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ISRAEL'S ELECTION, PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT'S FORMATION, LEBANON'S NATIONAL

DIALOGUE FOCUS, AS SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFED ON MIDDLE EAST

The past month had seen major political developments in the Middle East, the Security Council was told today, including the establishment of a new Palestinian Government, the conduct of a general election in Israel, and the beginning of an important national dialogue in Lebanon.

Briefing the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tuliameni Kalomoh reported that, while the programme of the new Palestinian Government showed signs of evolution from Hamas' deeply disturbing record and covenant, the Government should, as Palestinian President Abbas had urged, reassess its position on the Quartet's principles and President Abbas' platform of peace, if the aspirations of the Palestinian people for peace and statehood were to enjoy the strong international support that they deserved.

While awaiting the formation of a new Israeli Government, he said it must be recalled that, if the prospects of a viable Palestinian State in the framework of a two-State solution was seen to dwindle because of unilateral Israeli actions, it would become even more difficult to persuade Palestinians that there was anything to be gained from moving towardS compromise. The recently expressed interest of both Acting Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in negotiations should be seriously explored.

In addition, he said the beginning of the national dialogue in Lebanon was a historic and positive development. All the country's political leaders had come together, without any external prodding, for an open discussion on issues of national concern, and notable progress had been achieved. The process underscored the fact that dialogue remained the most effective way to reach consensus, and consensus, in turn, was the most effective means of ensuring the stability and national unity of Lebanon. He hoped their efforts would continue to bear fruit, thus sending a message throughout the region that peaceful dialogue was indeed the only way forward.

Following the briefing, Israel's representative told the Council that the results of the recent elections clearly showed that the Israeli people chose peace. The chosen leadership of the Palestinian people, on the other hand, was comprised of the Hamas terrorist organization, leaving much less room for optimism. Israel yearned for a Palestinian partner, with whom it could jointly pursue the road towards peace. Hamas did not even recognize Israel, and had not renounced terrorism and violence as a means to achieve its goals. The Israeli elections underscored a long-standing commitment to international agreements, while Hamas had vowed to accept only those agreements that matched its narrow interests.

The Observer for Palestine said Israel's disingenuous pronouncements that it had "no partner" with which to negotiate peace should be viewed from the perspective of unilateralism. It was Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestinian territory that obstructed a comprehensive peace agreement. It was not the Palestinian people or Palestinian democracy that threatened a resolution to the conflict, but rather Israel's "no partner" mantra, its confiscation and colonization of Palestinian lands, its oppression and subjugation of an entire people, its consistent violation of international law, its defiance of United Nations resolutions and the political paralysis of the international community.

Speakers today welcomed the holding of democratic elections, and expressed the hope that the new leadership on both sides would address the aspirations of their people. As stated by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, the end of the electoral season should provide a possibility for focusing seriously on a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis, who had been living in violence, instability and fear for so many years and who were still desperately waiting for peace.

The changes in the Governments of both sides, said Qatar's representative, placed the Middle East at the threshold of a decisive choice that would define the future of the entire region: either return to negotiations or risk more hardship and suffering for the peoples of the region. It was impossible to arrive at a comprehensive and sustainable settlement to the Palestinian question if the settlement was based on unilateral measures that ran counter to the terms of reference and the foundations on which the peace process was built. Such a solution must be the result of a negotiated agreement between the two sides.

Several speakers emphasized that the Hamas-led Palestinian Government would continue to be judged by its actions. The United States, stated its representative, had seen nothing that could cause it to change its position towards Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization under United States law that was responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent civilians, that had long been an enemy of peace in the region and that had harmed the Palestinian people's aspirations for statehood. Future assistance to the new Palestinian Government would be reviewed against its commitment to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations.

Beyond political developments, speakers also remained concerned about the fragile economic and humanitarian situation on the ground, and urged that the Palestinian people not be punished for the decisions taken by their leadership. Speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Yemen's representative said withholding aid, following the results of free and fair elections, was the wrong message to send to the Middle East region. He called on the international community to provide the necessary economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people. In that context, it was imperative that Israel release what it owed to the Palestinian side in tax and customs duties levied on goods destined for the Palestinian territories.

Statements were also made today by the representative of Lebanon, Syria, Greece, Peru, Congo, Russian Federation, Denmark, China, Slovakia, Japan, Ghana, France, United Kingdom, Argentina, United Arab Emirates, Austria (on behalf of the European Union and associated States) and Malaysia (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement). The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People also spoke.

The meeting, which began at 10:05 a.m., adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met this morning to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Statements

TULIAMENI KALOMOH, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said the past month had seen major political developments in the Middle East – the establishment of a new Palestinian Government, following elections on 25 January; the conduct of a general election in Israel; and the beginning of an important national dialogue in Lebanon.

Two days ago, he said, the Palestinian Legislative Council approved by 71 votes to 36 the new Palestinian Government, led by Ismail Haniyeh and comprising Hamas members and independents. That vote followed two months of discussions on the possibility of forming a national unity government, which did not bear fruit. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas swore in the new Government on 29 March. He had earlier written to Mr. Haniyeh to express his concern at the draft government programme prepared by Hamas, and to ask him to align the programme with that of the Palestinian Presidency.

The programme subsequently outlined by Mr. Haniyeh in his speech before the Palestinian Legislative Council states its respect for the constitutional relations with President Abbas, and its honouring of the relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) based on respect for their respective constitutional mandates. It did not, however, acknowledge the status of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people and the basic tenets of its 1988 Declaration of Independence, as requested by Fatah and other parties in discussions on a national unity government.

The following priorities were identified in the programme: all matters related to the occupation; the provision of security; improvement of the economic situation; internal reform and fighting corruption; reinforcing the status of the Palestinian cause in the Arab and Islamic worlds; and developing international relations to serve Palestinian interests. The Quartet and the Security Council had called on the new Government to commit to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

The Palestinian Authority continued to be unable to meet its financial obligations, he noted. Although Palestinian Authority salary payments were made in February, the Authority was unable to pay \$15 million to \$20 million in unemployment and other social benefits. Depending on the realization of pledges made at the Arab League Summit, a financing gap of at least \$60 million existed for March salaries.

