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**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL, CONCERNED ABOUT STALLED POLITICAL PROCESS, ENCOURAGES
'POSITIVE' ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN RESPONSES TO UNITED STATES LEADER'S SPEECH**
Briefing Security Council, Top Political Official
Says President Obama Addressed 'Legitimate Core Concerns' of Both Parties

Worried about the dangerous standstill in the Israeli-Palestinian political process, the top United Nations political official today encouraged the leaders of both sides to "respond positively" to [last month's speech](#) by United States President Barack Obama in order to move the peace talks forward. "President Obama's speech contained ideas that the international community can rally behind to offer a framework to resume talks and seek an agreement," B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the Security Council, adding that the "resumption of meaningful negotiations is urgent".

Briefing Council members on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, he said the 19 May speech as consistent with international positions and responded to the legitimate core concerns of both parties. The day after President Obama had expressed his sentiments, the Quartet had [appealed strongly](#) to the parties for the resumption of direct two-way talks on the basis of territory and security, without delay or preconditions, he added.

Noting that the Secretary-General strongly supported a meeting of the Quartet Principals to give impetus to that objective, he went on to underscore the Secretary-General's continuing support for Palestinian unity efforts, in line with [Council resolution 1850](#) (2008) and [1860](#) (2009). Mr. Pascoe urged Fatah and Hamas to implement their 4 May reconciliation agreement, in accordance with the Quartet position and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

No agreement had been reached on the composition of the proposed Palestinian unity Government, he continued, emphasizing that, until elections were held, it was vital to remain committed to President Mahmoud Abbas' programme while maintaining security cooperation in the West Bank and calm in Gaza. He welcomed the announcement that an eighth battalion of Palestinian security forces would be trained in Jordan, with external assistance, which would bring to 4,000 the number of such internationally trained personnel in the West Bank.

He said he counted on Israel's continued cooperation in transferring VAT and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority so that it could ensure payments covering salaries and essential State functions, including security. Donors must bolster funding to the Palestinian Authority, given its estimated \$300 million annual budget gap, he said. Regarding reports of plans by a flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to sail for Gaza in the next few days, he said the Secretary-General had asked the Governments concerned to use their influence to discourage such activities, which could result in violence. "I want to reiterate today the strong view of the United Nations that all assistance for the population of Gaza should be delivered through official crossings."

The Under-Secretary-General reported that, despite overall calm over the past 10 weeks, two rockets and two mortars had been fired into Israel from Gaza in the past month. Israel had conducted six incursions and one air strike, a Palestinian civilian had been killed by mortar fire while approaching the border fence at night, and two others had been injured by Israeli forces.

However, Mr. Pascoe welcomed Israel's approval, earlier this week, of \$100 million to build 1,100 housing units in Khan Younis and Rafah, as well as 18 schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), among other construction projects. It had brought the total value of approved United Nations reconstruction in the past 15 months to \$265 million. "We continue to stress that the market in aggregate, steel bar and cement can and should be liberalized by the Israeli authorities," he said.

He noted that on 25 May, Egypt had announced extended working hours and eased procedures at the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza, but the Egyptian and de facto Hamas authorities had faced difficulties in implementing the changes. Efforts to combat weapons smuggling through the tunnels continued. On illegal settlement activity, he said that, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, 1,774 units had been under construction in the West Bank during the first quarter of 2011, excluding East Jerusalem. In the past month, the Ministry of Defence had approved an additional 294 units in the settlement of Beitar Ilit, he said, adding that settlement activity also continued in East Jerusalem.

Expressing concern that continued demolitions in Area C were displacing Palestinians from their communities, he said the Israel Defense Forces had destroyed 81 Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including two in East Jerusalem, displacing 260 people. In addition, Israeli settlers had attacked Palestinians and their property in the West Bank, resulting in 13 Palestinian injuries and extensive material damage.

Mr. Pascoe said that on Nakhsba (catastrophe) Day, an occasion for Arab protest against the granting of Israel's independence, there had been no demonstrations along the Blue Line, due to the 2 June decision by the Lebanese Armed Forces strictly to forbid protesters from entering certain portions of the Line. On the same day, 23 people had been killed and many more wounded after the Israel Defense Forces had opened fire on large crowds of

demonstrators attempting to breach the ceasefire line and cross the technical fence into the Golan.

The Secretary-General had condemned the violence and called for maximum restraint on all sides, he said, adding that the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) had helped calm the situation and was seeking to confirm the facts. Meanwhile, riots had taken place the following day in Syria's Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp during funerals for those killed. They had resulted in 12 reported deaths, he said, adding that 120 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier had been injured, and 15 Palestinians arrested during demonstrations in the West Bank.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, he recalled that on 13 June, the new Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, had announced the formation of a new Government, largely comprising members of the 8 March coalition. According to Lebanon's Constitution, the new Government must present its programme to Parliament and gain its confidence within 30 days. "Let me be clear: the Secretary-General expects the new Government to reiterate its commitment to the full implementation of [Security Council resolution 1701](#) [2006] and to all of Lebanon's international obligations," Mr. Pascoe said. He went on to state that on 18 June, armed clashes had erupted in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli between the mainly Sunni Bab Tabbahen neighbourhood and the predominantly Alawite area of Jabal Mohsen following demonstrations in support of the anti-regime protests in neighbouring Syria. The violence had left 6 people dead and 22 injured, he said, noting that the United Nations continued to monitor developments along Lebanon's northern border. The influx of Syrian nationals into that area, which had reached an estimated 4,000 people in mid-May, had virtually stopped since early June due to stepped up Syrian security measures. The United Nations was coordinating closely with the Lebanese Government to provide aid to the displaced, he added.

Mr. Pascoe emphasized that the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remained a matter of concern, urging donors to bolster their support for UNRWA's regular education, health care and other basic services, and for the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp in northern Lebanon, destroyed in 2007.

The meeting began at 10:15 a.m. and ended at 10:30 a.m.

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