



Security Council SC/9544

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Security Council
6049th Meeting (AM & PM)

CHALLENGE OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE IS TO BUILD ON PROMISE ESTABLISHED

IN 2008, SPECIAL COORDINATOR TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

End of Occupation, State of Palestine 'Possible, Necessary, Urgent', Members Told in Day-Long Briefing

The challenge in the Middle East in the coming year was to build on the platform for peace established in 2008 and to turn promise into reality, Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Security Council today, prior to an open debate on the situation in the region.

"The diplomatic process and improvements on the ground must reinforce each other and move swiftly forward," said Mr. Serry, who is also the Personal Representative. "A comprehensive peace in the region, with an end of occupation and the creation of a Palestinian State living at peace with Israel, is possible, necessary and urgent."

He said that, with the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) on 16 December, the international community had sent a clear message that negotiations towards that outcome were irreversible. The main objective right now was to sustain progress during a period of transition, with a new Administration soon to take office in the United States and preparations continuing for a February general election in Israel.

Regarding other immediate priorities, he said that Arab League initiatives towards Palestinian unity required support, and that all aspects of the Annapolis process must be preserved and, where possible, advanced, setting the stage for a decisive push for peace in 2009.

Meanwhile, he strongly appealed for basic humanitarian principles and calm to be maintained in Gaza, where a further four Palestinians had been killed in the past six weeks, and more than 130 rockets fired from that territory into Israeli towns and Gaza crossing points.

In the West Bank, two Palestinian militants had been killed in addition to scores injured in actions by the Israel Defense Forces and settler violence, he said. However, Palestinian security was being improved with unprecedented donor support and improved Israeli-Palestinian cooperation. Action on Road Map commitments was also crucial, and Israel should take further action to remove settler outposts, address settler extremism and halt settlement expansion.

He also briefly addressed the dynamics between Syria and Israel, noting that settlement activity continued in the occupied Golan though the region remained quiet. The situation in Lebanon had been relatively quiet.

Following Mr. Serry's briefing, the representatives of Israel and the Observer Mission of Palestine welcomed recent Council action, expressing the hope that progress could soon be made towards a two-State settlement of their conflict, while stating their respective view of the remaining obstacles. The Permanent Observer for Palestine said the Council's recent efforts to address current developments signalled a reassertion of its authority after over four and a half years of silence.

While stressing the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis process, he said the Palestinian Authority had been fulfilling its obligations, but Israel had persisted in tightening its siege and collective punishment in the Gaza Strip, its "colonization campaign" of settlement expansion, its isolation of Jerusalem, its construction of the separation Wall and its obstruction of circulation in the West Bank. The Quartet and the Council must devise a practical mechanism to get Israel to fulfil its obligations.

Israel's representative, welcoming the provisions of resolution 1850 (2008), agreed that the test now lay with the parties on the ground, emphasizing that, despite the promotion of fear and terror by Hamas, Israelis and Palestinians had demonstrated increasing courage in the past 12 months through growing cooperation in security and economic endeavours. The city of Jenin, a former breeding ground of terrorism, was now a model of security cooperation, while Palestinian wages in the West Bank had jumped 35 per cent.

Unfortunately, Israel also had to deal with the Hamas track, she said, adding that rockets still rained down daily on Israeli civilians and crossing points to Gaza. Hamas terrorists were not acting alone; they and many other radicals in the region were trained, funded and equipped by Iran. Israel was particularly concerned by the rearmament and redeployment of Hizbullah in Lebanon, in violation of Council resolutions. Nevertheless, Israel was fully committed to the peace process and hoped that 2009 would enable a furthering of peace in the region.

In the ensuing open debate, Council members stressed the importance of the advances made in 2008, leading up to the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008). Among the key points in that text, they emphasized support for the Annapolis process, the irreversibility of the negotiation process and the call for regional cooperation towards peace. Along with many non-Council speakers, most also called for more progress on the ground, urging Israel to halt settlement activity and ease restrictions in Gaza and the West Bank, and calling on the Palestinians to continue making progress on security and seeking political unification.

Along with Council member Libya, some non-members welcomed the continuation of negotiations towards a Palestinian State but called on the Council to take more concrete actions to condemn Israel for its policies towards Gaza, and to protect Palestinian civilians. Iran's delegate, accusing Israel of "some of the most horrendous crimes ever committed", rejected the accusations made by the Israeli representative against his country, as well as other baseless allegations by Council members on the basis of distortions created by the "Israeli regime".

Other speakers today were the representatives of the United Kingdom, Italy, United States, France (on behalf of the European Union), Burkina Faso, Belgium, Russian Federation, Indonesia, China, Costa Rica, South Africa, Panama, Viet Nam, Croatia, Syria, Lebanon, Brazil, Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Turkey, Japan, Pakistan, Venezuela, Morocco, Norway, Australia, Iceland and Qatar.

Also delivering a statement was the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting opened at 10:15 a.m. and was suspended at 1:05 p.m. Resuming at 3:10 p.m., it ended at 4:50 p.m.

Background

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

Briefing Summary

ROBERT SERRY, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, said the "timely and important" adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) embodied the principles upon which Israeli-Palestinian peace must rest. The action had come a day after the Quartet had affirmed the need to intensify the political process and address acute challenges on the ground. The international community had sent a clear and united message of its commitment to the irreversibility of the process leading to the creation of a Palestinian State living in peace alongside a secure Israel.

He noted that preparations for the Israeli general election, scheduled for 10 February 2009, had continued, with many political parties holding primaries. A new United States administration would take office on 20 January 2009. There were also internal challenges on the Palestinian side. The situation, therefore, was in a period of transition and the main priority was to sustain the process by building a solid bridge to carry the parties through the fragile period ahead. Another priority must be to ensure calm in and around Gaza and urgently to improve humanitarian conditions. The decision of the Arab League to ensure there was no vacuum on the Palestinian side, support the legitimate Palestinian Government and pursue Palestinian unity demanded support. The three tracks of the Annapolis process – negotiations, institution-building, and phase 1 Road Map implementation – must be preserved and, where possible, advanced, and the stage must be set for a decisive push for peace in 2009.

Turning to the situation in Gaza, he strongly appealed for basic humanitarian principles to be continuously observed, noting that access had been restricted for goods coming into the Gaza Strip, as well as for diplomats, United Nations staff and humanitarian workers and the international press. There had been heightened rhetoric and violence in recent days, with an increase in rocket firing and a resumption of Israeli air strikes. Statements by Hamas saying that the calm expired today and questioning its renewal were of extreme concern. A major escalation of violence would have grave consequences for the protection of civilians in Israel and Gaza, the welfare of the Gaza population, and the sustainability of political efforts.

