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SHOULDER RESPONSIBILITY OR SEE CREDIBILITY UNDERMINED, PERMANENT OBSERVER

OF PALESTINE WARNS AS SECURITY COUNCIL CONSIDERS MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

Underlining the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine until its resolution, the Permanent Observer for Palestine warned the Security Council today that its credibility would be undermined unless it shouldered its responsibility in that regard.

Addressing the Council during a debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, she said her people had continued to appeal to the international community to address Israel's continuing denial and violation of their inalienable rights, because it was a matter of international peace and security. The Council's failure to address the issue would continue negatively to affect the image of the United Nations and feed the perception of double standards, in the Middle East and the developing world.

In a similar vein, Indonesia's representative said the Middle East conflict had been going on for far too long, tarnishing the international community's collective conscience. The situation continued to pose a threat to international peace and security, because of the Council's inability to take concrete and resolute action from the beginning. However, present prospects for peace in the region were flourishing and it was important to seize that opportunity.

Indeed, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, outlined a number of encouraging developments across the region as he briefed the Council. Progress had been particularly heartening in Lebanon, where a major step forward had been taken with the announcement of a national unity Government. Another positive development was the continuing indirect talks between Israel and Syria. In Gaza, moreover, the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire had held and there had been a marked decline in violence. It was a matter of concern, however, that there no improvement on the ground had been seen in the West Bank.

He said the political process begun at the Annapolis Conference continued, with regular meetings and discussions at various levels on the core issues, both in the region and elsewhere. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas had met on the margins of the Paris Union for the Mediterranean Summit on 13 July and underscored their determination to reach an agreement. However, some gaps remained significant. During discussions in Paris, the Secretary-General had emphasized the need to press ahead with bilateral talks aimed at overcoming all outstanding differences. It was, nevertheless, encouraging that Israeli President Shimon Peres had, for the first time, hosted President Abbas at his Jerusalem residence today.

There was no better time than the present to broker peace, Indonesia's representative stressed, welcoming the unflagging commitment of the Arab League, the Quartet and key countries of the region. However, one challenge that must be addressed urgently was that of Israeli settlement activities. The Council should pronounce itself clearly and vigorously on that very important matter. It was equally important to address other core issues, including borders, Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem and, most urgently, ending the Israeli occupation that had begun in 1967.

Analysing the situation, the representative of the United States said progress towards a two-State solution was not always visible, but that should not be mistaken for a lack of progress. The United States welcomed the strong European support for that process, as demonstrated at the recent Union for the Mediterranean Summit, and was working hard to support the parties' efforts to improve security for Palestinians and Israelis, while improving the humanitarian situation for the Palestinians.

The international community had a role to play in supporting the efforts of the parties to reach a comprehensive Middle East peace, he said. For example, at the Quartet's next meeting in September, it would consider the timing and agenda for an international meeting in Moscow to lend support to the Annapolis process. On the financial side, the United States urged the international community, especially regional partners, to increase their efforts to support the Palestinian Authority. The United States had delivered on much of its \$555 million pledge made at the Paris Conference last December, including \$150 million in direct budgetary assistance.

However, Libya's representative maintained that all activities by the Israeli authorities, especially in continuation of settlement activities after Annapolis, showed that Israel was not serious in seeking a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict. Despite all requests, announcements and calls to stop the construction of settlements, those activities continued, while new licences for construction were granted. The separation wall was still being built, despite the

advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Stressing the responsibility of the Council to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions, several speakers lamented the lack of agreement in the Council on an Arab-sponsored draft resolution that would have condemned the recent acceleration of Israeli settlement activities and demanded an immediate cessation.

Speaking on behalf of 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement, Cuba's representative said the Movement had submitted a letter to the President of the Council, urging that body to address the serious issue of settlements, including through the adoption of a resolution. Israel continued to carry out countless other unlawful policies and measures intended to advance its illegal settlement campaign and alter the demographic composition, character and status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

On another aspect of the issue, Italy's representative said that, in seeking peace in the Middle East, Israel's security was non-negotiable. To that end, the international community should help bring about good governance in the region through a modern legal framework. It should also help strengthen the Palestinian security and rule of law sector as a priority. It should assist in finding a rapid solution to the inter-Palestinian crisis, while ensuring that contributions made to support the Palestinian economy and administration were well coordinated. For its part, Israel must reduce the obstacles it had erected to hinder free movement in the West Bank.

Malaysia's representative emphasized that the responsibilities of Palestinians and Israelis could not be equated, noting that, as an occupier, Israel bore the responsibility under international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. It was long overdue for Israel to cease its policy of imposing collective punishment on the population of Gaza. It should halt all human rights violations and illegal actions.

Israel's representative, for his part, expressed hope that the Arab and Muslim world would realize that their responsibility today was to support the moderates in isolating and marginalizing the extremists. It was time to legitimize a moderate Palestinian leadership. It was the Council's duty to support the talks on the ground between the moderate, democratically elected leadership of Palestine and the Israeli leadership. Hopefully, the parties could bring an end to the cycle of violence, enabling the two peoples to live side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

Others speaking today were the representatives of Burkina Faso, Panama, United Kingdom, Croatia, South Africa, France (on behalf of the European Union), Costa Rica, China, Belgium, Russian Federation, Viet Nam, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar (on behalf of the Arab Group), Jordan, Argentina, Japan and Iran.

Also addressing the Council was the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting began at 10:15 a.m., suspended at 1:50 p.m., resumed at 3:40 p.m. and ended at 4:25 p.m.

Background

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

Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said in a briefing to the Council that there had been a number of encouraging developments across the region over the past month, and particularly heartening had been the progress in Lebanon, where a major step forward had been taken with the announcement of a national unity Government. It was also positive that indirect talks continued between Israel and Syria. In Gaza, the ceasefire had held and there had been a marked decline in violence. It was a matter of concern, however, that there had been no improvement on the ground in the West Bank.

The political process begun at Annapolis continued, with regular meetings and discussions at various levels on the core issues, both in the region and elsewhere, he said. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas had met on the margins of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean on 13 July and underscored their determination to reach an agreement. However, some gaps reportedly remained significant, and in discussions in Paris, the Secretary-General had emphasized the need to press ahead with bilateral talks with the goal of overcoming all outstanding differences. It was, nevertheless, encouraging that, for the first time, Israeli President Shimon Peres had today hosted President Abbas in his Jerusalem residence.

In Gaza and Israel, the security situation had improved as the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire had generally been upheld, he continued. During the reporting period, one Palestinian civilian had been killed by the Israel Defense Forces near the Gaza-Israel border and two others injured. Palestinian militants had fired 7 rockets and 10 mortars at Israel, resulting in no casualties. No Israeli air strikes or incursions had been reported. Hamas was communicating to the public in Gaza its support for the calm, and had detained individuals involved in firing mortars. However, 9 Palestinians had been killed and 29 injured by internal violence, reckless handling of weaponry and tunnel collapses along the Gaza-Egypt border. Building on the ceasefire, Egypt continued to work on an agreement to exchange captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit for a number of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had still not been provided with access to Corporal Shalit after more than two years in captivity.

He said the number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip through the Sufa and Kami crossings had increased by 54 per cent during the four weeks following the ceasefire, compared to the month before. Imports of cement had increased substantially, meeting Gaza's requirements for the reporting period. There had also been a slight increase in imports of non-food commodities. Current import levels stood at some 30 per cent of the level before June 2007. However, the continued lack of many raw materials and prohibitions against exports precluded any significant economic recovery, and approximately 95 per cent of local industrial establishments remained closed. On 17 July, Israeli officials had informed their counterparts in the Palestinian Authority that they would increase the amount of fuel allowed into Gaza. But, between 27 June and 20 July, only 17 per cent of daily petrol needs, 57 per cent of diesel requirements, 40 per cent of cooking gas and 81 per cent of industrial gas requirements had been met. The Gaza Electricity Company continued to operate at less than 70 per cent of capacity.