Turning to Israeli political developments, he said Israeli elections were held two days ago, and the new Kadima party, led by Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, emerged with 28 seats. Mr. Olmert stated during the campaign that only parties committed to the so-called "convergence plan" he outlined would be invited to join a Kadima-led coalition government. That plan involved withdrawal from parts of the West Bank combined with the annexing of major settlement blocs, with the stated goal of setting Israel's permanent borders by 2010. According to statements during the campaign, Israel would stand ready to proceed unilaterally should it judge that negotiations with the Palestinian side were not possible. President Abbas had for his part rejected unilateral measures, and indicated his desire to enter into negotiations with Israel at the earliest opportunity.

Regarding security developments, he said Israel was on high security alert during most of the reporting period, and both Israelis and Palestinians suffered from violence. Citing security concerns, Israel had closed the Karni crossing into Gaza for 46 days since the beginning of the year. As a result, stocks of basic food commodities had been severely depleted. Since then, Karni had reopened to allow over 1,300 truckloads of food to enter Gaza and stocks of basic commodities were stabilizing. The continuous operation of the Karni crossing, as envisaged in last November's Agreement on Movement and Access, remained vital to Gaza's economic viability and social welfare.

He noted that, as in neighbouring areas of Israel, Avian Flu had recently been confirmed in two locations in Gaza and was suspected in two other locations in the Strip, affecting an estimated 3 million birds. The United Nations system was working closely with both parties to contain the crisis.

In Lebanon, political leaders had been engaged since 2 March in a national dialogue to address major issues affecting the country, including the implementation of Council resolution 1559, he said. Discussions so far had led to important consensus on certain issues, including the international investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri and 22 others; a court of an international nature to try the assassins; and rebuilding Lebanese-Syrian relations on the basis of non-interference and mutual respect. Consensus had also emerged on how to address the question of Palestinian weapons.

Participants in the dialogue also agreed to initiate a process through which to identify the Shaba'a Farms as Lebanese, he said. The Security Council in June 2000 confirmed the Secretary-General's assessment that the Farms lay in an area occupied by Israel in 1967, and thus did not fall within the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operation and the purview of resolutions 425 and 338. However, as stated in the Secretary-General's report of 22 May 2000, the line of withdrawal identified by the United Nations was "without prejudice to future border agreements between the Member States concerned". The national dialogue was now concentrating on the issue of the Presidency and on reaching consensus on the weapons of Hezbollah.

The situation along the Blue Line had remained quiet, although there had been continuing concern regarding the potential for instability, he said. The Israeli authorities reported concern over a possible operation led by Hezbollah against Israeli targets. The Secretary-General had appealed to the leaders of Israel, Lebanon and Syria to do their utmost to maintain calm, the importance of which could not be overstated, particularly at the current time.

He said that, while the programme of the new Palestinian Government showed signs of evolution from Hamas' deeply disturbing record and covenant, the

Government should, as President Abbas had urged, reassess its position on the Quartet's principles and President Abbas' platform of peace, if the aspirations of the Palestinian people for peace and statehood were to enjoy the strong international support that they deserved.

Second, while awaiting the formation of a new Israeli Government, it must be recalled that, if the prospects of a viable Palestinian State in the framework of a two-State solution was seen to dwindle because of unilateral Israeli actions, it would become even more difficult to persuade Palestinians that there was anything to be gained from moving towards compromise. The recently expressed interest of both Acting Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in negotiations should be seriously explored.

Third, he said, despite the gulf between the parties, they and the international community shared a common interest and duty to prevent a security or humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In that context, and while mindful of Israel's security concerns, he observed that the extended closure of Gaza had caused real hardship.

Finally, he said, the beginning of the national dialogue in Lebanon was a historic and positive development. All the country's political leaders had come together, without any external prodding, for an open discussion on issues of national concern. Notable progress had been achieved. The process underscored the fact that dialogue remained the most effective way to reach consensus, and consensus, in turn, was the most effective means of ensuring the stability and national unity of Lebanon. He encouraged the Lebanese parties to maintain their commitment to that dialogue, as a means through which Lebanon addressed both its national priorities and international commitments. He hoped their efforts would continue to bear fruit, thus sending a message throughout the region that peaceful dialogue was indeed the only way forward.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Observer for Palestine, recalled that President Abbas had reaffirmed on a number of occasions since the Palestinian elections a commitment to all obligations and agreements signed by the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority, including the provisions of international law, international conventions, United Nations resolutions – including General Assembly resolution 194 – the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut, and all the agreements signed with Israel.

The Government of Israel had intensified and accelerated its attempts to carry through with its unilateral actions intended to further entrench its illegitimate measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, he said. The political platform of Acting Prime Minister Olmert was based on a dangerous campaign that called for the unilateral definition of Israel's borders in the next four years by keeping control of strategic parts of the occupied West Bank, occupied East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and three illegal settlement blocs. That illegal plan would effectively mean the end of the two-State solution and result in a series of Bantustans.

He said that Israel's announcement that it would implement its "E1" plan must be condemned and rejected by the international community, he stressed. It would isolate occupied East Jerusalem from the West Bank by encircling the city with illegal settlement structures and the expansionist wall, end its territorial contiguity with the rest of the Palestinian territory, and tip Jerusalem's demographic balance in favour of Israel by sustaining a Jewish majority through the incorporation of the city's illegal settler population.

Israeli unilateralism and militarism must be rejected and not be allowed to replace constructive political dialogue and pragmatism, he said. The unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, since it had not been negotiated with the Palestinians and ignored all Palestinian concerns, had proven disastrous. Israel still retained ultimate control of Gaza by controlling its borders, territorial sea and airspace. That had turned the territory into a massive prison, entirely besieged by Israel and without the attributes of sovereignty and independence. While the unilateral withdrawal had been intended to portray the end of Israel's military occupation of Gaza, it had become clear that Gaza was still subject to the Fourth Geneva Convention. In that connection, the Palestinian side would reject any and all unilateral actions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Occupied Palestinian Territories constituted a single territorial unit and to suggest that Gaza should enjoy a status different from that of the West Bank would violate Palestine's territorial integrity, unity and contiguity and the substantive law of self-determination.