In the past six weeks, a further four Palestinians had been killed in Gaza, including two children, and 18 others had been injured, he said. Eight Israeli soldiers and four civilians had been injured by rocket and mortar attacks, more than 130 of which, including 30 in the past two days, had been fired from Gaza towards Israeli towns and at the crossing through which civilians, United Nations and other humanitarian workers and all goods entering the Strip must pass. The rocket attacks were to be condemned and must cease immediately.

Noting that the United Nations welcomed the Quartet's appeal last week for humanitarian supplies, including food, fuel, pharmaceuticals, water and sewage maintenance, he reiterated the Quartet's call for the immediate release of Corporal Gilad Shalit, noting also that no Muslim pilgrims from Gaza had been able to attend the hajj in Mecca prior to the Adha holiday. The Palestinian Authority had secured visas for some 3,000 pilgrims but Hamas had denied their exit through the Rafah crossing. Alongside the security, humanitarian and development dimensions of the Gaza crisis was a deep political crisis, which threatened the unified basis on which a future Palestinian State must rest, as well as the two-State solution itself.

Turning to the situation in the West Bank, he said two Palestinian militants had been killed and 67 civilians injured by the Israel Defense Forces and settler violence during the reporting period. Most of the injuries had occurred during demonstrations against the separation barrier. Despite the adversities on the ground, the efforts of the Palestinian Authority, together with unprecedented donor support and improved Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, security was being enhanced and prospects created for economic improvements. Despite the 620 obstacles to movement and access across the West Bank, an easing of restrictions around the Nablus area had been instituted on 7 December. Further steps to ease movement and access, given the significant improvements in security on the ground, were strongly encouraged. The release on 15 December of 227 Palestinian prisoners as a gesture to President Mahmoud Abbas was also welcome.

In other highlights, he noted that the Palestinian Authority had finalized its budget for 2009, which envisaged continued fiscal reforms and a shift in expenditure from recurrent items towards development projects. There was an urgent need to secure adequate and predictable financing from donors. The overall challenge was to take the incremental steps that had been implemented, intensify and multiply them, and make them transformative. Another key element was action on Road Map commitments, but in the reporting period, illegal Israeli settlement activity had continued in East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank. Israel was called upon to implement its Road Map commitment, and any new Israeli Government was urged to address decisively the question of settlement expansion. The evacuation by Israeli security forces of settlers from a house in Hebron on 4 December was welcome, and Israel should take further action to remove settler outposts and address the growing threat of settler extremism.

He said that, in the search for regional stability and peace, no further rounds of indirect Israeli-Syrian talks had taken place, but he looked forward to their continuation and intensification. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained quiet, but Israeli settlement activity continued. Important efforts to promote comprehensive regional peace had been made, including in a joint letter from Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal and Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa to United States President-elect Barack Obama underscoring the Arab world's commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative.

The situation in Lebanon had been relatively quiet, he said. On 11 December, Lebanon and Syria had exchanged official documents on the locations of their

future embassies in Beirut and Damascus, respectively. In the context of the run-up to the 2009 legislative elections in Lebanon, prominent political leaders had continued reaching out to each other in an effort to ease tensions. The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations had been generally quiet during the past month.

In closing, he said that an important platform for peace had been established in 2008, due to the efforts of the parties and the support of the international community. The challenge now was to build on that platform and turn the promise of peace into reality. The diplomatic process and improvements on the ground must reinforce each other and move swiftly forward. A comprehensive peace in the region, with an end of occupation and the creation of a Palestinian State at peace with Israel at its heart, was possible, necessary and urgent.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer for Palestine, said the Security Council's inability to pronounce itself on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for more than four and a half years had prevented it from playing its rightful Charter role. The Palestinian delegation, therefore, welcomed the Council's recent efforts to address current developments such as the intensification of illegal Israeli settlements, attempts to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, the rise of settler violence and the status of the peace process. Those efforts signalled a reassertion of the Council's authority and its intention to play a more active role in a settlement.

The establishment of a viable State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security must remain among the Council's priorities, he said, emphasizing in that regard the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, which was integral to the Annapolis process. All efforts and practical measures must be exerted to advance that process in a way that would resolve the core issues, including those relating to Jerusalem, borders, refugees, settlements, water, security and prisoners.

The obstacles to making peace were well known, he maintained, citing negative developments on the ground. In that connection, the Palestinian Authority had agreed to the Quartet proposal for United States supervision and monitoring of the process and developments on the ground. However, the Fraser Report, apparently prepared by the United States in that context, had not yet been made available. At a minimum, it should be shared with the Quartet and the Council. There must be a determination of who was upholding their obligations and who was not, as well as what must be done to create appropriate conditions, on the ground and between the parties, to advance the peace process.

He said that, in the run-up to Annapolis and continuously thereafter, Israel had persisted in tightening its siege of the Gaza Strip, to use excessive force against the population there and other actions amounting to massive collective punishment of Palestinian civilians. It was also pressing on with its colonization campaign, escalating construction and expansion of settlements and the Wall, particularly in East Jerusalem. Those practices called for a concrete response by the Quartet and measures to ease movement in the West Bank, where at least 100 more obstacles had appeared, and from which Jerusalem was being isolated.

All those developments were occurring at the very same time that all concerned parties were praising the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to promote law and order and engage in cooperation on the security front, he noted. Even as that cooperation continued, however, Israel was carrying out raids and arrests, ensuring the continued imprisonment of at least 11,000 Palestinians. On the ground, that had resulted in further fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, deeper socio-economic deprivation and a weakening of belief in the peace process.

He said the Quartet and the Security Council must devise a practical mechanism to address the situation in which one party repeatedly failed to respond to calls to fulfil its obligations, "miring us in a cyclical process with no end in sight". Even given that situation, the Palestinian delegation had high hopes for the Annapolis process. It also reiterated its hope that the ceasefire would continue to hold and that it would be extended to the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority pledged its continued cooperation with the Egyptian mediation to regain Palestinian national unity in all its aspects.