Describing the visit to the Gaza Strip by Special Coordinator Roberterry, he said the aim had been to explore suitable ways to resume stalled projects, including some run by the United Nations. Both the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator had underlined their support for President Abbas' initiative for progress towards reunification of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. Members of the League of Arab States would have a leading role in facilitating that effort.

As efforts continued to solidify the ceasefire in Gaza, it was critical to accelerate progress in the West Bank, he stressed, noting with concern that Israeli Forces had stepped up their military operations throughout that territory since 19 June. The Israel Defense Forces had closed down and seized equipment belonging to alleged Hamas-affiliated institutions in Nablus, including schools, medical centres, media outlets and civic associations. Israel had also outlawed 36 international non-governmental organizations, charging them with fundraising for Hamas. Israeli troops had raided the Nablus municipality, arrested elected Palestinian Authority officials and ordered the closure of the main Nablus shopping mall.

Palestinian Authority officials, including Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, had criticized those operations as undermining the economy and the effort to improve security, he said. Palestinian Authority forces had continued their efforts to impose law and order and to disarm and arrest militants, in compliance with

Palestinian obligations under Phase I of the [Road Map](#). The effects of Israeli raids on the efforts by Palestinian security forces to operate effectively in areas under their control were a matter of concern.

On 2 July, he recalled, three Israeli civilians, including two women, had been killed and 30 others injured when a Palestinian from East Jerusalem had used a bulldozer to attack vehicles in West Jerusalem. The Secretary-General had condemned that attack. This morning, a similar attack had occurred, resulting in the injury of two Israelis. In the West Bank, meanwhile, three Palestinians, one a civilian, had been killed by the Israel Defense Forces and 136 others injured, including at least 22 of them children. Most of the injuries had occurred during anti-barrier demonstrations. On three occasions since mid-June, Israeli settlers had reportedly fired a total of six rockets towards the Palestinian village of Burin, south-west of Nablus. On 12 July, Israeli police had arrested a settler suspected of manufacturing and launching those projectiles and seized explosives and weapons in the settlement of Yizhar. On 21 July, another rocket had been fired from the settlement.

He said construction activity in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, had continued, and on 3 July, Defence Minister Ehud Barak had reportedly approved construction of a new building in the Beit Romano Settlement in Hebron's old city. As the Secretary-General had stressed many times, Israeli construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was contrary to international law, Israel's commitments under the Road Map and the Annapolis process. Israel should heed the clear call of the Quartet to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001.

The Under-Secretary-General also reported a slight deterioration in movement and access across the West Bank, with four significant obstacles that had been removed during June having been reinstalled by the Israel Defense Forces in July, bringing the total number of closure obstacles to 609. In addition, Israel was renovating the Wadi Nar/Container checkpoint, controlling movement from the north to the southern part of the West Bank, rather than honouring its prior commitment to remove it. A recent report by the Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs confirmed that 56 per cent of the planned barrier route had now been constructed, and the majority of the construction deviated from the Green Line and was, therefore, contrary to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Taking up the Palestinian economic situation, he said that, due to budget shortfalls this month, the Palestinian Authority had barely managed to make salary payments for June. It planned to pay July salaries through loans and donor aid, but would need an additional \$600 million to stay solvent from August through December. All donors who had not yet fulfilled their budget-support pledges made at the December 2007 Donors' Conference were urged to do so in order to avert a fiscal crisis. France, the Paris Conference Chair, and three Co-Chairs – Norway, the European Commission and the Quartet Representative – had met on 7 July to discuss developments since the Donors' Conference. A meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee was scheduled for September.

Turning to the Syrian-Israeli track, he said another round of indirect talks, mediated by Turkey, was expected later this month, to be followed by further talks in August. The Secretary-General had expressed his support and the Special Coordinator had visited Damascus to underline United Nations backing. The Government of Syria had raised the issue of prisoners from the occupied Syrian Golan and the Special Coordinator had noted the release from Israeli custody of Sitan al Wali on 8 July. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan had remained quiet during the reporting period. Yesterday, the Syrian Foreign Minister had arrived in Beirut, where he had handed over to Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, an official invitation to visit Syria. Both countries were urged to establish full diplomatic relations and representation, consistent with Security Council resolution 1680 (2006).

On Lebanon, the Under-Secretary-General applauded the major step taken on 11 July, when President Suleiman had announced that agreement had been reached on the composition of the national unity Cabinet, subject to a vote of confidence in Parliament. Another important development had been the implementation of the major humanitarian aspects of resolution 1701 (2006). On 16 July, the bodies of two abducted soldiers had been returned to Israel in exchange for Lebanese detainees and remains. The Facilitator had worked with great perseverance for almost two years and would be submitting a full report to the Secretary-General, who had received letters from Israel and Hizbullah, both committing themselves to further humanitarian action.

He also reported a number of security incidents in Lebanon, expressing concern about the clashes and their implications for the country's stability and security. The area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had remained generally quiet and the Lebanese Armed Forces Command had not yet returned the army units deployed in May, due to the security situation in other parts of the country. The UNIFIL Force Commander had called on the Lebanese Command to return those units as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces were working to ensure that the shortage of units did not adversely affect their ability to carry out their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL continued to record Israeli air violations on an almost daily basis.

Statements

FEDA ABDELHADY-NASSER, Permanent Observer Mission of [Palestine](#), said the Middle East peace process was in a "state of serious disrepair" with its premise "incessantly undermined by the illegal actions of Israel" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Those actions were totally contrary to the principle of land for peace and the objective of a two-State solution. Israel's illegal settlement campaign in the Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan was the main obstruction. Indeed, for more than 41 years, Israel had been aggressively colonizing the land it had forcibly occupied in 1967, in breach of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer by the occupying Power of its civilian population into the territory being occupied.

She said the Israeli settlement campaign aimed at "creating unilateral facts on the ground" and illegally altering the demographic character of the Territory so as to facilitate de facto annexation. The issue of settlements was at the crux of nearly all other final-status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, water and security. Israeli settlement activities had been relentless in spite of United Nations resolutions demanding their cessation and the dismantling of settlements. Israel also remained defiant in the face of calls by the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to respect and abide by that treaty. It continued its activities despite the fact that halting its settlement campaign was the cornerstone of the Road Map.

She recalled that July marked the fourth anniversary of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which affirmed the illegality of the wall. The Court had concluded that the route chosen for the wall gave expression to the illegal measures taken by Israel with regard to Jerusalem and the settlements, as deplored by the Security Council. Israeli settlements occupied approximately 50 per cent of the West Bank. Along with more than 600 checkpoints erected throughout the Territory, it had created a situation whereby Palestinian communities were being separated from one another or being destroyed while thousands of Palestinian civilians were displaced.

East Jerusalem was being isolated from the rest of the Palestinian Territory, which was being dissected into northern, central and southern parts, she continued. Israel imposed economic and social devastation on the Palestinians. "The entrenchment and continuation of this illegitimate situation will make physically impossible the establishment of a sovereign, contiguous, viable and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the ultimate realization of the two-State solution for peace, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions."