He said Israel had continued with its illegal colonization policy and de facto annexation of huge areas of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in spite of the absolute prohibition of such colonization under the Fourth Geneva Convention's Additional Protocol 1, which defined it as a war crime, as did the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Moreover, Israel had begun to physically transform the Qalandiya checkpoint in the West Bank into an international crossing point. Those actions were further undermining the territorial integrity and contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory and thus making the vision of two-State solution impossible.

Israel's disingenuous pronouncements that it had "no partner" with which to negotiate peace should be viewed from the perspective of unilateralism, he pointed out. The PLO, which President Abbas also headed, was the sole representative of the Palestinian people everywhere and, therefore, the only real negotiating partner. Obviously, it was Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestinian territory that obstructed a comprehensive peace agreement. That had occurred regardless of whether or not the Palestinian people had a government, and whether or not a Palestinian Government was headed by the late President Yasser Arafat or President Abbas. It was not the Palestinian people or Palestinian democracy that threatened a resolution to the conflict, but rather Israel's "no partner" mantra, its confiscation and colonization of Palestinian lands, its oppression and subjugation of an entire people, its consistent violation of international law, its defiance of United Nations resolutions and the political paralysis of the international community.

DANIEL CARMON (Israel) said that in recent weeks, and as recently as the day before yesterday, the world had witnessed two major political events in the Middle East: elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council and Israel's parliamentary elections. Both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples had chosen who would be their respective leaders. The results of those elections clearly showed that the Israeli people chose peace. Israel remained committed to the two-State solution, as envisioned in the Road Map. The chosen leadership of the Palestinian people, on the other hand, was comprised of the Hamas terrorist organization, leaving much less room for optimism.

Israel yearned for a Palestinian partner, with whom it could jointly pursue the road towards peace, he said. Yet, on the Palestinian side, Hamas did not even recognize Israel, and had not renounced terrorism and violence as a means to achieve its goals. In Israel, the elections underscored a longstanding commitment to international agreements. Yet, on the Palestinian side, Hamas had vowed to accept only those agreements that matched its narrow interests.

Israel remained committed to the Road Map, with progression based on the fulfilment of successive benchmarks, and believed it was the best way to advance towards a peaceful outcome of the conflict, he said. Unfortunately, as of yet, the Palestinians had failed to carry out even the first requirement in it – to fight terrorism and begin to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. Acts of terrorism had continued to create a dire situation in the Middle East. On Tuesday, the very day of Israeli national elections, Islamic Jihad fired a 122-millimeter katyusha rocket into Israel – the very first time such a weapon had been used by a Palestinian terror organization, representing what might be a new stage in their terrorist war against Israel. Israel's security forces faced more than 50 daily alerts of terror attacks in the period prior to the national elections.

Israel had reason to believe the situation might deteriorate now that Hamas had assumed the political helm of the Palestinian Authority, unless radical change was made to its charter and to its approach to Israel and what it stood for. Only last week, he noted, Hamas officials stated that they would not arrest terrorists who attacked Israel. Israel faced a constant dilemma: safeguarding the security and well-being of its citizens while at the same time minimizing any humanitarian hardships that might affect the Palestinians as a result of terrorism prevention.

Israel was recently forced to close the Karni crossing – a vital channel for food and goods to enter the Gaza Strip – as a result of direct threats of terrorism. Those alerts represented an example where Palestinian extremists had harmed the lives of other Palestinians. Israel provided the Palestinian Authority with names of specific individuals who threatened such attacks, yet the Authority failed to arrest them. Israel had also proposed an alternative crossing to be used

while Karni was under threat, yet the Authority refused to fully utilize that alternative, undoubtedly for political reasons and at the great expense of Palestinian well-being. As of 23 March, when the security situation permitted, the Karni crossing was reopened. Israel was doing everything in its power to ensure that the Palestinian people received all needed humanitarian assistance, but it could not compromise its security.

He said the role of Hamas and Palestinian terrorism was only one angle of the situation in the Middle East. The terror organizations that perpetrated those crimes were headquartered in Damascus and were financed by Iran. The alliance between Iran, Syria and Palestinian terrorist organizations – an axis of terror – posed grave dangers to the security and stability of the Middle East and beyond. He was deeply concerned by Hizbollah's continuous presence on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line.

He called on the international community to continue its fight against terrorism in order to remove that treacherous component from the complicated relations with Israel's neighbours. To that effect, Israel appreciated the international community's continued insistence that the new Palestinian Government abide by three requirements: recognize Israel, abandon violence and terrorism, and comply with previous agreements with Israel. Only after those three conditions were met could Israel negotiate with the Palestinian Authority. He called on the international community to continue to make strict demands on Hamas to comply with those three fundamental benchmarks that the international community itself had set.

Ms. ZIADE (Lebanon) said the Middle East region was witnessing accelerating crises, including unstable security and political conditions in Iraq and daily Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. Lebanon had long suffered Israel's violations of its territorial integrity, as well as borne the waves of Palestinian refugees expelled from their homes. Lebanon was now on the road to full sovereignty and the promotion of a culture of democracy, perhaps the most notable indication of which was the dialogue among the Lebanese people regarding the need to support the international investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Agreement had also been reached on the need to recover the Shaba'a Farms and other territories occupied by Israel.

The Lebanese Government had prepared a comprehensive approach vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugee community, she said. Lebanon rejected their naturalization and reasserted their right to return to their homes according to General Assembly resolutions. Lebanon was also suffering from Israel's continuing policy of threatening its sovereignty, as well as its violation of Lebanese land and air space. In addition, Lebanon urged the international community to demand the release of all Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails.

She said her country rejected attempts to impose collective punishment on the Palestinian people for having expressed their democratic choice. Those steps included Israel's continuing control over Palestinian ports, its continuing building and expansion of settlements, as well as the separation wall. The international community must put pressure on Israel to cease and desist from those construction activities and urge it to withdraw from all occupied Palestinian lands. Arabs had chosen peace as a strategic choice, and the Israeli side must rise to that choice and accept the principles upon which the Middle East peace process was based. Peace was a collective responsibility and, given the necessary good will, the page could be turned towards a better future.