GABRIELA SHALEV (Israel) said the past year had witnessed substantial progress in the framework of the Annapolis process. In fact, 2008 had been a most constructive year for the peace process. Resolution 1850 (2008), besides expressing unequivocal support for direct bilateral negotiations, included additional important principles. It endorsed, for the first time, the three Quartet principles as the basis for international legitimacy and support for any Palestinian Government. In so doing, the international community had delivered an unequivocal message to Hamas in Gaza. The resolution supported the region's moderate elements. "We must not let radicals in the region hijack the agenda for their extremist purposes." The resolution also rightly noted that lasting peace could only be based on ending terror and incitement, and on a commitment to the two-State solution.

Noting that the test now lay with the parties on the ground, she stressed that it should not be forgotten that Israel was operating on two major tracks. On the one hand, it was trying to promote peace with the moderate, responsible leadership on the Palestinian side, while fighting the extremist Hamas terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip on the other. Despite efforts by those who promoted fear and terror, Israelis and Palestinians in the region had demonstrated increasing courage during the past 12 months, resulting in important changes on the ground. Several key developments had including growing cooperation between the security forces of the two sides. For example, the city of Jenin – once a breeding ground of suicide terrorism – was now a model for security cooperation in the West Bank. Also, in the past year alone, Palestinian wages in the West Bank had increased almost 25 per cent, and trade and commerce between Israel and the West Bank had jumped 35 per cent.

She said confidence-building measures by Israel must be met by the Palestinians and by the wider Arab world, which had a responsibility to facilitate the negotiations, including through a clear message against any incitement and support for terrorism. While Israel and the Palestinian Authority had managed some important accomplishments, serious and dangerous challenges and obstacles remained. December had witnessed yet another onslaught of rockets and mortars fired at civilians in Israeli towns and cities. In a record number of attacks, more than 2,900 rockets and mortars had been fired from the Gaza Strip. On the day that the Security Council had adopted resolution 1850 (2008), 11 rockets had been launched, and 25 rockets just yesterday, 1 of which had landed at the entrance of a busy supermarket. The incessant attacks by Hamas also targeted border crossings, fuel depots, and other vital routes through which goods and humanitarian aid were normally allowed into Gaza.

The Hamas terrorists of Gaza who relentlessly attacked Israel were not acting alone, she said. Iran remained the epicentre of the organization's work. It actively trained, funded, and equipped Hamas, as well as Hizbullah to the north, and many other radicals in the region. Israel also remained deeply concerned by the rearmament and redeployment of Hizbullah in Lebanon – both north and south of the Litani River – in violation of relevant Security Council resolutions. Israel was fully committed to the peace process and hoped that 2009 would enable a furthering of peace in the region.

JOHN SAWERS (United Kingdom) said today was an opportunity to hear the viewpoints of others since Council members had expressed themselves in the debate on Tuesday. Resolution 1850 (2008) underlined the key points relating to a lasting settlement, including the need for the parties to fulfil their commitments, a comprehensive peace, and regional coexistence in peace and security. Momentum for progress had been created in 2009. The United Kingdom looked forward to the new United States Administration's quick engagement in that effort, and to progress on the ground.

ALDO MANTOVANI (Italy), associating himself with the statement to be delivered by France on behalf of the European Union, said the most important message of resolution 1850 (2008) was its recognition of the irreversibility of the peace process. The European Union called on all countries in the region to support that process. It also called for a peaceful electoral competition in Lebanon and offered France's assistance. It was to be hoped also that border issues between Lebanon and Israel would be resolved. Both countries were urged to cooperate with UNIFIL, to which Italy would also continue to contribute. Hopefully, there would be further reconciliation between Lebanon and Syria.

ALEJANDRO WOLFF (United States) welcomed the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) as a positive and forward-looking document that put the Security Council and international community on record as confirming the irreversibility of the peace process and endorsing the parties' efforts in that regard. It squarely supported building the institutions of a Palestinian State and improving conditions on the ground. The United States had made clear the obligations of the Palestinian Authority, including the need to end terrorism and incitement, all leading to the creation of a Palestinian State as soon as possible, living in peace and security with Israel. In parallel, the text also underlined that a solution should be in line with regional peace, as outlined by the Arab Peace Initiative.

Expressing concern about the innocent people of Gaza and southern Israel, he said a lasting solution to the situation in Gaza could only be achieved through peaceful means. Restoring Palestinian unity based on recognition of the legitimate Palestinian leadership, commitment to non-violence and recognition of Israel's statehood were among those factors central to Gaza peace. The Quartet, expressing concern that the Egyptian-brokered calm in Gaza had been challenged, had called for an immediate cessation of violence, including against commercial crossings, without which the people of Gaza would continue to suffer.

The United States, as the largest single contributor of aid to the Palestinian people, was deeply committed to seeing that aid getting through, he said. Nonetheless, the Council should not lose sight of the root cause of the current situation. While the vast majority of people of Gaza wished to get on with their lives, Hamas and other groups continued to institute violence, launching more than 200 rockets and mortar attacks against Israel, including against crossing points into Gaza. Those attacks represented an ongoing threat to international peace and security, and the United States called for a full dismantling of the infrastructure of terrorism, in accordance with the Road Map, as well as the immediate release of Corporal Shalit.

Continued progress in Jenin and the successful deployment of security services to Hebron had demonstrated that Palestinians and Israelis could work together to advance the cause of peace, he said. On Lebanon, full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) was vital to the country's peace and security, as was the establishment of the Lebanon Tribunal to try those responsible for the assassination of its former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, and others. The United States also urged Member States to pledge additional funds for the Tribunal, which should become fully functional by 1 March 2009.

JEAN-MAURICE RIPERT (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said he shared the belief reflected in the resolution adopted by the Council two days ago that the Annapolis negotiations process was irreversible and must be given the strongest possible support. A comprehensive peace agreement must provide for the creation of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as the capital of both Palestine and Israel. To that effect, the Union called for inter-Palestinian reconciliation, for which it supported Egyptian mediation efforts and would support any Government that respected the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments and strongly support peace negotiations with Israel.

Like its European partners, France subscribed to a comprehensive approach to settling the Arab-Israeli conflict, and welcomed in that regard the indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria under Turkey's auspices. It encouraged the two to open direct talks. The Arab Peace Initiative provided a solid and relevant basis for Middle East peace. Also helpful would be to include the Syrian-Lebanese tracks in the process.