Turning to the Gaza strip, she noted that it was experiencing a humanitarian crisis and called for an immediate end to violent military raids by Israeli occupying forces. The Palestinian Authority remained ready to assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of Gaza's border crossings and called upon Israel to allow the reopening of the crossings in line with the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

Underlining the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine until it was resolved, she said the Palestinian people had continued to appeal to the international community to address the continuing denial and violation of their inalienable rights, because it was a matter of international peace and security. It endangered the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, consequently, the

future prospects for peace and stability in the Middle East. Unless the Council shouldered its responsibilities regarding the question of Palestine, its credibility would be undermined. It would continue negatively to affect the image of the United Nations and feed the perception of double standards in the Middle East and the developing world, a conclusion borne out by several assessments, including the latest independent panel investigation.

DAN GILLERMAN ([Israel](#)) began by voicing appreciation for efforts to secure the release of the bodies of the two Israeli soldiers, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, and, noting that his tenure as Permanent Representative was coming to an end, thanked all Council members for the time they had spent on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

He said that, in six years at the United Nations, he had been accused of overreacting and over-dramatizing events, but he would be leaving New York with a sense of achievement, but also frustration. Most Council members wanted to make the world a better place for future generations, as did Riyad Mansour, the Permanent Observer of Palestine. Despite their differences, their interactions had always taken place under good intentions. However, there was one Council member whose aim was to block any mention of terror or condemnation of terror in Council resolutions. That some members should think in such a way should be considered carefully when the Council next elected new members.

Israelis dealt with terror every day, he said, pointing out that a new manifestation of that had occurred only a few hours ago. A few yards from where the Presidents of Israel and Palestine were having lunch, a bulldozer had been used as a "death machine". It was the second such occurrence and constituted a pattern. It would seem that one member of the Council in particular supported such "contributions".

While stressing that he was pleased to have worked with people representing countries had given the world Zola, Berlioz, Ben Franklin, Thomas More, Benjamin Britten, Dostoevsky, Nelson Mandela and others, Council members should consider that the biggest invention and advanced exports of some countries were aeroplane hijackings, suicide bombings the use of bulldozers as death machines. Council members should deal with the world's real problem – that there was no dash of civilizations, but only a "dash of civilization". The killings and bloodshed occurring today were all happening within Islam. Not only were the majority of terrorists Muslim, but their victims were also largely Muslim – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sharm el-Sheikh, Amman, Morocco and Cairo. Those acts of violence were often marked by eerie silence.

He said there was not a single Muslim leader — whether secular or religious — who stood up and said "enough is enough". It was to be hoped that the Arab and Muslim world would realize that their duty and responsibility today was to support the moderates in isolating and marginalizing the extremists. In Iran, the President denied the Holocaust even while preparing the next one. Much of the Arab and Muslim world realized where the real threat was, but it was up to them to stand up for what was right. It was time to legitimize a moderate Palestinian leadership. It was the Council's duty to support the talks on the ground between the moderate, democratically elected leadership of Palestine and the Israeli leadership. Hopefully, the parties could bring an end to the cycle of violence to enable the two peoples to live side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

ATTIA OMAR MUBARAK ([Libya](#)) said the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained the same, with continuing closures and assassinations of Palestinian activists. It was important to remember that partial openings were not a concessionary agreement by the occupying Power, but Israel's obligation under international law. The policy of collective punishment was considered a crime of genocide in accordance with the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. All activities by the Israeli authorities, especially in continuation of settlement activities after Annapolis, showed that Israel was not serious in seeking a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict. Despite all requests, announcements and calls to stop the construction of settlements, those activities continued, while new licences for construction were granted. The separation wall was still being constructed, despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The Council's inability to express its will vis-à-vis the settlement issue required that the international community review its working methods, he continued. It was unacceptable that some States prevented the Council from acting on that issue. In the past month, the Arab Group had attempted to issue a resolution on the settlements in order to advance the peace process, but that endeavour had met with paralysis and flimsy pretexts to impose a solution protecting the occupying Power and treating the victims unjustly. It was the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation, and Libya rejected completely any attempt at linking resistance with terrorism. Actual terrorism was the activities of the occupying Power, including the detention of Palestinians without trial. Libya had been astonished by the futility of discussing an issue as important as the situation in the Middle East, in view of the double-standard policy.

On Lebanon, he underscored the principle of non-intervention in Lebanese affairs. That country had been able to emerge from political crisis and Libya welcomed recent positive developments there. Still, the Secretary-General's last report on resolution 1701 (2006) referred to Israel's violations of Lebanese air space, which had reached 82 daily. Among other things, Israel still occupied the Shab'a Farms and did not respond to appeals for maps showing mines and cluster munitions covering 49 per cent of south Lebanon, all in flagrant violation of international law and relevant Council resolutions. Also, despite resolutions stipulating that Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan was null and void, the occupation of that territory continued "in absolute arrogance".

Regarding today's statement by the representative of the Israeli entity, he recalled that several days ago the international community had witnessed a young Palestinian handcuffed and shot by Israeli soldiers. Israel should accept observers to see what was happening in Palestinian refugee camps. Instead of providing the Council with information regarding the conduct of Libya, Israel should improve its own conduct, which was based on terrorism.

MICHEL KAFANDO ([Burkina Faso](#)) welcomed recent positive developments in the region, including the formation of Lebanon's national unity Government and the exchange of prisoners and remains between Israel and Hizbullah. Dialogue was possible if there was goodwill on both sides. On the Syria-Lebanon track, Burkina Faso welcomed the readiness of both countries to establish diplomatic relations. That would clearly be a decisive milestone in the settlement of that crisis.

With respect to a comprehensive settlement of Middle East issues, it was important to normalize relations among all countries concerned, he said. The Palestinian Authority and Israel must continue their negotiations, guided by the Annapolis process and the Quartet Road Map. The settlement of the dispute required efforts by both parties and a just sharing of obligations and responsibilities. It was important that Israel end its settlement policies and develop progress in bilateral negotiations. The problem of land was among the main obstacles to the peace process. Israel should also lift its siege on Gaza to settle the humanitarian issues there. Palestine should meet its obligations in ensuring security for Israel.

He said the countries of the Middle East also played a decisive role through initiatives like those by Qatar, Turkey and Egypt. Their involvement had brought about the current truce in Gaza. The Council should maintain the necessary pressure on Israeli and Palestinian leaders by reminding them of the need for strict compliance with the United Nations Charter. International organizations should continue their assistance for the development of Palestine. With respect to international cooperation, the new Union for the Mediterranean could perhaps contribute to the settlement of the conflict. It was the expressed will of Israeli and Palestinian officials to move forward with negotiations, hopefully by the end of 2008. That was the only way to find a solution.

RICARDO ALBERTO ARIAS ([Panama](#)) noted that the Under-Secretary-General's report presented both a positive and negative picture of the region. The ceasefire mediated by Egypt last month remained largely unbroken, bringing relative calm to Gaza and Israel. Hopefully, that reciprocal measure would enable negotiations to take place in a climate marked by more trust. The ceasefire should be extended to the West Bank. Parties involved in confidence-building measures in the region, including the exchange of prisoners under Germany's mediation and efforts being conducted in Lebanon, deserved thanks.

Progress could be made by moving towards the implementation of agreements in a timely manner and through discrete steps, he said. For one, Israel should cease its occupation of Palestinian Territory, particularly through the establishment of settlements, which were obstacles to the peace process. Efforts to bring about peace must provide for the existence of two States, bound by the pre-1967 boundaries recognized as common borders. Panama called for the completion

of negotiations to achieve the rapid release of abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and the return of Shab'a Farms to Lebanon. The peace process would require the resolve of all parties involved, as well as that of the international community and the Security Council.

