adhere to the reform agenda and re-establish fiscal discipline was a central theme of the meeting, he said. Donors agreed on the need for the Authority to implement, as a matter of priority, a medium-term fiscal stabilization plan, and stressed that reform must continue in the coming months, even though the election period might make that more difficult. The Authority's fiscal situation was so acute that there was real concern that the December salaries might not be paid.

The United Nations, he said, reported three significant socio-economic trends that emerged in 2005. The first was that poverty rates increased, despite overall growth in the economy and employment rates. Second, the gap between rich and poor widened. Third, geographic disparities became more pronounced, with humanitarian needs highest in the Gaza Strip and the northern and southern areas of the West Bank. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee discussed convening a pledging conference to mobilize the target sum of \$3 billion, to take place in the first half of 2006.

At the London meeting, he said, the World Bank reiterated that movement restrictions imposed on goods and people continued to be the major obstacle to Palestinian economic growth. That underscored the importance of the Agreement on Movement and Access signed last month. Implementation was proceeding with some parts of the Agreement. The Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt had been open since 26 November for five hours each day. The Kami crossing, through which produce entered Israel from Gaza, had also remained open since 15 November, allowing the first "post-disengagement" Palestinian harvest to reach Israeli markets. Both parties must continue to make efforts to ensure that agricultural exports remained a top priority.

The Agreement included an Israeli commitment to allow the passage of convoys to facilitate the movement of goods and persons between Gaza and the West Bank, specifying that bus convoys would start by 15 December. Despite the concerted efforts of the United States and Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn to resolve outstanding differences and ensure that Israel's security concerns were met, commencement of the convoys remained suspended. He hoped that discussions aimed at breaking the impasse would continue on that important issue. Discussions were also ongoing between Israel and the United States, with the participation of the United Nations, to develop a plan to reduce obstacles to movement in the West Bank.

Turning to the security situation, he said that on 5 December, a suicide bombing in Netanya killed five Israeli civilians, and wounded dozens more. Representatives of Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. The Palestinian Authority, which condemned the act, arrested some 60 suspects after the bombing. The Quartet condemned that attack, and demanded that the Syrian Government take immediate action to close the offices of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and to prevent the use of its territory by armed groups engaged in terrorist acts. It also encouraged and supported the Authority's efforts to prevent armed groups from acting against law and order and the policy of the Authority itself, and urged all parties to exercise restraint, avoid an escalation of violence, and keep the channels of communication open.

The Government of Israel responded to the Netanya attack and to the firing of Kassam rockets at Israel by tightening the closure regime, and by implementing a previously-announced resumption of targeted killings, which led to the killing of eight people in Gaza. While acknowledging the right of Israel to defend itself against terrorist attacks in conformity with international law, it must be noted, however, that extrajudicial killings amounted to executions without trial, and innocent bystanders were often killed or injured in those operations. Meanwhile, the Palestinian internal security situation had worsened, with attacks on electoral offices, armed clashes between Fatah factions at the party headquarters and between the Palestinian security forces and armed elements.

Continuing, he said it was clear that the Palestinian Authority must pursue security sector reform with single-minded determination. The Authority's inter-ministerial working group, supported by the team of the United States Security Coordinator, had now produced a first draft of a security reform white paper. Security sector reform was expected to feature in the Palestinian Authority's Medium Term Development Plan.

Concerning settlement activity, he said that during the reporting period, settlement activity and barrier construction had continued. A recent study by the Israeli non-governmental organization, "Peace Now", referred to a list published by the Israeli Ministry of Housing and Construction, reporting that 3,696 housing units were currently being built in West Bank settlements, and another 1,654 in East Jerusalem. He was concerned by unconfirmed reports that the Israeli Defence Minister recently approved plans to construct further housing units in Ma'aleh Adumim and other settlements near Jerusalem. According to the Road Map, Israel was obliged to freeze its settlement activities, and to dismantle outposts in the West Bank constructed since March 2001.