He said there was only one path towards strengthening mutual trust – quick and significant change on the ground. In that regard, the Palestinian Authority had made major efforts with respect to security, governance and rule of law. Much still remained to be done to stop terrorism and violence; however, the progress made thus far called for reciprocal gestures on Israel's behalf, starting with the colonization issue. It was necessary and urgent to put an end to colonization, which included natural expansion, as well as expansion into East Jerusalem. The humanitarian situation in Gaza also required radical improvement, which included the reopening of the crossing and the provision of goods and services for the population. The Union condemned all forms of violence, especially in Gaza, as well as the firing of rockets at the civilian population, which must stop immediately; the fight against terrorism must continue unabated, and Corporal Shalit must be unconditionally released.

The Union was determined to work towards strengthening the Quartet's monitoring role on the ground, he said. In order to promote a lasting settlement, the Union, without becoming involved in the negotiations or prejudging their results, had demonstrated that, when the time came, it was prepared to help implement a final peace agreement. He stressed the importance of the continued, broad and constructive commitment of its Arab partners. To be sustainable, peace must be comprehensive, and he reiterated the Union's commitment to resolving all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, especially the principle of land for peace, with the relevant Security Council resolutions, and the Road Map.

GIADALLA ETTALHI (Libya) said that events on the ground were clear indications of the willingness of the parties to bring an end to the conflict and the suffering of the Palestinians. Israeli attacks on Palestinians had tripled since last year, and Israel had carried out many hundreds of military operations, claiming hundreds of Palestinian lives and destroying homes. Meanwhile, settlement activity, barriers to circulation and building of the Wall had also gone ahead and arrests of Palestinians, including children had increased, despite some releases.

Palestinians experienced daily humiliation and attacks by Israeli authorities, he said, quoting Israeli sources that likened the situation to "apartheid". He said that Palestinians had respected the calm but had also responded to Israeli attacks and the siege of Gaza. He described the deprivations in Gaza in detail and called them a flagrant violation of human rights. He also recalled settler attacks on Palestinians. The total situation was the result of Annapolis and was taking place in the context of the Council's silence. A minimum measure needed from the Council was a condemnation of Israeli practices and a protection of Palestinians.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) said that the success of the initiatives of 2008 depended on the parties, particularly when it came to strengthening mutual trust. The international community must contribute, at the same time, to the socio-economic development of Palestinians. In regard to Lebanon, he expressed hope that the Doha Accords would be implemented and called for further reconciliation between Lebanon and Syria. He urged Israel to become part of that process. The countries of the region were destined to live together. He encouraged them, therefore, to pursue peaceful coexistence. The United Nations played an important role in that effort. He expressed hope that 2009 would bring progress towards peace, calling the recent council resolution and the Annapolis agreements an important framework to build upon.

JAN GRAULS (Belgium) reiterated his delegation's concern over the humanitarian and security situation on the ground, especially in and around Gaza. His position had been broadly reflected in the statement made on behalf of the European Union, but he would add that the international commitment to settling the crisis was at an unprecedented level in the new millennium. In a single year, the Quartet had held five summit meetings, including one with the parties. There had also been four successive ministerial conferences in support of the negotiations, as well as investors' conferences, and a plan had been evolved by Tony Blair for economic recovery. There had been paralysis on the part of the economic community, until adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), which had confirmed it would help build a two-State solution.

He said Belgium advocated, along with its European partners, maintaining that international commitment, beginning by seeing to it that 1850 (2008) was not "window dressing" but that it strengthened the Council's ability to shoulder its responsibilities and see to it that its previous resolutions were implemented. That resolution had recalled the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, and he hailed the authors' commitment to reaffirm that plan. Under Turkey's aegis, indirect talks had begun between Israel and Syria. He hoped that the fifth session would bring them closer to direct discussions, with a view to a peace agreement. Constructive dialogue had begun between Lebanon and Syria, and he encouraged a normalization of those relations. In view of the impact on regional peace and security, he emphasized the need for enhanced monitoring of the two borders and a halt to arms smuggling. He favoured the holding of an international meeting on the Middle East in Moscow.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said he had hoped for more clear results from Annapolis by the end of 2008, but the continuing settlement activities by Israel and rocket attacks against Israelis were both causes for concern. At the same time, Russia had been pleased with the ministerial meeting of the Quartet

on 15 December, its Declaration, and the adoption of Security Council resolution 1850 (2008). The parties must continue the painstaking work of seeking mutually acceptable solutions to all items on the agenda. The process must not be allowed to stall, and the Council and Quartet had, therefore, pledged to continue their joint efforts.

The Arab Peace Initiative had been designed to establish the best possible atmosphere in 2009 for continued Arab-Israeli dialogue on all tracks, he said, adding that ensuring uninterrupted progress fell to the international community, the Quartet first and foremost. The Quartet should energetically tackle the issues of a just peace and security in the region. It would seek to enhance its effectiveness, support Tony Blair's efforts and develop its efforts with the Arab League, leading to a settlement, and in 2009 to an international conference on the Middle East. On the Lebanon track, Russia firmly and energetically supported its efforts to establish a Government of National Unity, strengthen its institutions and promote its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as democratic and crisis-free development. Those ideas had been supported during a visit by the Lebanese leadership to Moscow.

MARTY M. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia), noting that the Council had, in recent years, been "fraught with silence" in response to the Middle East conflict, despite many critical developments, expressed hope that the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) two days ago would signal a new beginning in which the 15-member body would assume its Charter-mandated responsibilities in response to the situation of that region.

He underscored the need to urgently address the critical challenges on the ground, particularly the profoundly concerning situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Israeli siege of Gaza should be immediately lifted and the Egyptian-brokered cessation of hostilities in Gaza and southern Israel should be maintained.

Steps that could undermine or prejudice the outcome of any negotiations should be stopped or reversed. Israeli settlement activities must end and the construction of walls on Palestinian lands stopped and the walls removed.

In anticipation of the creation of a Palestinian State, he underlined the importance of international assistance towards institution-building efforts and economic development activities. He also emphasized the importance of unity among Palestinians and expressed hope that the inter-Palestinian dialogue would be implemented as planned. Recognizing the diplomatic Quartet's vital role in promoting solutions to the conflict, he welcomed the regular consultations of its principals. He also commended the League of Arab States and individual countries in the region, noting the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turning to Lebanon, he underlined the continued efforts by President Michel Suleiman to promote dialogue and reconciliation among all Lebanese factions. Indonesia looked forward to the implementation of the 15 October 2008 agreement between Lebanon and Syria. Also important were indirect talks between Israel and Syria. His delegation further called on Israel to fully comply with all relevant Security Council resolutions related to the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

LIU ZHENMIN (China), welcoming the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), said it sent a strong and clear signal for maintaining political negotiations. It was essential, however, that the resolution be implemented, and China expected both parties to ensure that the negotiations were irreversible. It was to be hoped that the Council would become more involved in the process and that the Quartet would pursue greater coordination with it. Meanwhile, it was important to continue providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in Gaza. Lebanon, Syria and Israel should all improve their mutual relations with the assistance of the international community.