JOHN SAWERS ([United Kingdom](#)) expressed support for agreements reached at Annapolis and those recently reached in Paris. In order to bring about peace, the public must be able to perceive progress on the ground. In his address to the Knesset, Prime Minister Gordon Brown had reiterated that Israeli settlements eroded trust. As such, it was crucial that Israel freeze the establishment of further settlements and dismantle existing ones, as agreed. For their part, the Palestinians must act with perseverance and persistence against terrorists targeting Israelis. The United Kingdom welcomed Egypt's work in facilitating a ceasefire in Gaza. What remained was to curtail the rampant arms smuggling in the region and negotiate the release of Sergeant Shalit.

Welcoming the lead taken by the United Nations to improve the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he noted that the Palestinian Authority was at a critical juncture and would soon be in the red. The United Kingdom had already provided whatever financial assistance it could, and it was up to others to step up for the cause. The Council should find its voice on the Middle East by crafting a balanced draft resolution. A text that focused on one aspect of the conflict was not likely to muster enough agreement in the Council.

He welcomed the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon, calling it an important step in delivering on the Doha agreements. Lebanon had the United Kingdom's full support in terms of reforming the security sector, providing assistance to Palestinian refugees and facilitating the work of the Independent Investigation Commission and Tribunal. The United Kingdom also welcomed the exchange of prisoners, and would continue to support UNIFIL in preventing militias from acquiring arms through Syrian territory. It was to be hoped that the Governments of Syria and Lebanon would delineate their border and establish diplomatic relations.

HASAN KLEIB ([Indonesia](#)) said the conflict in the Middle East had been going on for far too long, tarnishing the international community's collective conscience. It continued to pose a threat to international peace and security because of the Council's inability to take concrete and resolute action from the beginning. Present prospects for peace in the region were flourishing and it was important to seize that opportunity.

Emphasizing the importance of inter-Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation, he said his country attached great importance to the Yemen agreement outlining important avenues for dialogue among Palestinians. Given recent positive developments, there was reason to be hopeful that they would eventually crystallize into a new equilibrium in which all nations of the region could share the peace dividend and an independent and viable State of Palestine could stand side by side with its neighbours. The international community had been waiting for that moment.

Despite the progress, one could not be complacent, he continued. The Middle East conflict would remain unresolved if all parties concerned did not go beyond the ordinary in their efforts to find a viable solution. There was no better time than the present to broker peace. Indonesia welcomed the unflagging commitment of the Arab League, the Quartet and key countries of the region. However, one challenge that must be addressed urgently was that of Israeli settlement activities. The Council should pronounce itself clearly and vigorously on that very important matter. It was equally important to address other core issues, including borders, Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem and, most urgently, ending the Israeli occupation that had begun in 1967. Building a viable Palestinian State would require continued preparation and planning, and recent conferences were important in that regard. Indonesia, in collaboration with South Africa, had hosted the Asia-Africa Ministerial Conference on Capacity-Building for Palestine on 14-15 July.

With regard to Lebanon, he welcomed the election of President Suleiman, but voiced concern over recent clashes in Tripoli, and the regrettable violence in Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp. Indonesia attached primary importance to a point in the Doha agreement underlining that "all parties will commit not to resort to arms or violence in order to resolve political conflicts". Unity was a key aspect of achieving a sustainable peace in Lebanon, and Indonesia welcomed the efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation.

VICE SKRAČIĆ ([Croatia](#)) said the international community, including the Council, should do its utmost to support the parties. Progress was linked to tangible improvements on the ground and there was an urgent need to build confidence. Croatia supported fully international efforts beginning with the Paris Conference, which, coupled with the Special Coordinator's efforts to bring the parties together and stimulate the economic renewal, could build a platform for peace. Croatia also supported the objectives of the Berlin conference on security and rule of law, and stressed the importance of building an effective and accountable security infrastructure in Palestine, including accountable legal and police institutions. Not only was it an essential part of Palestinian State-building, but also a legitimate expectation on the Israeli side. Israel must be confident that the two-State solution would not jeopardize its security. A Palestinian State willing to combat terrorism and anarchy was needed.

Welcoming a number of positive developments in the region, he cited the period of calm in Gaza, indirect talks between Israel and Syria, and the exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hizbullah. However, Croatia was concerned about today's attack and that of 2 July. There was also a need to allow the movement of goods and people in Gaza, as well as progress in the case of the abducted Israeli soldier. Croatia also welcomed the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon and hoped that momentum would be used to consolidate institutions and ensure the Government's control over the country's entire territory. The requirements of the Doha agreement must be fully implemented. It was equally important to implement relevant Council resolutions. Hopefully such positive developments as the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon would bring stability to the wider region.

DUMISANI KUMALO ([South Africa](#)), aligning himself with the statement to be made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the Council should support home-grown initiatives to find solutions to myriad disagreements in the Middle East, including those by the parties themselves with the support of neighbouring countries, sometimes with the assistance of subregional bodies such as the League of Arab States. In that context, South Africa welcomed efforts by Lebanon to engage in dialogue with its neighbours and achieve the withdrawal of Israeli Forces from its territory. South Africa also joined the global condemnation of Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which was illegal and changed facts on the ground. Settlements constituted a key obstacle to the peace process relative to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

He also welcomed Egypt's efforts in brokering a ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli leadership, and urged the parties to abide by agreements made. South Africa acknowledged the discussions currently under way on easing border restrictions in Gaza, and supported the notion of extending the ceasefire to the West Bank, because Israeli attacks on one area had negative repercussions on others. Negotiation teams were encouraged to persevere in seeking the establishment of a Palestinian State before the end of 2008, as declared at Annapolis. While the international community had its part to play, primary responsibility for achieving peace lay with the two sides. In that regard, it was crucial that any pronouncements they made be calculated to advance peace. Israel's illegal actions, including the siege of Gaza, incursions into the West Bank and the establishment of checkpoints, settlements and a wall did not contribute to a change in the situation.

MARCELLO SPATAFORA ([Italy](#)), aligning himself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union, said that, in seeking peace in the Middle East, Israel's security was non-negotiable. To that end, the international community should help bring about good governance in the region through a modern legal framework. It should also help strengthen the Palestinian security and rule of law sector as a priority. It should assist in finding a rapid solution to the inter-Palestinian crisis while ensuring that contributions made to support the Palestinian economy and administration were well coordinated. For its part, Israel must reduce the obstacles it had erected to hinder free movement in the West Bank.

Recent calm in the Gaza Strip had contributed favourably to negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, and should continue, he said. Italy was also greatly satisfied with the Lebanese Government's efforts to take up talks with its neighbours and the international community must support those talks. Italy's active role in UNIFIL was a sign of its commitment to disarming Lebanese militia. It was promising to note that Syrian leaders had expressed the will to normalize relations with Lebanon, and it was to be hoped that the two countries would restore diplomatic relations.

JEAN-MAURICE RIPERT ([France](#)), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said there were encouraging signs in the Middle East and the international community must continue to support that momentum. The Union for the Mediterranean Summit had shown that the European Union could make a contribution to stability and peace in the Middle East, notably through the creation of new dialogue forms. In pursuing the Annapolis objectives, including a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, both parties must make painful compromises in the coming weeks and months. The attacks in Jerusalem, Israeli incursions in the West Bank, the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza, the firing of Palestinian rockets and Israeli settlement activities contributed to the difficulty of the situation.

Building settlements anywhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was illegal and would compromise the viability of the two-State solution, he stressed. The Palestinian economy needed to develop and, to that end, the movement of goods and persons must resume. The Palestinian Authority must ensure security and Israel must freeze all settlement activities. The situation in Gaza must not be forgotten, and the efforts of President Abbas to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation were welcome. Hamas must comply with the Quartet principles and renounce violence. The gains made in Annapolis and at other conferences should not be in vain, and the situation on the ground must change for the better. Israel and Palestine must decide on the terms of a comprehensive settlement, while other nations contributed to a settlement. The international community could provide guarantees to the parties in implementation of an agreement.