MILAD ATIEH (Syria) said the Middle East had continued to witness instability and tension for more than six decades, due to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, the killings, the destruction of infrastructure, and the policies of closure and siege, all to oppress Arab peoples and humiliate them, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and the United Nations Charter. Arbitrary Israeli policies fell under the rubric of war crimes and terrorism, for which Israel must be held accountable. Attempts to spread accusations against others were desperate attempts to hoodwink and keep the world occupied elsewhere, ignoring its crimes against the Palestinians. The claims by Israel that Damascus hosted a number of terrorist organizations were blatantly untrue. Palestinians in Syria were refugees who were victims of Israel's occupation, to whom Israel had denied the right to return to their land in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. Syria looked towards a just and comprehensive peace.

Since the founding of the United Nations, Arab States had great hopes pinned on the Organization to find a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Regrettably, Israel did not heed the will of the international community, despite the resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly, all of which called on Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands. Challenging international legitimacy, Israel had displaced hundreds of Syrians from their lands and continued with its plans for settlement of the Syrian Golan. If it was genuine in its desire for peace, why did Israel continue to build settlements and attract more settlers to Syrian and Arab occupied land? Syria had made every effort towards a just and comprehensive peace in the region. But Israel had responded with more rejection and continued occupation, defying international legitimacy. Peace, as wished for by the international community, would not be obtained until Israel heeded international resolutions and agreements, and accepted the initiative of the Arab League, agreed at the Beirut Summit.

The tragic conditions in the occupied Palestinian lands were getting worse, due to Israeli military practices, he said. The international community must put an end to those arbitrary practices, which denied Palestinians their basic rights. The Palestinian people had exercised their democratic right in the recent legislative elections. The international community must respect the will of the people in choosing their leaders and not interfere in their internal affairs. Israeli unilateral actions, which the Government intended to carry out, would destroy the peace process. He stressed that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East would only be obtained with the complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands to the June 1967 borders.

ADAMANTIOS VASSILAKIS (Greece), endorsing the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, said it was evident that in order for a negotiated peace to exist, there must be credible interlocutors on both sides who were willing to approach talks in good faith and on the basis of mutual respect and recognition.

He emphasized that all democratically elected Governments should adhere to certain fundamental universal principles, including, above all, adherence to the rule of law. The international community expected the new Hamas-led Government to renounce violence and to disarm, to recognize Israel's right to exist, and to respect all previous agreements and understandings, including the Road Map. The Palestinian Government would be held accountable against those standards not only by the international community, but also by the Palestinian people themselves.

At the same time, he called upon the new Israeli Government to be formed in the coming days to adhere to Israel's obligations under the Road Map and to refrain from any unilateral actions that may prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations and render the two-State solution physically impossible to implement. Greece expected all concerned to demonstrate political maturity and wisdom, to refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric, and to seize the opportunity so that the fate and future of their respective peoples may finally be one of peace, optimism and prosperity.

OSWALDO DE RIVERO (Peru) said a lack of negotiations between the parties could lead to an undesirable deterioration of the situation and trigger unilateral acts and violence with unpredictable consequences. To avoid that, a radical change was required. That change included the negotiation and withdrawal from the occupied territories. A firm commitment of the new Palestinian Authority to the principles suggested by the Quartet, such as the recognition of Israel, the commitment to non-violence and the acceptance of the previous agreements and obligations, was a must to revert the current dangerous situation of uncertainty and to continue the negotiations that would allow the aspirations of the Palestinians to be realized. Peru would continue to support the Palestinian people to establish a viable and democratic State according to the Road Map.

Turning to Lebanon, he said his delegation had joined the consensus to support the creation of an international tribunal as requested by the Lebanese Government. The result of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC) should be the basis for the work of the tribunal. He preferred that the tribunal have the largest number of Lebanese elements as possible in its composition and functions.

JOHN BOLTON (United States) said that the Road Map imposed a phased series of obligations on both sides to take concrete steps in order to create the necessary conditions to permit final status talks to go forward. Partnership between the parties was a critical element. The international community had made clear that a new Palestinian Authority Government must disavow terror and violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and accept previous obligations and

agreements between the parties. Those requirements were based upon long-standing principles and applied to any Palestinian Government.

However, he said, as the majority party in the new Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas would now have to bear responsibility for the decisions it made and face up to the consequences of those decisions, which would shape the international community's approach to issues involving the Palestinians and regional peacemaking efforts. On the Israeli side, the United States noted Acting Prime Minister Olmert's remarks on 28 March, following his party's success in the Israeli elections, calling for a return to negotiations and declaring that Israel was ready to compromise for the sake of peace.

Emphasizing that Hamas would continue to be judged by its actions and not its words, he said the United States had seen nothing that could cause it to change its position towards Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization under United States law that was responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent civilians, that had long been an enemy of peace in the region, and that had harmed the Palestinian people's aspirations for statehood. The position of the United States and the Quartet was consistent: future assistance to the new Palestinian Authority Government would be reviewed against that Government's commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations.

He said that, until now, the United States Security Coordinator's focus had been on frequent and direct coordination between the Israeli Defence Force and Palestinian security forces, including on such issues as the Gaza border crossings, and continuous liaison with the Palestinian and Israeli security leadership. With a new Palestinian Authority Government taking power, the United States Security Coordinator would have no contact with Palestinian security forces who reported to any members of a Hamas-led Cabinet. His role would be redefined in light of changing circumstances.

TUVAKO N. MANONGI (United Republic of Tanzania), associating himself with the statement to be made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the political developments in the Middle East were of crucial importance to both Israelis and Palestinians, as well as to the region at large. Those delicate moments of change should be confronted patiently and calmly by both sides. The end of the electoral season should provide a possibility for focusing seriously on a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis, who had been living in violence, instability and fear for so many years and who were still desperately waiting for peace.

He said the Hamas-led Government sworn in yesterday would be able to come to terms with the new realities of the region and decide once and for all to disarm, renounce violence, recognize Israel and reaffirm past peace agreements as a sure way to remove a major hurdle in the peace process. Prime Minister Haniyeh should recognize the imperative of a two-State solution, whereby Israel and a Palestinian State would live side by side in peace and prosperity. And any new Kadima-led Government in Israel must also come to terms with the new realities and be prepared to work with the Hamas-led Government as its new negotiating partner. It must freeze settlement activity, stop barrier construction and end attacks on Palestinians. Hurried unilateral actions by Israel in trying to fix its borders would not bring about peace.