SAÚL WEISLEDER (Costa Rica) expressed hope that the momentum created in 2008 would lead to progress in 2009, with greater involvement of the Council. Costa Rica called for compliance with previous agreements and international law in the creation of a viable Palestinian State, living in peace with Israel. Progress must be made on core issues, extremists must be isolated and humanitarian concerns must be dealt with. While Israel's security must be protected, it was unacceptable to mete out collective punishment in Gaza. Costa Rica welcomed Israel's recent release of Palestinian prisoners, and called on the international community to support the voices of moderation in the region. Regarding Lebanon, it was to be hoped that all parties would continue to make progress towards meeting the obligations of Council resolutions.

DUMISANI KUMALO (South Africa) said that, after five years, the Council had unanimously adopted a resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The text was not perfect, but it reminded the parties of their previous undertakings and recommitted them to their previously agreed obligations. The leadership of both sides had already committed to a final outcome of the talks -- a settlement resulting in the emergence of a viable Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel, resolving the conflict, and ending the occupation. That commitment remained the basis of the current negotiations. New declarations of undertakings were no longer required. There must be implementation of the steps required to reach a settlement.

He said it was imperative that both sides ensure that their actions and pronouncements were calculated to advance the quest for peace. Illegal actions, such as the siege on Gaza, settlements expansion, the separation Wall, and military checkpoints perpetrated the cycle of violence. While South Africa recognized Israel's legitimate security concerns, it did not condone its excessive use of force to improve its security. Resolution 1850 (2008) would face two crucial tests: implementation of its provisions, and, on the Council's part, ensuring the text would be implemented. A lack of implementation would further erode the Council's credibility.

RICARDO ALBERTO ARIAS (Panama) said that, if the conflict remained unresolved, so would the others around the world. The outlines of a peace agreement were well known and supported by the majority of the international community. It was also necessary to reach agreement on Palestinian refugees and the use of resources in the region.

He said that, in order for an overall agreement to succeed, the parties must accomplish a number of things as soon as possible. Palestinians must achieve a political agreement among themselves; Israelis must suspend the construction of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and start eliminating existing ones; Palestinian extremists must end acts of violence against innocent Israeli civilians; the Palestinian people and the Arab countries must give Israel the necessary security guarantees as a State, lest peace in the Middle East be destined to failure. South Africa reiterated its deep condemnation of the suffering of the people of Gaza owing to Israeli blockades. It equally condemned the terrorist attacks against Israelis.

BUI THE GIANG (Viet Nam), associating his remarks with those made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, recognized the commitment by Palestine and Israel to carry forward bilateral negotiations into 2009, the Palestinian Authority's strengthened efforts in preparation for statehood, Israel's recent decision to evacuate illegal settlers in Hebron and to release over 200 Palestinian prisoners, and the continued cooperation in enhancing the rule of law and security sector reforms in Jenin.

He welcomed resolution 1850 (2008), which broke a five-year hiatus on texts related to the situation in the Middle East, as a good basis for all relevant partners to overcome setbacks and achieve further concrete results. An honest assessment of the current situation, however, regrettably revealed the scope of remaining obstacles and prompt efforts were needed by the international community to commit Israel to its obligations under the Road Map and related international legal provisions. The parties concerned must also refrain from any act that would undermine the atmosphere for a results-oriented dialogue.

Saying that regional peace also required forward movement on other axes, he commended efforts facilitated by Turkey to re-energize the Syria-Israel track and to resume good-faith negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. He called on the international community to support the Lebanese Government's steps to fully assert authority over its territory and to promote national reconciliation, political stability, socio-economic development and regional and international integration. He further urged all parties to strictly observe resolution 1701 (2006).

Council President NEVEN JURICA (Croatia), speaking in his national capacity, noted the renewed hope that had built up by the end of 2008 following the developments at Annapolis and continued negotiations. A series of meetings this week reaffirming the international community's commitment to the two-State solution had been capped off by the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), which had been adopted at a crucial time in terms of maintaining the momentum towards peace.

Political progress was linked to progress on the ground, he said, stressing the need to end the deterioration of conditions in Gaza and to boost economic development for Palestinians. While statements by the President of Iran were alarming, there was a clear consensus for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which would, hopefully, soon bear fruit.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said his country had expressed its desire for peace for many years, most recently through the Arab Peace Initiative. Such initiatives held hope if Israel would agree to make progress according to agreed principles and Council resolutions. On the contrary, however, Israel had continued to build settlements and the apartheid Wall. It had brutally attacked Lebanon in 2006 and the whole world had witnessed the conditions that it had imposed on Palestinians through State terrorism against an unarmed people. The siege of Gaza had seriously increased the suffering there through the policy of collective punishment.

Calling for immediate measures to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and force Israel to open the crossings, he stressed the importance of restoring Palestinian unity in order to attain independence. Syria also called upon Israel to comply with Council resolutions demanding its withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which it continued to occupy while harming the region's occupants, taking its resources and pursuing other unacceptable practices. It was time for Israelis to explain all their unacceptable actions.

Denouncing the 26 October 2008 attack on his country's territory by the United States, he said it showed that the current Administration was determined to continue its aggressive practices for as long as possible. Syria called on the Council to take up its responsibilities in that instance, as well as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said resolution 1850 (2008) had activated the Council towards achieving Middle East peace, but while Lebanon welcomed the planned conference in Moscow, the resolution lacked a specific time frame for achieving peace, a clear call for an end to the occupation, and a clear denunciation of the punishment of Palestinian citizens. Israel's actions contravened peace as it continued to build and expand settlements. In 2008 alone, the number of settlements had grown by 3,000 units. Israel also continued to expropriate land and water resources in the West Bank, build the separation Wall, and divide the area by erecting hundreds of checkpoints and barriers. Settlers' violence had been increasing, as in Hebron. All those practices were clear violations, not only of international law, but of Israel's commitments under the Road Map. By its continuing blockade of Gaza and by subjecting its residents to collective punishment, Israel was escalating an already dangerous situation.