The changing situation in Lebanon could bring long-awaited calm, he said, welcoming the formation of the national unity Government. That had been a vital step after the election of President Suleiman. The Doha agreement favoured the logic of dialogue. As everybody knew, implementation of the accord should proceed with the drafting of the electoral law and national dialogue. To combat impunity, the European Union had committed to encouraging the establishment of a Special Tribunal, and it was also essential that the Lebanese State extend its authority throughout its national territory. Détente through Doha could also encourage the dialogue between the Syrian and Lebanon authorities. It was also encouraging that Syria and Israel had begun indirect peace talks, another example of dialogue that must be encouraged.

JORGE URBINA ([Costa Rica](#)) said he shared the frustration of those who criticized the way in which opportunities like today's meeting were used by those seeking to advance their own political agenda. The Council's voice had gone unheard for a number of years and its contribution to resolving problems in the Middle East were nearly non-existent. Its silence contributed to the problem rather than the solution. A short while ago, Italy had warned that the Council's inaction could make it irrelevant, a luxury that the international community could not afford. Irrelevance on the part of the Council could only lead to a world outside the bounds of law. Consideration of the Middle East required courage, and at times such courage had been demonstrated in other forums, while lacking in the Council. For example, the Quartet had reproached Israel's settlement policies, but the Council had been unable to reach agreement in a sufficient tone.

The international community had also heard the Secretary-General express ideas and appeals which should resonate in the Council, he recalled. If the Council could not condemn, as it should, an urgent humanitarian situation in Gaza, or policies and action that undermined efforts to achieve peace, it should at least consider the positive aspects that could contribute to the process. Costa Rica was grateful for the efforts of Egypt, Turkey and Qatar, and for the mediation efforts by Germany and those of the Palestinian security forces to restore order in the West Bank. It also welcomed the contribution of the Union for the Mediterranean and the announcement of a resumption of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. In the Middle East, there would be no victory for just one party. The creative and respectable coexistence of two independent States with safe and recognizable borders was needed.

LIU ZHENMIN ([China](#)) welcomed the truce in the Gaza Strip and the active diplomatic effort of Arab States to foster peace in the region, including through direct talks, as with Lebanon and Syria, and the exchange of prisoners between Israel and Lebanon. The formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon was also welcome. In light of difficulties in the region over the last few months, those initiatives were most encouraging. However, it was up to the parties involved to show enough political will to implement their agreements.

Stressing the importance of providing more assistance to the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, he said the situation in the West Bank was also of concern, since its inhabitants as well as residents of Gaza constituted "one whole". The international community should do everything in its power to build the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to maintain unity among the people of Palestine. Israel and Palestine must be encouraged to speed up their negotiations, since they had reached the halfway mark in the Annapolis process.

The establishment of Israeli settlements was certainly not conducive to those negotiations and, as such, countries close to Israel should "nudge" it towards "a strategic choice", he said. The ultimate goal was comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The peace process between Syria and Israel and between Syria and Lebanon were closely linked to the Israel-Palestinian track. Improved relationships among Lebanon, Syria and Israel were likely to have positive impacts on Israel-Palestinian talks. The Council had a role to play in fostering such positive relationships.

JAN GRAULS ([Belgium](#)) recalled that, two years ago, a serious crisis had threatened to bury hopes for peace in the Middle East. However, the agreements reached in the past few weeks constituted a source of hope, albeit a fragile one. Nevertheless, they should be seen as a source of encouragement for the parties to redouble their efforts to engage in in-depth negotiations between now and the end of 2008. Although there were inevitable difficulties in meeting that goal, Belgium stood ready to help the parties surmount them.

Ongoing bilateral negotiations must be bolstered by tangible progress, he said. While realities threatened the viability of the peace process, in order to avoid the conflagration of crisis, the two sides must build trust between them, based on respect for their Road Map commitments. The international community should do its part by helping strengthen the rule of law, and the Israeli Government should facilitate those efforts by preventing new military operations in the formerly occupied territories now under Palestinian control. Belgium called on Israel to end its settlement activities, including in Jerusalem.

Noting that projects in Jenin and Bethlehem had proved the possibility of cooperation between the two parties, he said that the people of Gaza and southern Israel had benefited from relative calm, marred only by a few incidents. The calm should be seen as the first stage towards achieving normalization of the humanitarian and political situation in the Gaza Strip. Belgium acknowledged the efforts at political reconciliation on the part of President Abbas and called on Israel to reopen crossing points. For its part, the European Union was ready to monitor the Rafah crossing.

He welcomed the re-launch of talks between Syria and Israel under Turkey's auspices, saying they would have a positive impact on the process towards achieving a comprehensive Middle East peace. After a prolonged political stalemate, it was encouraging that the Doha agreement had opened a new door in Lebanon's peace process. That country's leaders should invest in the full implementation of that process, including agreement on an electoral law and re-engagement in a national dialogue. The humanitarian gestures of 16 July should contribute to regional stability.

VITALY CHURKIN ([Russian Federation](#)) said the key to success was the fundamental commitment to the Road Map and a focus on creating conditions for the establishment of lasting peace in the Middle East. That could be achieved only through mutual compromise to ensure the establishment of an independent and sustainable Palestinian State, living at peace with its Israeli neighbour within internationally recognized borders and fully renouncing terrorism as the means to achieving political goals. However, the current headway could not conceal the alarming events to which the Under-Secretary-General had referred. There was still a danger of loss of Israeli lives arising from extremist attacks, as corroborated by today's attack and that of 2 July. Palestinians must implement fully their security obligations under the Road Map.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remained dire, and in the West Bank Israeli authorities continued to build settlements and the separation wall, ignoring appeals by the international community, he said. The Palestinian people could not move freely and were frequently victims of arbitrary actions on the part of the Israeli authorities. Under such circumstances, the international community, particularly the Quartet, should do everything within its power to establish an atmosphere that would promote lasting peace. That would not be possible without restoring the unity of Gaza and the West Bank under the leadership of the

Palestinian Authority. The Russian Federation supported efforts to promote inter-Palestinian unity and had sent clear signals with respect to the timeliness of efforts to overcome the ruinous rift currently dividing the Palestinian people.

Welcoming the contacts between Syria and Israel, he expressed hope for full-scale talks to create the final conditions for peace. The Russian Federation, with the support of the Quartet and other parties, intended to hold an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow to accelerate the Annapolis process and advance other tracks. Russia also welcomed the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon, which reaffirmed that country's ability to arrive at a consensus in its national interest. Russia would continue to contribute to the peaceful resolution of problems in Lebanon through dialogue and reconciliation, and without outside interference in the country's affairs. The Russian Federation also welcomed steps to normalize Syrian-Lebanese relations, as well as efforts to find solutions to the issue of detainees and the fate of Israeli soldiers missing since 2006. The recent exchange of prisoners and remains by Israel and Hizbullah would contribute to the easing of tensions, proving that constructive dialogue rather than confrontation would help find a solution.

ZALMAY KHALIZAD (United States) said progress towards a two-State solution was not always visible, but that should not be mistaken for a lack of progress. The United States welcomed the strong European support for that process, as demonstrated at the recent Union for the Mediterranean Summit, and was working hard to support the parties' efforts to improve security for Palestinians and Israelis, while improving the humanitarian situation for the Palestinians. United States-trained Palestinian police had deployed to Jenin in coordination with Israeli authorities, working to uphold law and order and cracking down on terrorism. The United States also supported Egyptian efforts to restore calm to Gaza and southern Israel, and called on all parties to adhere to the period of calm that had begun on 19 June. Like other Quartet partners, the United States welcomed the announcement of indirect talks between Israel and Syria, under the auspices of Turkey.