Expressing deep concern over the recent upsurge in violence in the West Bank and Gaza, he called on the new leadership to exercise restraint and patience, to take deliberate measures to reduce tensions in those areas, and to restore calm. The parties should appreciate the delicate nature of the situation and seek to work closely together for a lasting solution to the challenges they faced. The international community should continue to be fully involved, despite the difficult stage that the peace process had reached. Efforts should focus on impressing upon the parties that unilateral actions would not work and that negotiations provided the only credible alternative for a viable solution. Further, blocking the flow of funds and resources to the Palestinians would only make matters worse and increase the suffering of many innocent people.

PASCAL GAYAMA (Congo) commended the Israelis and Palestinians for the democratic choices they had made recently during their respective elections. He hoped the new political paradigm would lead to a movement towards the objective set in the Road Map of two States living side by side in peace and security. He urged both parties to undertake dialogue and negotiations, based on the Road Map, as the only alternative to violence. It was vital to end the cycle of violence and repression, and opt for negotiations within respect for international law.

Saying that the latest statements by Israeli and Palestinian officials provided some glimmer of hope, he urged both parties to create conditions for dialogue and negotiation. To do that, confidence-building measures were required, through, among other things, the recognition of Israel, acceptance of agreements, renouncing violence, ending unilateral acts, dismantling settlements, and ending acts of collective punishment. Now was the time to call on the international community to support the peace plan in Palestine. The Palestinian people should not be left on their own and the primary donors needed to continue to provide assistance to them.

On Lebanon, he welcomed the fact that political leaders had decided to overcome their infighting and begin national dialogue. He welcomed the meaningful progress they had achieved, and encouraged them to find consensus-based solutions to the outstanding issues. He also welcomed the cooperation between the UNILIC and the Lebanese authorities, as well as the easing of tensions between the Commission and the Syrian authorities. He welcomed plans to establish an international court to try those responsible for the killing of former Prime Minister Hariri and 22 others. Lastly, he expressed deep concern over the tense situation in southern Lebanon, which was marked by repeated violations by both sides of the ceasefire agreement.

KONSTANTIN DOLGOV (Russian Federation), noting that today's meeting was being held against the backdrop of important events taking place in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian and Israeli elections, emphasized that any policy aimed at resolving the Middle East conflict must be rooted in the framework established by the Quartet regarding the renunciation of violence in pursuit of political goals, recognition of Israel's right to exist and, above all, the Road Map to Middle East peace.

Welcoming Acting Prime Minister Olmert's stated intent to restructure his relationship with President Abbas, he said that the Palestinian Authority should recognize the leading role of the PLO. There was a need to continue the fundamental need for dialogue with the Hamas movement and to work with it in order to encourage it to abide by the Road Map. The Russian Federation did not agree that it was impossible to work with a Hamas-led Government.

Instead of closing the door and punishing the Palestinians with threats and sanctions for the democratic choice that they had made, the Russian Federation firmly intended to fulfil its commitment to provide the Palestinian Authority with \$10 million in assistance. The Russian delegation called on both sides to avoid unilateral actions that could compromise final status negotiations and welcomed Acting Prime Minister Olmert's stated willingness to return to negotiations. A prompt resumption of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the negotiation process was also important. The Russian Federation wished also to stress the need to continue the inter-Lebanese dialogue.

NASSIR BIN ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar) said that the Palestinian Legislative Council elections reflected the free will of the Palestinian people, who exercised their democratic right. All parties must respect the result of the constitutional process. The Israeli decision to halt the transfer of taxes due to the Palestinian side was considered a punishment of the Palestinian people for exercising their right. That measure would only exacerbate the situation and obstruct the implementation of the Road Map. He called on the international community to continue providing financial and economic grants and assistance to the Palestinian Authority, so as to avoid any dangerous repercussions on the day-to-day life of the Palestinian people.

He said it was impossible to arrive at a comprehensive and sustainable settlement to the Palestinian question if that settlement was based on unilateral measures. That ran counter to the terms of reference and the foundations on which the peace process was built. Such a solution must be the result of a negotiated agreement between the two sides. The changes in the Governments of both sides placed the Middle East at the threshold of a decisive choice that would define the future of the entire region: either return to negotiations or risk more hardship and suffering for the peoples of the region.

The main actors must take advantage of those changes to better serve the peace process, he said. He urged the parties concerned to shoulder their responsibilities and return to the negotiating table. He also called on the Israeli Government to approach the peace process seriously and withdraw to the June

1967 border. Israel must also withdraw from the Lebanese Shaba'a Farms and cease its violations of the Blue Line.

ELLEN MARGRETHE LØJ ([Denmark](#)), associating herself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, expressed the hope that the new Palestinian Government would address its people's aspirations for peace and statehood that had been so strongly articulated by President Abbas. The new Government was expected to fulfil the obligations entered into by the Palestinian Authority. Violence and terror were incompatible with democratic processes. In accordance with the Quartet's declaration of 30 January, all members of the Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. Those conditions remained unchanged.

Noting that Prime Minister Haniyeh had expressed the wish to enter into a dialogue with the Quartet, she said that although Hamas had clearly undergone a change of sorts, as evidenced by its observance of a ceasefire and its participation in the recent elections, it remained to be seen whether that transformation was irreversible and would continue in the right direction. Moreover, the new Government was expected to be committed to the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management, as well as to prevent terrorist attacks and dismantle the infrastructure of terror.

Ways must be found to continue support to the Palestinian people, she stressed. Modalities for the provision of international assistance were currently being analysed and it would neither be fair nor in accordance with the ideals that the international community wished to take hold in the Middle East, to punish the Palestinian people for exercising their democratic rights. A functioning Palestinian Authority, including stable Palestinian institutions, was essential both for the well-being of the Palestinian people and for the creation of a viable Palestinian State. Denmark stood ready to continue its support for Palestinian economic development and democratic State-building. An economic collapse of the Palestinian Authority was in nobody's interest.