Israel pursued a direction that was opposite that of peace, not only in Palestine, but also in the occupied Golan and in Lebanon, he said. Despite resolution 1701 (2006), it stubbornly refused to fulfil its obligations under that text. In the past few months alone, it had committed 1,100 violations of Lebanese airspace. Lebanon called for the immediate cessation of those violations. It was time for the United Nations to launch a new diplomatic track, which, among other things, would compel Israel to provide maps of the location of its cluster bombs, which were causing suffering daily to hundreds of victims, including children. Israeli officials continued to issue various threats against Lebanese, including threats against the Lebanese Army deployed in the south, which was cooperating completely with UNIFIL. Lebanon had made the choice of a comprehensive and just peace based on the Arab Peace Initiative; it had chosen to see the glass as half full rather than half empty. In the name of peace, long sought by the region's people, Lebanon appealed to the Council not to allow the new opportunity born of resolution 1850 (2008) to be lost.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VOTTI (Brazil) said there would be no peace in the Middle East before a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question was reached on the basis of the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference, the land-for-peace principle, the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant Security Council resolutions. It was regrettable that the Annapolis peace process had not been concluded in the time frame originally envisaged, but opportunities for a brighter future had not been jeopardized. Brazil supported the Council in its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations. The Council must ensure that resolution 1850 (2008) was turned into deeds. The political leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United States – current and future – bore a special responsibility to assist the Council in that formidable task.

Joining the Quartet's 15 October call for intensified negotiations, since she said her country renewed its readiness to cooperate fully and effectively with the parties and the international community for the implementation of initiatives that would enable further progress. It was imperative that Israelis and Palestinians fulfil their obligations and refrain from any activity inconsistent with a future peace agreement. All violence, including that by settlers, must be stopped, and humanitarian law must be observed strictly by all parties and in all cases. Brazil was gravely concerned about the plight of Palestinians in Gaza and supported the Secretary-General's call for a steady and sufficient supply of fuel and humanitarian aid to the territory.

The peace process would be greatly strengthened with substantial improvement in the situation on the ground, including in the West Bank, she continued. Brazil also supported a cessation of violence between Israel and Hamas, which, if renewed, must be observed more consistently and thoroughly than in the past six months. As in the past, Brazil condemned the launching of rockets against Israel, which had occurred last week. Peace stood the best chance if progress was made in other crucial tracks. Palestinian reunification was indispensable, and Brazil thanked Egypt for its good offices in that regard. Dialogue between Israel and Syria was also essential. But the question of Palestine had eluded the international community for far too long and had contaminated and made it more difficult to solve other problems in the region. Years of failed attempts to bring peace and stability to the Middle East risked eroding the international community's credibility. Results were needed now, and Brazil was ready to continue making its contribution.

ILEANA NÚÑEZ MORDOCHE (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, called upon the Council to actively follow up and implement resolution 1850 (2008), stressing that Israel's unlawful settlement campaign remained the primary danger to realizing the rights of the Palestinian people and achieving a two-State solution for peace. The Non-Aligned Movement called for a complete cessation of all settlement activities and colonization measures, and condemned Israel's continuing unlawful construction of the separation Wall, which was a flagrant challenge to and disrespectful of the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice and the General Assembly's resolution of 20 July 2004.

She said that, despite commitments made in the context of the Middle East peace process, Israel had actually escalated its illegal activities recently, seeking to advance its attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to impose a unilateral solution. Thus, the Movement's members had submitted two letters urging the Council presidency to seriously address that critical issue. But despite its firm position in previous resolutions on the question of illegal settlements, the Council had remained unable to implement its own resolutions. The international community must act to end the siege of Gaza, thereby allowing the free movement of persons and goods, and alleviating the dire humanitarian crisis prevailing there.

Turning to Lebanon, she reiterated the Movement's satisfaction with the Lebanese Government's steps to implement resolution 1701 (2006), and welcomed the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces along the country's northern and eastern borders. However, the Movement remained deeply concerned about Israel's ongoing air and land violations of the Blue Line in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), and called on Israel to end the occupation of the northern part of Ghajar and to immediately refrain from such violations. The Movement also called for the prompt settlement of the Sheba'a farms question, and condemned Israel's use of cluster bombs, calling upon it to provide the exact locations of landmines it had planted during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

Condemning also the recent Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Syrian Golan, she reaffirmed that all Israeli measures to modify the legal, physical and

demographic conditions and institutional structures of that area were null and void. Israel must withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967. It also condemned the act of aggression committed by United States forces against Syria on 26 October 2008.

She expressed deep concern that little progress had been made in the peace process despite its re-launch at Annapolis in November 2007, and the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations. Indeed, Israel continued directly to obstruct and undermine the process through its continuing pursuit of illegal policies and practices. Nevertheless, all parties, including the Security Council and the Quartet, must exert all necessary efforts to promote the peace process towards the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 425, 1397 and 1515, the principle of land for peace, and the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

BAKİ İLKİN ([Turkey](#)) said that, although the Annapolis objective to reach agreement by the end of 2008 would not be achieved on time, the parties' determination to continue uninterrupted negotiations was welcome. Permanent peace could only be attained through direct and intensive negotiations. With that in mind, Turkey welcomed resolution 1850 (2008), as it underlined the irreversibility of the Annapolis process and the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative. The resolution also recommitted the parties to their previously agreed obligations, which was of particular importance since the situation on the ground would have a direct impact on the success of the process.

In order to maintain the momentum in the Israeli-Palestinian track at the present critical juncture, neither party should take any action which might undermine the peace process or prejudice final-status negotiations, he stressed. In that respect, Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem must end, as must its construction of the separation Wall. Israel must also ease the daily difficulties that Palestinians faced at checkpoints and roadblocks, and take immediate steps to halt the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The Palestinian people should be able to feel that the future held a better, brighter and more dignified life in store for them, and they should also be able to end internal divisions. The Israeli people should be able to feel secure and confident about a stable and peaceful future, free from threats. Thus, Israel's security concerns must be addressed.

Pointing out that the region's problems were interlinked, he said a comprehensive peace was needed. Thus, Turkey welcomed the indirect talks between Israel and Syria, the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, and the tangible developments in Lebanon in implementation of the Doha Agreement. The Lebanese people would carry forward their country's recent positive developments. Turkey also expected a resumption of the indirect talks between Israel and Syria after the Israeli elections, and would continue to work towards a comprehensive peace based on a two-State settlement, and for regional stability, security and prosperity.