On Lebanon, he welcomed the Doha agreement, the formation of the national unity Government and recent announcements in Paris that Syria and Lebanon had agreed to exchange diplomatic missions. But, despite that progress, significant challenges remained. The security situation remained tense. The United States condemned all attacks targeting civilians and reiterated its condemnation of efforts by Hamas and other groups to usurp power in Gaza. It called for the restoration of the lawful Palestinian Authority Government in the Territory. The United States also reiterated its deep concern over continuing Israeli settlement activity, which was having a negative effect on the atmosphere surrounding the negotiations.

The international community had a role to play in supporting the efforts of the parties to reach a comprehensive Middle East peace, he said. For example, at the Quartet's next meeting in September, it would consider the timing and agenda for an international meeting in Moscow to lend support to the Annapolis process. On the financial side, the United States urged the international community, especially regional partners, to increase their efforts to support the Palestinian Authority. The United States had delivered on much of its \$555 million pledge made at the Paris Conference last December, including \$150 million in direct budgetary assistance.

In Lebanon, the international community must continue to work towards full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), as well as the Doha agreement, so as to safeguard that country's independence and security, he said. It must also continue strongly to support the efforts of the Lebanese Armed Forces and internal security forces to restore calm and support the legitimate Government of Lebanon. Outside parties, especially Syria and Iran, should stop arming illegal militias in Lebanon.

Council President LE LUONG MINH (Viet Nam), speaking in his national capacity, noted that, since the last meeting on the Middle East, there had been a broad spectrum of both new opportunities and new challenges. Positive developments included the engagement of Israel and Palestine in negotiations on final-status issues, and the strong support pledged at the international conferences held in Paris, Bethlehem and Berlin for the establishment of a Palestinian State. It also included high-level diplomatic initiatives and mediation efforts by the Quartet, the League of Arab States and countries of the region. There had also been tangible progress on ceasefires, prisoner exchanges and other areas of mutual concern. In addition, the Palestinian Authority had undertaken steps to promote the rule of law and promote foreign investment, thus enhancing national unity, security and economic development reforms.

Yet, the Middle East situation remained volatile despite those developments, he said. Israel's military incursions into the West Bank were worrisome, as were its plans to expand its illegal settlements in the Palestinian Territory, its ongoing construction of the separation wall, its imposition of closures and restrictions on freedom of movement and access of persons and goods in Gaza, and its continued detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners. In the meantime, the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza continued to deteriorate.

The conflict had gone on for too long, he emphasized, calling on the parties to renounce violence, implement agreements and abide scrupulously by their obligations under international law. Viet Nam called on the parties also to take concrete action to advance the peace process. Israel must end its restrictive measures by opening border crossings and ensuring unfettered access for humanitarian assistance to the people in Gaza. As for Lebanon, the parties should use the Doha agreement to build on the momentum of national reconciliation, and to extend support for the newly established national unity Government. All parties should avoid actions complicating the process of political stabilization, socio-economic development and regional and international integration.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) noted that, 60 years on, he would like to have seen Palestinian refugees exercise their right to return, which was a basic condition for a comprehensive and just peace. Yet, that and other conditions had still not been met, despite a plethora of peace initiatives affirming and reaffirming them, such as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, the Annapolis Conference and others. Most recently, the Arab Group had put forward a draft resolution calling on Israel to stop its settlement activities, which were widely agreed to be the main impediment to peace. But the reality was that Gaza remained under siege, West Bank land was still being confiscated, checkpoints continued to be established and a separation wall continued to be built.

Highlighting Arab efforts to foster peace, he drew attention to the Doha agreement, carved out by the Arab League last March under Qatar's auspices, which had led to the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon. Under that agreement, Parliament would begin elections and continue to negotiate on "matters of controversy". Meanwhile, the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL would continue to be deployed in the south to maintain peace. In addition, Arab States had agreed to participate in an exchange of prisoners for war dead – in line with resolution 1701 (2006) – ending a painful part of Lebanon's history.

However, other provisions contained in resolution 1701 (2006) still had not been met, including those referring to the protection of borders, he said. Israel had committed more than 20 violations per day at one point, and Lebanon had long asked for maps showing the location of mines and cluster bombs, though no response to those requests had been forthcoming. Certainly, there was no way to return bodies blown up by those devices. Israel also did not seem at all intent on responding to calls for the return of Shab'a Farms and other areas it had occupied inside Lebanon. Its latest scheme was to "distribute letters to civilians"; details on such violations of the "communication network" had been described in a report just submitted to the Council. There could be no peace in the region unless international law was respected.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said he was full of hope that the Council could consider Middle East issues in a way that would lead to the end of the occupation and bring peace to the region. Arab leaders had underscored the need for comprehensive and just peace based on resolutions of international legality, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as the land-for-peace principle. Despite the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, under Turkish mediation, to explore common ground on moving to direct negotiations, the sudden adoption of reckless resolutions by the Knesset, which stipulated that two thirds of its members should approve any attempt to withdraw from the Syrian Golan, was contrary to the goals of peace. Israel's refusal to respond to legitimacy on other tracks and its continued settlement activities, as well as continued military training, showed it was not serious about seeking peace as it continued with its occupation and military escalation.

He said the occupying Power continued its hostile policies towards the Palestinian people, including acts of coercion, collective punishment, human rights violations, compulsory expulsions and the transformation of Gaza into the world's largest prison. It was trying to minimize the question of Palestine from an

issue of just struggle of an oppressed people to one of safeguarding food, electricity and water for people under siege. Some specific international parties had justified the Israeli measures, but the United Nations Charter did not give any State the right to violate the rights of civilians under occupation, under the pretext of self-defence. The occupying Power had specific obligations under the Charter.

The situation on the ground had deterioration due to Israel's repressive illegal actions, including construction of an apartheid wall and settlement activities, he said. The Israeli Government should be held to account before the international community, including the Security Council, which must show its clear responsibility in that context, rather than a policy of double standards. The Council's inability, due to the objection of one delegation, to adopt a draft resolution presented by the Arab Group reflected the policies that had proven to be a failure.

The situation of Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan was not much different from that prevailing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he continued. Their rights were being violated, the natural wealth of the Golan was being plundered and the construction of illegal settlements continued. Israel continued to jail Syrian citizens and to violate the rights of Syrian prisoners of war. The international community should intervene to ensure the release of those prisoners, some of whom had been jailed for 20 years. The occupying Power was a party to the Fourth Geneva Convention and must abide by its provisions. The Council had a responsibility to give credibility to its discussions by imposing measures on Israel. Its resolutions rejected Israel's decision to annex the Syrian Golan, yet Syria was still waiting for their implementation. International peace and security could not be achieved without an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

Responding to Israel's statement, he said he expected that country's Permanent Representative to undergo an "awakening of consciousness", instead of trying "to falsify history in a theatrical manner that is not convincing". The representative had described contributions to international civilization, but had not elaborated on its own contributions since its creation, which included the massacre and assassination of Palestinian children. Israel had the record number of condemnations by the General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council. It also had established the record for using an influential State to protect it more than 44 times through the power of veto.

The General Assembly considered foreign occupation the worst kind of terrorism and injustice, thus the occupation of Arab territories was the worst kind of terrorism, he said. Israel had been the first to undertake air piracy against a Syrian aircraft. It had also brought down a civilian Libyan passenger plane and destroyed the Lebanese passenger fleet on the ground. It had been the first aggressor against peacekeeping forces. There was no struggle between cultures, only between the colonialists and peoples aspiring to freedom. The Arab Islamic civilization had brought the mind and religion together, while Islamic culture had given the world many philosophers and scientists.