He said that preparations continued for Palestinian Legislative Council elections scheduled for 25 January 2006. Those preparations had been marred by violent incidents, many of them arising from internal disagreements within the Fatah party concerning the composition of the party's lists. The Central Election Commission decided to close down all district offices on 13 December, but reopened them the following day when police protection was provided. That allowed candidates to be registered by the deadline of 14 December. The candidate lists included two Fatah lists, one headed by Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, and another under the name Al-Mustaqbal ("The Future") headed by the imprisoned Fateh leader, Marwan Barghouti. Hamas had also formally registered for its first parliamentary elections.

On 15 December, the fourth round of municipal elections took place in the West Bank, including in larger municipalities such as Neblus, Jenin and al-Bireh, where Hamas won an overwhelming majority of seats, and Ramallah, where Fatah won, he reported. The fifth and final round, which would include major constituencies in Gaza, would be organized in early 2006 after the legislative elections.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon – a country that had had to endure yet another attempt to undermine its stability and independence through the brutal killing of Gebran Tueni and three others on 12 December, he said that Mr. Tueni had been a champion of a democratic, sovereign Lebanon and of a free press. The Security Council and the Secretary-General had condemned that act of terrorism, and expressed their support for the Lebanese Government's determination to bring to justice the perpetrators of those and other such attacks.

He noted the Council's decision in resolution [1644 \(2005\)](#) to establish a tribunal of an international character to try those found responsible for the assassination of Rafik Hariri, to extend the International Independent Investigation Commission's technical assistance to the Lebanese authorities, and to expand the scope of its investigations. The Secretariat was working actively to implement that text's operative paragraphs.

Promoting the stability of Lebanon was a vital part of the efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, he said. The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Alvaro de Soto, visited Lebanon in early December, where he had discussed with the Lebanese Government, among other matters, the need to improve the situation along the Blue Line. That was a matter on which Mr. de Soto had also held discussions with Israel.

The Under-Secretary-General said that the situation along the Blue Line had been tense but stable during the reporting period. Hezbollah had started to reconstruct its position near Ghajar village, which had been destroyed during the 21 November exchange of fire, on which the Council had received a separate briefing. He stressed the importance of the Lebanese Government to extend control over all its territory, especially in the south.

Since his last briefing on 30 November, there had been 19 Israeli air violations, including on the day of Mr. Tueni's funeral, he said. On 15 December, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Lebanon, Geir Pedersen, yet again expressed his deep concern about those violations, and noted that overflights were a serious breach of Lebanese sovereignty. Israeli cited the continued presence and activities of Hezbollah as the reason for those violations. He reminded both parties, however, that one violation did not justify another. He called again on the Israeli authorities to halt those overflights and on all parties to respect the Blue Line in its entirety.

He said that the Road Map's target date for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was now 10 days away. It was obvious that, while very important progress had been made, the destination would not be reached on time. "Let me be clear: This does not in any way detract from the centrality of the Road Map. It remains the agreed framework for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East", he stressed.

That was surely an occasion, however, for all parties to reflect on what more they could do to ensure that the Road Map obligations were met, so that genuine progress was made towards the goal of two States, Israel and an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders.

More immediately, during the present delicate pre-electoral period, there was a need to respond to the forces of violence and despair with concrete political, economic, security, and social action – action that provided a framework in which the "agenda of peace" was made stronger than the "agenda of conflict", he said.

He said that the Palestinian Authority's inability to exercise control over its territory remained a source of great concern. The Quartet encouraged and supported the Palestinian Authority's efforts to take immediate steps to prevent armed groups from acting against law and order and against the policies of the Authority, itself. Israel's continued policy of settlement expansion and barrier construction, not only undermined Palestinian leaders who were seeking election on a platform of peaceful negotiation with Israel, but it also undermined efforts to achieve a viable two-State solution, with a contiguous West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and meaningful linkages between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In closing, he recalled the comments of the Quartet Special Envoy, James Wolfensohn, at the recent donor meeting in London. Mr. Wolfensohn, whose efforts had been so crucial to achieving the progress recorded in 2005, had reminded participants that the immediate aftermath of both Palestinian and Israeli elections would be a critical moment of opportunity, which neither the parties nor the international community could afford to miss.

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