YUKIO TAKASU ([Japan](#)) voiced his country's support for Palestinian unity under the leadership of President Abbas through the "national dialogue", which Egypt had made great efforts to promote. Equally important was the creation of an environment conducive to the peace process continuing uninterrupted. Japan, therefore, recognized the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the constructive role of each Middle East State. It also appreciated the indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria under the auspices of Turkey.

Noting the improved security situation in Jenin, Nablus and elsewhere, he said it could serve as a solid foundation for the peace process heading into 2009. Signs of progress notwithstanding, however, Japan was deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian conditions on the ground, especially in Gaza. The shortage of basic supplies and the restrictions on movements were having an adverse impact on the livelihoods of ordinary people. Clear, tangible improvements in the daily lives of the Palestinian people were essential to maintaining the momentum of the peace process. Japan urged the Israeli authorities to lift the blockade and allow movement and access for the Palestinians.

Japan was equally committed to support economic development in the Middle East, having promoted the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative to build an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley, and to provide job opportunities and facilitate exports to surrounding areas. Japan had provided more than \$1 billion in aid to the Palestinians since the Oslo Accords and stood ready to provide more, in accordance with its pledge of \$150 million, made at the Paris Conference in 2007. Hopefully those efforts would help bring about the long-awaited peace.

Welcoming recent positive developments in Lebanon, he called on the parties concerned to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). While it was ultimately the responsibility of the parties themselves to realize peace, the international community could help ease the situation and allow the parties to concentrate on their efforts. Japan would remain an active partner in helping realize peace in the region.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON ([Pakistan](#)) said that, "as we approach the end of 2008, the goal of a peace treaty, instead of being materialized, has only been re-promised". Thus, it was understandable that the general feeling among Member States was that resolution 1850 (2008) did not do full justice to the gravity of the situation, and that it should have sent a stronger and clearer message from the Council. Perhaps more important was the fact that international pressure had been such that the Council could not afford to keep quiet at the present critical juncture. Despite its shortcomings, the resolution was important in that it kept alive the hope of a peaceful settlement, building on previous agreements and obligations.

The time had come for the Council to exercise its responsibility for peace and security in the Middle East, which could not be done in any better way than by the Council implementing its own resolutions and decisions. Business as usual had become unsustainable. Greater political will, especially on the part of the permanent members, was required to achieve real progress. The Quartet must also use its full potential in support of the peace process through transparent and objective engagement, bringing the parties together and mobilizing the moral, diplomatic, political and economic backing of the international community for the peace effort. In the regional context, the Council and the Quartet should engage more seriously with the Arab League, which had demonstrated a determined, constructive and dynamic approach to regional peace.

He said the framework for peace was already determined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the understandings reached at Annapolis, which flowed from that framework. There could be no deviation from or modification of that basic mandate. It was imperative to address the root cause of the Middle East conflict, namely the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. The solution, therefore, required Israel's complete withdrawal. Pakistan reiterated its call for parallel progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel tracks.

JULIO RAFAEL ESCALONA QJEDA ([Venezuela](#)) said that, after four-and-a-half years, the Council had finally come up with a resolution that could facilitate a peace settlement in the Middle East. Its implementation should not be exclusive or limited; there must be acceptance of and legitimacy for all the political, cultural, social, economic and other dimensions involved. For that reason, Venezuela supported fully the communiqué recently adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement, which called for an end to Israel's occupation and illegal practices, which were abetted from abroad.

A critical mass must be generated within the international community in order to bring about a just settlement, he said. The blockade of Gaza was a crime against humanity that could no longer be tolerated by humankind. The policies that had led to the 1982 massacres in Lebanon remained the same. A settlement must be reached, but crimes of genocide must not go unpunished. Silence was not an option for the Government of Venezuela when it came to the Palestinian cause.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI ([Morocco](#)) said that, while resolution 1850 (2008) ignored some important aspects, it affirmed necessary principles of the peace process, such as the irreversibility of negotiations and the need for progress on the ground. The cordoning-off of Palestinian territory, the creation of obstacles and other actions went against the interests of the peace process and would not, like other Israeli actions, create the environment necessary for the success of peace efforts.

States enjoying good relations with the parties must use their influence to give a decisive impulse to the ongoing negotiations, he said, expressing the hope that the talks would result in improved conditions for the Palestinians, and restored unity among them. Regional initiatives had been bold, and Morocco was ready to make appropriate contributions to the peace process, to assist negotiations and to act in a way that would give them new energy. It was to be hoped that a settlement would soon be reached and that it would include a viable Palestinian State, the return of the occupied Golan to Syria and peaceful co-existence in the entire region.

MONA JUUL (Norway), stressing the importance of economic growth as a key to political progress, said Israeli restrictions undermined it in Gaza. In addition, Israeli settlements strangled the Palestinian economy, undermined Palestinian institutions and prevented the development of a Palestinian State. On the Palestinian side, there was a dangerous fragmentation and, therefore, an urgent need to support renewed reconciliation efforts, as well as an effective ceasefire in and around the Gaza Strip.

Given the political uncertainty on many fronts, decisive action by key stakeholders was needed to support ongoing negotiations she said, noting that fragmentation among donors would only harm prospects for peace. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee remained the key instrument for mobilizing and coordinating donor support in tandem with the Annapolis process. It had already succeeded in mobilizing high levels of contributions to the Palestinian Authority under the able current leadership. The continued willingness of donors rested on the ability of the parties to achieve results toward a settlement. The opportunity was there and the momentum must be consolidated.

ANDREW GOLEDZINOWSKI (Australia) said that as a firm friend of Israel and of the Palestinian people, his country shared the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security. To that end, he welcomed the Quartet's statement on 15 December, which had reiterated support for the ongoing negotiations through the Annapolis process. Also encouraging was the commitment of the parties to the Quartet on 9 November at Sharm el-Sheikh to "vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations" and to implementing their respective obligations under the Road Map. Progress made under the Annapolis process must not be lost, and Israel and the Palestinian Authority should continue and expedite bilateral negotiations irrespective of the composition of their parties' leadership, he added.

He noted Australia's deep concern for the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as the resumption of violence and indiscriminate attacks against Israel, which he condemned. He strongly supported the Quartet's call for the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire to be respected and extended and echoed the Quartet's call for humanitarian supplies to Gaza to be assured continuously. He further welcomed renewed interest in the Saudi-sponsored Arab Peace Initiative as a possible basis for further discussions and expressed hope that progress could be made on the Israel-Syria track.