RODOLFO ELISEO BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba), speaking in his capacity as Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, reiterated that the occupying Power's lack of respect for international law and its illegal occupation continued to be major obstacles to the success of efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive Middle East peace. In that connection, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterated its regret that, for more than 41 years, the Palestinian people had been suffering under the brutal Israeli military occupation and colonization of their land, and continued to be denied their fundamental human rights, including the inalienable right to self-determination and the right of the Palestine refugees to return, in accordance with international law and relevant resolutions.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterated its call for Israel to cease all its violations against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to abide scrupulously by its obligations under international law, he continued. July marked the fourth anniversary of the rendering by the International Court of Justice of the advisory opinion on the construction of the wall. The Court had affirmed, among other things, that the wall's construction was illegal and that the occupying Power was under obligation to cease construction, dismantle the wall and make reparations for the damage caused. Israel, in violation of numerous Council resolutions regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the illegality of its settlements, as well as General Assembly resolutions, and in contravention of the advisory opinion, continued to build the wall and to impose an associated permit regime. It also continued to construct and expand its illegal settlements.

The Non-Aligned Movement remained seriously concerned by Israel's recent decisions to continue illegal settlement construction and the unlawful construction of the wall, including in and around East Jerusalem, he said. The Movement was concerned by the huge physical, economic and social devastation caused by those illegal colonization practices. Recently, Israel had actually escalated its illegal activities. The Movement had submitted a letter to the President of the Council, urging the body to address that serious issue, including through the adoption of a resolution. Israel continued to carry out countless other unlawful policies and measures intended to advance its illegal settlement campaign and alter the demographic composition, character and status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterated its condemnation of all ongoing illegal settlement activities. It reiterated its demand upon the occupying Power to immediately and completely cease all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He emphasized the Movement's satisfaction with the steps undertaken by the Lebanese Government to implement resolution 1701 (2006), but said it remained deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations in breach of that text. The Non-Aligned Movement called on Israel to end the occupation of the northern part of Ghajar on the northern side of the Blue Line, and immediately refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolution 1701 (2006), as well as any provocation against the Lebanese Armed Forces or UNIFIL. The Movement called for a prompt settlement of the Shab'a Farms question and urged all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area. It strongly called upon Israel to provide the exact location of cluster bombs and the maps of landmines planted during the occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Doha agreement constituted an essential step towards the resolution of the crisis in Lebanon, the return to the normal functioning of its democratic institutions and complete restoration of its unity and stability, he said. The Non-Aligned Movement welcomed the election of the country's new President, the formation of a national unity Government, and the decision to continue the national dialogue. The Movement also welcomed the agreement to ban the use of weapons and violence to settle disputes.

He further reaffirmed that all action by Israel to alter the legal, physical and demographic conditions and the institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan and to impose Israeli jurisdiction and administration there were null, void and had no legal effect. All those measures, including the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan, constituted violations of international law, agreements, the United Nations Charter and resolutions. The Non-Aligned Movement demanded that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said many steps had been taken in recent months to strengthen the Middle East peace process. The Annapolis Conference had given the process some momentum, while the Quartet had continued its efforts to strengthen implementation of the Road Map. At the same time, Syria and Israel had begun indirect peace talks, paving the way for direct talks. Unfortunately, while the Arab side was pursuing peace in the sincerest of terms, the Israeli side had chosen to embark on policies that fed the spiral of violence. Despite hundreds of resolutions and appeals condemning its occupation of and settlement activities in Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, Israel had failed to comply with those resolutions.

In terms of illegal settlements, he said, the Israeli Interior Ministry had agreed to the construction of 1,000 more settlements in East Jerusalem and other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Four years after the issuance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, Israel continued to build the separation wall. It must come to understand that sieges and targeted assassinations did not help to bring about security for itself. If the Israelis were serious about peace, they must end the expansion of settlements and the construction of a separation wall, end violence against civilians and open border crossing points. Israel must also comply with the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding the protection of civilians in time of war, return to the 1967 borders and leave the Syrian Golan. It must also take responsibility for compensating landowners for their seizures.

He said the Arab Group supported the people of Lebanon with regard to Shab'a Farms and other occupied lands. It called on the Council to fulfil its mandate to preserve international peace and security, and upon Israel to end its daily violations of Lebanese airspace and its diversion of Lebanese water resources for its

own use. Israel must provide the Lebanese Government with maps detailing the location of mines and cluster bombs. It must end its acts of aggression and implement ceasefires.

The world was witnessing the worst humanitarian situations in the Gaza Strip due to Israeli policies, he said. Such illegal practices were a slap in the face of international peace efforts, particularly those of the United Nations. The Council should stop being a motionless spectator and begin dealing with the challenges facing the Middle East by according the issue the importance it deserved. Peace could not come from repressive policies. The Governments of Yemen, Egypt and Syria were helping narrow difference between Palestinians. Bringing lasting peace to the Middle East required a resolution of the Palestinian question.

MOHAMMED AL-ALLAF (Jordan) endorsed the statements on behalf of the Arab Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, saying his country advocated logic and moderation. After 60 years of conflict, it was not acceptable to continue trading accusations. It was not acceptable for any party to claim a monopoly on the truth or to cast doubt on the role of the Council. Millions of people in the Middle East still looked to the Council with hope, still believing in its ability to exercise its basic function of maintaining international peace and security. Should they stop thinking in those terms, it would be difficult to control events on the ground. Jordan accepted only positive dealings between the parties in the quest to realize peace in the region while preserving the right of the Palestinian people to a viable, contiguous State within the realm of the resolutions of international legitimacy and preserving the security of Israel.

That was not an unattainable goal, he continued, pointing out that the Annapolis Conference had formulated a time frame of which only five months remained. The real challenge today was how to use of the remaining time to realize the objectives. Peace between Palestinians and Israel would change the situation in the region dramatically, but failure to reach an agreement would strengthen the positions of anti-peace forces. A lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestine question was the key to solving other conflicts in the region. Consequently, Israeli occupation must end and a solution must realize the aspirations of the Palestinian people and security for the people of Israel, as well.

Demands for all parties to go to the negotiating table must be accompanied by the international community's efforts to encourage the parties to implement their commitments, he said. The success of the peace process required a rebuilding of confidence and understanding. Unilateral policies and the imposition of a de facto situation had failed in the past and would not enjoy success in the future. Israel's plans to build new settlements and expand existing ones were unacceptable, constituting a flagrant violation of international law and its own obligations. The international community must urge Israel to end its settlement activities.

Regarding the situation in Gaza, he said his country would pursue all efforts and contacts to end the suffering of its people and help improve living conditions there. The success of political negotiations required steps by Israel to improve the situation on the ground, particularly by lifting blockades and closures. There was a need to support the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas in their efforts to establish a democratic regime, strengthen national institutions and ensure security. Ending violence and achieving peace was not the responsibility of one party alone. Jordan rejected the killing of civilians on both sides, as such actions placed obstacles in the way of the peace process and created more hatred and extremism. Jordan supported regional and international efforts towards the resumption of negotiations, and emphasized the important role of the Quartet in crystallizing the message of peace expected from the Council.

JORGE ARGÜELLO (Argentina) noted that, while the Annapolis Conference had brought new impetus to the peace process by defining the path that the parties should follow to reach a final settlement, certain activities had the effect of destroying trust: Israel's illegal settlements; restrictions on the movement of Palestinians; continued construction of a wall in the West Bank; closures of border crossings; and continued Palestinian terrorist attacks. A demonstration by both parties of the will to reach a peace agreement, as shown in Paris, gave hope for the future. But it would not be possible to reach a lasting peace without negotiations involving Israel, Syria and Lebanon, as well.