Turning to the Israeli elections, she reminded the new Government to be formed that, in light of the continued creation of facts on the ground, peace could not be imposed unilaterally and that durable peace could not be achieved outside the regional framework of the Middle East peace process. Both Israel and the Palestinians should adhere to their obligations under the Road Map and avoid unilateral actions that would prejudice final status issues. Construction of settlement outposts constituted such action. Moreover, impediments to Palestinian economic life must be removed. The separation barrier cut off the movement of people and goods. The movement and access agreement must be respected, and the border crossings, including Karni, must be reopened.

ZHANG YISHAN ([China](#)) said the past month had seen an unprecedented new phase in the situation between Palestinians and Israelis. The Hamas-led Government had been established and the Kadima Party had won the Israeli elections, both of which reflected the will of the people. The international community must respect the democratic choices made by both peoples. Israelis and Palestinians yearned for the early start of a life of peace and stability. The sticking point was that both sides had yet to establish mutual trust, which had led to a deterioration in the security and humanitarian situations. That must be reversed.

Since it was a matter of fact that Israel existed, it was understandable that it had security concerns, he said. At the same time, the basic rights of Palestinians must be realized. China had consistently stressed that the key to the settlement of the conflict was the establishment of mutual trust, the renunciation of violence and the search for a peaceful settlement. The Road Map remained the most viable option for the settlement of the conflict. He hoped the leadership of both sides would display statesmanship and restart dialogue to carry out the important tasks bestowed on them, and live up to the hopes of their peoples and the international community.

All agreements reached should continue to be honoured and implemented, he stated. He appreciated the positive indications made by President Abbas. At the same time, all resources belonging to the Palestinians should be returned to them in order to improve their living conditions. China would continue to work with the relevant parties to ensure that the peace process in the Middle East could register positive headway. In addition, he was pleased to note the national dialogue that was taking place in Lebanon, and hoped it would lead to reaching consensus on major issues affecting the fate of that country. He supported the efforts of the UNHCR and hoped the establishment of an international tribunal would facilitate the maintenance of peace and stability in Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East.

PETER BURIAN ([Slovakia](#)), associating himself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union, stressed that there was no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict was through peaceful negotiations leading to a two-State solution in accordance with the Road Map. For that reason, it remained necessary for the new Palestinian Government to accept previous obligations and agreements, including the Road Map. To become a partner in the peace process, Hamas must recognize Israel's right to exist and renounce violence and terror. Such a step would contribute significantly to the creation of the conditions necessary for the continuation of a dialogue on solutions to the Middle East conflict.

Expressing his country's support for the efforts and leadership of President Abbas, he said Slovakia hoped that he would continue his functions and that he would proceed to execute his authority, as well as establish good relations with the new Prime Minister and his Government. Aware of the developing difficulties over the financial and material support to the Palestinian Authority, Slovakia stressed that the Palestinian people could not and should not be abandoned. International humanitarian aid and support must be continued and the best ways found to do so effectively and transparently.

Turning to the recent Israeli elections, he said that the outgoing Government had taken uneasy decisions and implemented difficult steps towards peace in the region. Slovakia welcomed Prime Minister Olmert's stated wish to return to peace negotiations and hoped that Israel would refrain from steps and activities that might contradict the principles and agreements laid out in the Road Map that might threaten the physical implementation of a solution based on the coexistence of two viable States.

Regarding Lebanon, he said his country fully supported the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to extend their sovereignty to and regain full control over the entire national territory. Also, the completion of the investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri was an imperative for the stabilization and reconciliation proves not only in Lebanon, but also in the wider region. Slovakia supported the creation of the tribunal of an international character that would bring the perpetrators to justice. The establishment of a mixed tribunal, with balanced Lebanese and international involvement, would best serve that cause.

KENZO OSHIMA ([Japan](#)) said peace and the peace process in the Middle East now faced a new and truly challenging phase, with the latest political developments on both sides. In that new situation, the possibilities for promoting peace were just as great as the chance for conflict and troubles. In that delicate situation in which the region now found itself, the international community must do all it could to help promote the chances of better understanding, cooperation and peace. With the swearing-in of the new Palestinian Government led by Hamas, he strongly expected that the new Government would unequivocally repudiate violence and make efforts to advance the peace process. On the Israeli side, he expected that its new Government would continue its efforts to realize peace with the Palestinians by placing the advancement of harmony and peace at the top of its foreign policy agenda.

It was important for the international community to continue to send a positive and strong message to the new Palestinian Government, so that it would be encouraged to get on to the peace process. At the same time, the international community should continue to encourage Israel to make greater efforts to realize peace through dialogue with the Palestinian side. It was also necessary for the international community to focus its attention on elaborating effective and appropriate measures to prevent any further deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinians.

He said that, on the occasion of the visit of President Abbas to Japan in May 2005, Japan's Prime Minister had announced his intention to provide approximately \$100 million for the immediate future. Most recently, out of concern over the deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian people and to help meet the humanitarian needs of affected people, Japan decided on 17 March to extend additional food aid in the amount of 660 million yen (approximately \$6 million) for Palestinian refugees and for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

NANA EFFAH-APENTENG (Ghana) said the Council should be guided by its own decisions on the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which continued to threaten international peace and security. Those decisions had consistently affirmed the rights and interests of both Palestinians and Israelis. The Palestinians had a right to their own independent State, which must be a viable one that guaranteed its citizens freedom of movement and had real prospects for sustainable development. Israelis equally had a right to their own State within well-defined and secure borders.

The means to achieving those ends was through a negotiated settlement, he said, adding that neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis must be allowed to impose unilateral solutions on the other. Suicide bombings, indiscriminate shelling of civilians, wanton destruction of property, barricades, targeted assassinations and all other acts of violence used by the two sides had not moved them any closer to peace. While there had been no shortage of initiatives to bring about a peaceful negotiated settlement to the question of Palestine, it was clear that neither side had adhered faithfully to its obligations and commitments.