HJÁLMAR W. HANNESSON (Iceland) said it was distressing to witness, in the year of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, that Palestinian self-determination remained unrealized, and that the occupation had intensified. There was a need for changes on the ground, including the lifting of access restrictions in Gaza, the closure regime in the West Bank and the cessation of all settlement expansion and other actions that made the realization of a two-State solution more difficult. On the Palestinian side, clashes between Hamas and Fatah must end, as should rocket attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip. Iceland urged both Hamas and Israel to maintain their ceasefire and avoid the resumption of hostilities.

He said that, as a strong supporter of Council resolution 1325 (2000), his country believed strongly in the importance of women's participation in peace processes. In that regard, the Council's attention was drawn to the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace, a tripartite body involving Israelis, Palestinians and prominent international women leaders operating under the chairmanship of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The main parties to the peace process would benefit from the Commission's substantive input and from the effective working methods they had developed to reach agreements among themselves on major issues.

ESHAGH AL HABIB (Iran) described the many ways in which the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had deteriorated as a result of illegal Israeli practices, saying that the violence, terrorism, harassment and racist actions by Israeli settlers added up to some of the most horrendous crimes ever committed in the history of humankind. It was long past time for the United Nations to take urgent and meaningful action to counter those atrocities and alleviate the suffering caused by collective punishment in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli regime also maintained its brutal occupation of and unlawful actions in the occupied Syrian Golan while continuing to occupy parts of Lebanon, in addition to its daily violations of Lebanese airspace, in blatant breach of Council resolutions.

The Council's inaction was due to the unqualified support extended to the regime by a permanent member, he said. That support had emboldened the regime in its criminality and impunity, its persistent intimidation and harassment of United Nations agencies and human rights officials, and its vicious threats against nations that showed sympathy for the innocent Palestinian people. The permanent member's support was explicit support for war crimes and unlawful activities. Iran rejected the Israeli representative's baseless accusations against it, which were merely attempts to distract attention from Israeli crimes, and other baseless allegations made by Council members, which were all based on distortions created by the Israeli regime.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar), associating himself with the remarks made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the Council's adoption two days before of resolution 1850 (2008) was a commendable act. But while Qatar welcomed the resolution in principle, it believed the text suffered from shortcomings by overlooking certain obstacles that compromised the chances of achieving a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the region, particularly the issue of illegal Israeli settlements and the consequent violations of international law and human rights.

His delegation wondered why its recognition that the crisis had to be addressed in a way that included all aspects of the problem – a view that, according to the presidential statement of 12 December 2008 on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), was shared by the Council – was not reflected in the resolution, he said.

In discussing a two-State solution, he said it was necessary to stress that the Palestinian State had to enjoy full and undiminished sovereignty in a continuum, with Jerusalem as its capital, and have the conditions to make it viable. The relentless insistence by Israeli authorities to build illegal settlements compromised the prospects for peace and constituted a "hard setback" to the Annapolis conference agreements. It was, therefore, imperative for the Council to reaffirm resolution 1850 (2008) and to adopt the Arab draft resolution on Israeli settlements that it had before it in blue.

The terrorist acts being perpetrated by those living in the Israeli settlements constituted a serious challenge to international peace and security, and the impunity the settlers enjoyed was undoubtedly encouraging them to persist in those acts, he said. Further, Israel should be persuaded to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories. He also stressed that Israel's siege of Gaza, which violated all laws, agreements, principles and ethics, was a serious obstacle to achieving a comprehensive peace.

PAUL BADJI, Chairman, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, voiced that body's full support for the political negotiations towards a lasting Middle East peace and commended the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), which, besides calling on both parties to fulfil their obligations, outlined the international community contribution to an atmosphere conducive to the negotiations. The irreversibility of the process must be maintained.

While strongly supporting the continuation of the talks, the Committee could not ignore the significant gap between the political process and the situation on the ground, he said. The Committee was extremely concerned about the renewed violence in Gaza and the humanitarian situation there. The civilian population was suffering under a crippling closure imposed by the occupying Power. The Committee unequivocally condemned violence on both sides which had led to civilian casualties, either in Israeli military operations or as a result of rocket fire from Gaza. It also considered totally unacceptable and unjust that the entire civilian population of Gaza was forced to endure collective punishment and subjected to a suffocating blockade for the actions of a few militant groups.

Indeed, the humanitarian situation in Gaza had deteriorated severely in recent months, he said, stressing that the territory's inhabitants needed access to basic commodities such as fuel and food supplies. Medical facilities had stopped functioning for lack of electricity and basic equipment, and there was an urgent need for building materials to repair bombed out homes and schools. Some humanitarian aid had been allowed into Gaza recently, but it was barely enough to meet the population's needs. Today, the United Nations had announced the suspension of its food distribution programme after it had run out of supplies.

He called on Israel to lift the siege on Gaza immediately and allow humanitarian assistance to enter. It should also call an immediate halt to military operations and the excessive use of force, both in the West Bank and Gaza, and act within the ambit of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Both sides should urgently cease all acts of violence, exercise utmost restraint and allow calm to prevail. The Committee was also deeply concerned about recent settler violence, particularly in Hebron. It condemned attacks by Israeli settlers and reminded Israeli of its responsibility, as the occupying Power, to protect Palestinian civilians, their property and holy sites. Israel must also halt settlement activity in fulfilment of its Road Map obligation.

AMIR WEISSBROD ([Israel](#)), taking the floor again in response to the representative of Iran, recalled that most speakers today had shared a message of hope for progress in the peace process, but Iran's statement had shown the challenges posed by radical forces in the region, in particular those led by Iran, which tried consistently to obstruct any progress towards peace. Iran's statement was in total contradiction of today's message of hope.

Mr. SERRY, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, said he would return to Jerusalem tonight with the sense that today's debate had been very constructive. Particularly welcome had been the contributions by the delegations of Palestine and Israel. It was that spirit that should be "taken with us into the new year".

Recalling that he had highlighted in his own statement, like most other speakers, the difficult situation in Gaza, he said he appreciated the many expressions of strong support and the urgent appeal for calm to be respected and extended. Following today's events and reported statements, everyone knew why that was important; they had called that calm into question.

Full-scale violence must not be allowed to return to Gaza, he emphasized, adding that all acts of violence – both rockets from Gaza and Israeli incursions into Gaza – must cease. There was international support for easing the suffering of the Palestinians, and the Secretary-General was personally leading those efforts, which would be placed in serious jeopardy if the calm was not respected.

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record