He reiterated the importance of abiding by resolution 1701 (2006), which provided for an arms embargo and the disarming of Lebanese militia. Argentina called on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to start its session as soon as possible to ensure that the perpetrators of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination did not go unpunished, for there could be no lasting peace without justice. Argentina reiterated its call for the reactivation of the "regional aspects of the peace process".

YUKIO TAKASU (Japan) noted the positive developments in the Middle East over the last few months, saying the international community should continue to support the parties' efforts to reach an agreement by the end of 2008. Japan appreciated diplomatic efforts within the region, which had produced indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria, the crafting of the Doha agreement and the formation of a new Cabinet in Lebanon.

He said the Group of Eight (G-8) had reiterated its commitment to comprehensive peace in the region at its Toyako Summit in Hokkaido, Japan, earlier this month. The Union for the Mediterranean Summit in Paris had provided valuable support for the parties concerned. Much remained to be done, however. Progress on the Palestinian question, which was the core issue in the Middle East peace process, should be achieved as soon as possible. It would require all parties to show maximum restraint and good faith in bilateral negotiations and to end all acts of violence, terrorism and incitement. Japan reiterated the call on Israel to freeze all settlement activities and the construction of houses in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Expressing concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, he called on Israel to take steps to ensure movement and access. The third Ministerial Meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Union for the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative, involving Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan, was examining the feasibility of an agro-industrial park in Jericho, to be completed by November 2008. It was believed that that initiative would help build confidence between the two sides and give hope for a productive economic future for Palestine, especially Palestinian youth.

Welcoming the recent exchange of prisoners by Israel and Hizbullah, he said Lebanon and Israel must vigorously pursue the disarmament and disbanding of all remaining militias, delineate the borders of Lebanon, including the Shab'a Farms, and ensure there was no illegal trafficking of weapons. Japan welcomed the announcement of a resumption of diplomatic ties. In addition, Japan, having recently extended a financial contribution to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, would assist in the efforts to fulfil that body's mission.

PAUL BADJI (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that, almost eight months after Annapolis, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, remained grim. Efforts to reach a final status agreement by the end of 2008 should be given full support. The Committee's programme for the year was geared towards supporting the creation of a climate conducive to advancing permanent status negotiations, including a complete cessation of all acts of violence. That had been echoed by participants in three international meetings the Committee had held in the past few months, including the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Amman, the Conference on Palestine Refugees in Paris, and the Meeting on the Question of Palestine in Malta.

Stressing the importance of changes on the ground as a prerequisite for successful negotiations, he said the Committee was seriously concerned about Israel's continuing settlement activity in contravention of Road Map obligations. Since Annapolis, Israel had announced plans to build more than 3,000 apartments in and around East Jerusalem, and the construction of some 300 buildings had already begun. Those settlements, together with the separation wall, severed Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and cut the West Bank in two. The Committee called upon Israel immediately to stop settlement activity and dismantle settlement outposts.

Four years after the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, construction of the separation wall continued unabated, he said. The Committee called on the international community, including the Council, to take more serious action to challenge the presence of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. With regard to Jerusalem, it was the Committee's position that a negotiated solution based on international law was crucial to resolving the conflict and fundamental to lasting peace in the entire region. No agreement that did not include East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian State could bring about

a sustainable settlement.

Israel and Hamas must do their utmost to sustain the ceasefire and extend it to the West Bank without delay, he said. At the same time, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remained critical, and the crossings were not opened frequently enough to provide the basic necessities to the population. Israel, as the occupying Power, was obliged under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect civilians under its occupation. It was responsible for providing basic services, such as food and medical care, and ensuring the overall welfare of the population. The Committee called upon the Council urgently to pursue its responsibility as the guardian of international peace and security, by upholding its own resolutions, which continued to be disregarded.

HAMDON ALI ([Malaysia](#)) recalled that June 2008 had marked the sixtieth year since the dispossession of Palestinian refugees and 2007 had marked the fortieth year since the occupation of the Palestinian Territory—the longest in modern history. There was a pervasive view among many developing countries that certain members of the Security Council had been selective in their approach to tackling issues relating to international peace and security. The Council had adopted various resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, but its lack of action to enforce those resolutions reflected negatively on its credibility.

Recognizing the significance of recent developments, including the Gaza truce and last week's prisoner exchange, he expressed hope that they would contribute to the peace process. Last November, Malaysia had been among those present in Annapolis who shared a sense of optimism that some progress was possible towards a solution to the conflict. However, developments since then had dashed that optimism. It was difficult to maintain the hope that the international community was nearer to realizing the vision of a viable, territorially contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. In particular, the ongoing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territory was a major impediment to the peace process. The Council simply could not stand idly by, for doing so would amount to condoning and abetting Israeli confiscation of Palestinian lands. To prod the Middle East peace process in the right direction, the Council must ensure that Israel complied with its resolutions.

One could not equate the responsibilities of Palestinians and Israelis in achieving a solution to the problem, he stressed. As an occupier, Israel bore the responsibility under international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. It was long overdue for Israel to cease its policy of imposing collective punishment on the population of Gaza. It should halt all human rights violations and illegal actions. According to its Declaration of Independence: "Israel extends its hand to all neighbouring States and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness and appeals to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land."

In 2002, he continued, the Arab countries, through the Arab League's peace proposal, had offered peace and normal relations with Israel in exchange for its withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, acceptance of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital and agreement to a just solution of the Palestinian refugee problem. Yet, Israel had not grasped that offer for peace. Ultimately, the current peace efforts should bring an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied since 1967. They should lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution to the question of refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194. That would be possible only if the Security Council implemented its own resolutions.

MANSOUR SADEGHI ([Iran](#)) said the Palestinian people had been subjected to daily brutalities over the past six decades, while the Israeli regime spoke "hypocritically" of peace. Its systematic pattern of human rights violations and massive breaches of international law, including humanitarian law, had continued unabated. Israel's military operations against civilians, including against schools, medical centres and other civilian institutions in the West Bank, and its imposition of a humanitarian crisis on the entire population of Gaza, displayed a gross violation of the most basic human rights and fundamental principles of international law. Its construction of the unlawful separation wall was not only illegal, but it amounted to a clear indication of the Israeli regime's aggressive, racist and expansionist policies. Expanded construction of the wall had added to the suffering of the Palestinian people, on top of other Israeli atrocities, such as massacres, extrajudicial killings and home demolitions.

The international community must hold the Israeli regime accountable for its illegal and criminal actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he stressed. As the International Court of Justice had also demanded in its advisory opinion, Israel must terminate its breaches of international law; cease construction of, and dismantle, the wall; render ineffective all legislative and regulatory acts relating to the wall; and make reparations for all the damage it had caused. It was also unfortunate that certain permanent members of the Council, by threatening to use a veto, had not allowed the Arab Group to present a draft resolution to the Council condemning the illegal settlements. Regarding Lebanon, Iran commended the formation of its new national unity Government and called on the Council to live up to its responsibility to prevent the Israeli regime from violating Lebanese airspace, which had increased to "an unprecedented level".

He rejected the "absurd allegations and distortions" made by the representative of the Israeli regime earlier in the day, saying they served only to distract the international community's attention from the crimes it was committing against the people under its occupation. Iran also drew attention to the question of its diplomats and journalists abducted by an Israel-sponsored Lebanese paramilitary group 26 years ago during the Israeli occupation of that country. Numerous reports seemed to indicate that those Iranian officials had been handed over to Israeli military forces and taken to Israeli prisons. That action had been in contravention of numerous United Nations resolutions and Iran called on the Council to help secure their release.

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* The 5939th Meeting was closed.