Much as the election of Hamas may seem an aberration, the reality was that its resounding victory had been achieved through free and fair elections, for which the Palestinian people deserved congratulations, he said. It may be more productive for the international community to listen more carefully to the Palestinians and to do more in addressing their rights and legitimate concerns, even as Hamas was pressed to abandon violence and extremism and enter into negotiations. Ghana was concerned about reports that a basic food shortage was making life increasingly unbearable for ordinary Palestinians. The irony was that some of those suffering may not even have voted for Hamas. Therefore, while supporting the international community's efforts in pressing Hamas to reconsider its position, care must be taken not to cause economic and financial strangulation of the Palestinians.

The provision of funds for the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, emergency assistance and basic services, as well as other purposes, must continue if economic and institutional collapse was to be avoided, he said. In that regard, it was regrettable that Israel had withheld taxes and customs duties levied on goods destined for the occupied Palestinian territory. That action was tantamount to financially strangling the Palestinian Authority and must be reversed with the timely disbursement of all such monies.

He said it was imperative for the incoming Hamas administration to earn the good will of all Governments and peoples eager for peace in the Middle East. Ghana, therefore, urged Hamas to seriously rethink its position and commit its Government to respect all existing agreements, including the maintenance of the ceasefire between the two sides. Both newly elected Governments must be encouraged to re-examine their positions in order to advance the peace process. It was time for the international community, including the Quartet, to reflect seriously on the prevailing situation and decide what needed to be done in order to achieve the long-sought two-State solution.

JEAN-MARC DE LASABLIERE (France) said this week saw two major developments: the formation of the new Palestinian Government; and the victory of the Kadima Party in Israeli elections. The Palestinian and Israeli people had expressed their views in the recent elections. Their leaders now bore a heavy responsibility, and it was incumbent on them to take specific measures to respond to the aspirations of their peoples for peace and security. Unilateral measures could not replace a negotiated process, which was the only way to achieve lasting peace. The international community must now work to assist the parties to resume dialogue and consider the possible conditions for the resumption of the peace process. The new Palestinian Government would be judged by its deeds. He deplored the fact that the new Prime Minister did not formally endorse the fundamental principles set out in the Road Map, including the recognition of Israel. He urged that Government to accept and implement those principles.

Beyond political developments, he said he remained concerned about the fragile situation on the ground. The security situation was still precarious. He called on all parties to display restraint. The Palestinian Authority must step up efforts to combat terrorism, including by preventing the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip. It must also reinforce the law and restore public order in the territories under its control. Israel must stop actions in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The worsening humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories was a matter of concern. He called for the full respect for and implementation of all provisions of last November's agreement on movement and access. The Palestinian people should not be punished and the institutional gains of the last decade should not be sacrificed. He was in favour of maintaining international aid through reliable and transparent channels.

He was also concerned about continued Israeli settlement in the occupied Arab territories and the route taken by the separation wall. He called on Israel to end illegal, unilateral measure which threatened the viability of the future Palestinian State. The initiatives taken by Israel in the future in the West Bank must be the subject of negotiations with the Palestinian side.

EMYR JONES PARRY (United Kingdom), aligning himself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union, said it was the Council's responsibility to maintain the momentum of the Middle East peace process. Congratulations were due to Acting Prime Minister Olmert and his Kadima Party. On the Palestinian side, while President Abbas had sworn in the new Cabinet yesterday, the United Kingdom policy on Hamas remained unchanged. With a democratic mandate came responsibility to govern in the best interest of the Palestinians people. Governing meant not only winning elections, but also accepting previous agreements and other conditions set out by the Quartet.

The pursuit of political goals through violent means was unacceptable, he said, stressing, however, that the Palestinian people must not be punished for the decisions taken by their Government. The United Kingdom was concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Palestinians. And while it had been one of the largest bilateral donors to the Palestinians, there was a need to be absolutely certain that funding for the Palestinians did not support terrorism.

He said the United Kingdom was also concerned about the closure of border crossings and called upon Israel to ensure that they were reopened. Israel should also cease all settlement construction and dismantle all existing outposts. But for its part, the Palestinian Authority must ensure an end to terrorism, including the launching of Qassam rockets into Israeli territory, and remain committed to reforming its security services.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, he expressed concern about reported arms transfers across the Lebanese-Syrian border. The United Kingdom awaited the report by the Special Envoy for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 in that regard. In addition, the process towards reaching agreement on the tribunal of an international character would support the work of the UNIIIC, which remained an essential element in promoting peace and stability in Lebanon and in the wider Middle East region.

Council President CESAR MAYORAL (Argentina), speaking in his national capacity, said it was a transcendent moment for the Middle East region, especially regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was up to the parties to make the choices that would largely determine their future. He welcomed the statements made by the leaders of some Israeli parties reaffirming their commitment to the search for a negotiated solution. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could only be achieved through negotiations in good faith, and not through unilateral measures or military operations. He reiterated the message of the Security Council that all members of the new Palestinian Government must unequivocally commit themselves to non-violence, to the recognition of the right of Israel to exist, and to the acceptance of the signed agreements between the two parties.

At the current juncture of political rearrangement and new alignments, he said, both parties must implement their obligations under the Road Map. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip was of special concern for his Government. The closure of the Karni crossing had caused considerable damage to the Palestinian economy and had a negative humanitarian effect. Therefore, urgent measures were needed to ease the scarcity of food and basic necessities in Gaza. The best solution was the full implementation of last November's agreement on movement and access. The budget situation of the Palestinian Authority was also of concern, especially in light of Israel's decision to suspend all transfers of tax revenues collected on behalf of the Authority. In addition, he welcomed the convening of a national dialogue in Lebanon, and hoped the parties would spare no effort in reaching agreement on outstanding issues.

ABDULAZIZ NASSER AL-SHAMSI (United Arab Emirates), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, strongly condemned Israel's unilateral measures which had not been approved by the Palestinian side and had not gained regional or international consensus, since those illegal measures were coming before the

negotiations of the final settlement. They would not contribute to the peace process or the future of peaceful coexistence in the region. The Arab Group called for the non-recognition by Member States and international organizations of those Israeli unilateral measures.

He demanded that the Security Council and effective members of the Quartet shoulder their responsibilities and take effective measures that were consistent with the resolutions adopted by Arab leaders at their recent Summit in Khartoum. They included condemnation of all unilateral measures by Israel; an end to Israel's policy starving the Palestinian people; its release of all funds belonging to the Palestinian Authority; a continuation of international financial grants and economic assistance by the international community regardless of the Palestinian people's democratic choice; reiteration of Syria's fair demands for the restoration of the occupied Golan and rejection of Israeli measures aimed at changing its legal structure; and a demand that Israel stop its repeated air, land and sea violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

Any further delays in taking the necessary and effective Security Council action against those illegal measures would send the wrong message to the Israeli Government and encourage it to commit further violations, he said. Accordingly, the Arab Group urged the Council to shoulder its responsibilities and avoid any double standards, in order not to drag the region into more violence and bloody conflicts. That would ensure a suitable political environment that would enable the new Palestinian and Israeli Governments to resume peace negotiations according to the planned track, while providing the opportunity to establish a just, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the vision calling for a two-State solution.

GERHARD PFANZELTER (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said he expected the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council and the newly formed Government to commit themselves to a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict with Israel, based on existing agreements and the Road Map, as well as to the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management. He urged the newly formed Government to confront all those engaged in terror and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. On that basis, the Union stood ready to continue to support Palestinian economic development and democratic State-building. The Union mobilized on 27 February a €120 million package to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian population and to help stabilize the finances of the caretaker Government. As the Quartet stated today, future assistance to the new Government would be reviewed by donors against its commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

He welcomed the reiteration of acting Prime Minister Olmert of his commitment to the Road Map and called on the future Government to adhere to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. The Union continued to urge Israel to reverse its settlement policy and to freeze all settlement activity, to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, and to end land confiscation and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, all of which threatened to render the two-State solution physically impossible to implement. He condemned all acts of terror and violence, and expressed his grave concern over the recent violent events in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. He called on both parties to exercise maximum restraint, and reminded them of their obligations under the Road Map and existing agreements.

Turning to Lebanon, he welcomed the launching of a national dialogue and hoped it would contribute to political stability in the country by addressing issues of national concern. He reaffirmed the Union's full support for the Government of Lebanon and encouraged it to urgently set up and launch the economic and political reforms programme initiated during the Core Group meeting held in New York in September 2005. Lastly, he expressed grave concern at the continuing tension and violence along the Blue Line and urged all parties to exercise the utmost restraint from any provocation that could further escalate tensions.

ABDULLAH M. ALSAIDI (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, stressed that there could be no peace in the Middle East unless and until the Arab-Israeli conflict was resolved on the basis of land for peace, the Road Map, the relevant United Nations resolutions and through negotiations between the parties. The Conference was confident that the Palestinian Authority was a good partner in the quest for peace.

Emphasizing that unilateral solutions would not promote the cause of peace in an area that had suffered enormously from lack of it, he said that for peace to prevail, Israel must withdraw from the territories it had occupied in the 1967 war, including the Syrian Arab Golan and the remaining occupied lands in southern Lebanon. Israel must also allow the creation of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. It was incumbent on the international community to exert pressure on Israel to end its policy of creating and expanding settlements, to respect and abide by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and to demolish the separation Wall.

The daily Israeli practices of weakening the Palestinian infrastructure and casting doubt on the democratic choice of the Palestinian people were not conducive to restoring peace and stability. Nor were the blockades of territories, which deprived the Palestinians of goods that were necessary to daily life. Moreover, withholding aid, following the results of free and fair elections was the wrong message to send to the Middle East region. Therefore, the Conference called upon the international community to provide the necessary economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people. In that context, it was imperative that Israel respect its obligations under the relevant agreements to release what it owed to the Palestinian side in tax and customs duties levied on goods destined for the Palestinian territories.

HAMIDON ALI (Malaysia), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the question of Palestine should be resolved through negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, on the basis of international law, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, the illegality of any territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or the use of force, the Road Map, and the relevant resolutions of the Assembly and Council. Further, it was incumbent on both Israel and Palestine, with the assistance of the international community, particularly the Quartet, to create the necessary conditions that could lead towards the resumption of negotiations. In addition, Israel should comply with its legal obligations as mentioned in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice concerning the separation wall.

Also, he continued, Israel should disburse without further delay to the Palestinian Authority the full amount of the monthly tax and custom revenue which rightfully belonged to the Palestinians. The much-needed revenue could greatly alleviate the dire humanitarian conditions and suffering of the Palestinians. In addition, he reiterated the Movement's support for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. Finally, he congratulated the Palestinian people for exercising their democratic right to freely choose and determine their representatives in the Legislative Council. He hoped the newly elected representatives would faithfully serve and pursue the interests and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

PAUL BADJI (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that with international attention focused on the recent elections, Israel had continued its activities in the occupied territories aimed at undermining the prospects of one day establishing a viable, contiguous Palestinian State. The Committee was concerned about recent statements concerning the "convergence plan", which meant that Israel would unilaterally define its permanent borders. By that plan, settlement blocs would be integrated into Israel, while it retained control of territory in the West Bank. The aims to which both Palestinians and Israelis aspired could not be achieved by unilateral activities by either side.

He said that approximately 12,000 Israelis had established themselves in the West Bank colonies, while only 9,000 had been evacuated from Gaza and northern West Bank, according to 2005 figures. The number of houses had grown, as had solicitations for the construction of new houses. The most worrisome aspect of Israel's settlement plans was that they sought to link East Jerusalem with Maale Adumim, the largest settlement in the West Bank. If that project was completed, the city would be effectively cut off from the remainder of the West Bank, thereby crushing the Palestinian aspiration to establish a capital in East Jerusalem. The Jordan Valley was increasingly inaccessible to Palestinians living in the West Bank unless they had an identification card citing their residence in the northern West Bank. Those owning property in the area, but living elsewhere, could no longer go there without authorization.

Regarding the construction of the separation wall, he said the Israeli Defence Force had announced last month the beginning of its southern section, which complicated the lives of the Palestinians living in that area. To complicate matters further, the already calamitous humanitarian situation was becoming still

worse. The international community must step up its support for the Palestinian people at this critical time. The United Nations, including the Security Council, must continue to discharge its permanent responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian question until it was resolved and until the Palestinian people could exercise their inalienable rights. The Committee would continue to lend its political support to the Palestinians until they attained their inalienable right to independence and national sovereignty and the right to return to the homes from which they had been displaced and uprooted.

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