



Security Council SC/9990

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

Security Council
6363rd Meeting (AM & PM)

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON ISRAEL, PALESTINIANS TO REMOVE OBSTACLES BLOCKING DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS FOR LASTING SETTLEMENT OF CONFLICT

Security Council Hears Some 37 Speakers in Day-Long Open Debate on Middle East

Detailing the conduct of ongoing "proximity talks" for Middle East peace, a top United Nations official called today on Israelis and Palestinians to remove the obstacles to direct negotiations, as he opened a day-long Security Council debate in which some 37 speakers participated.

"I urge the parties not to miss the current opportunity to make progress and move to direct negotiations with active third-party involvement and close Quartet support," B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the 15-member body in his regular monthly briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

He noted that George Mitchell, Special Envoy of the United States, had now facilitated six rounds of proximity talks, and that both President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel had visited Washington, D.C. All three had met with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Cairo on 18 July, while United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had met Prime Minister Netanyahu on 7 July and Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, had seen President Abbas in Ramallah earlier today.

In order to move the talks forward at a "critical juncture", Mr. Pascoe called for the extension and expansion of Israel's 10-month moratorium on settlement activity and an end to demolitions and expulsions in Jerusalem. He also urged reconciliation among Palestinian factions, an exchange of prisoners that would involve Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit and some of the 9,000 Palestinians detained in Israel's jails, as well as further improvement in West Bank conditions.

Turning to Gaza, he noted an increased flow of goods and described the need for further progress towards a full opening of land crossings under the framework of the Agreement on Movement and Access. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) had been playing an active role between the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza to urge a Palestinian solution to the electricity crisis caused by disputes over funds.

He said the Secretary-General continued to attempt to gain agreement for his proposal for an international panel of inquiry into the 31 May attack on a flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance to Gaza, based on domestic inquiries. Meanwhile, the Office of the Special Coordinator had agreed on arrangements to ensure that the cargo from that convoy reached Gaza, in addition to arrangements for other aid ships. He stressed, however, that such convoys were not helpful in resolving Gaza's basic economic problems, and needlessly carried the potential for escalation.

Following Mr. Pascoe's presentation, the Permanent Observer for Palestine said he had hoped to inform the Council of real progress due to the proximity talks, but instead had to report with regret that the situation remained volatile due to Israel's ongoing aggression, colonization and provocations against the Palestinian people and their land. The Palestinian side, on the other hand, had engaged in the talks in good faith, with corresponding actions on the ground, he said.

Citing Israel's continuing settlement and wall construction, its blockade of Gaza and its military incursions into the West Bank, he said the situation requiring immediate redress through collective action by the international community, if the opportunity to attain peace was not to be lost. The alternative would be rising tensions and another cycle of violence, suffering, insecurity and instability, he warned.

Israel's representative called for direct negotiations without preconditions or delays, stressing that the threats facing her country had proliferated. However, Israel was ready to take political risks for peace and had taken a major step towards easing the closures in Gaza. All goods were now entering the enclave except materials that could be used for violence, she said, adding that Israel was also working with the Palestinian Authority to build a flourishing economy in the West Bank.

She said it was necessary to pursue a definitive end to the conflict on the basis of mutual recognition between the Jewish State and a future Palestinian State. Undermining the possibilities, however, were a Hizbullah arms build-up in Lebanon and support for terrorists on the part of so-called activists, under the guise of delivering humanitarian aid, while seeking to provoke violence in order to de-legitimise Israel. She stressed that Hizbullah's provocations must not go unanswered by the Council.

Lebanon's representative described Israel's raid on the Gaza aid flotilla as a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and of the Law of the Sea, as well as an act of piracy. The tragedy could have been averted had Israel responded to the recurrent appeals by the international community for an end to its blockade on the enclave. Urging Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to conduct an impartial, credible and fair investigation into the incident, she rejected a unilateral Israeli investigation, which would be neither transparent nor impartial, she said, pointing out that such an inquiry would not be in conformity with international law since Israel was the aggressor. Regarding the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), she said that Lebanon's Council of Ministers had issued statements on the important intact nature of the Force and its inextricable link with Lebanese citizens. She also called on the international community to end all Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty once and for all.

Syria's representative said Israel had taken every measure possible to expel the Syrian inhabitants of the Syrian Golan and replace them with foreign settlers. Its recent military exercise in that area had destroyed about 5,000 *dirhum* of Arab land, and had harmed women and children through the use of tear gas and rubber bullets. There was no Israeli partner for peace, he declared, emphasizing that its obsession had always been security at the expense of the Arabs. It was illogical and unacceptable that the Arabs alone must continue to prove their commitment to peace when Israel was the occupier, he pointed out, noting also that Israel was a major importer of weapons and the world's fourth largest weapons exporter.

Following those presentations, speakers welcomed the proximity talks, but agreed that the upcoming period would be critical for moving them towards direct negotiations. They also urged all parties to avoid all actions likely to undermine the talks, with most speakers calling on Israel to end house demolitions and new construction in East Jerusalem. Some also called on Israel to rescind the expulsion orders against Palestinian legislators, now in its courts.

While noting the Israeli investigation into the violence that had ensued during the interception of the Gaza aid flotilla on 31 May, many speakers called for a complementary international investigation, in accordance with the Secretary-General's efforts. However, the representative of the United States said Israel was capable of conducting a credible investigation, adding that her country would not prejudice the outcome.

Most speakers welcomed Israel's easing of restrictions on goods entering Gaza, with many calling also for the lifting of all remaining import and export bans. Most also welcomed Palestinian institution-building and economic activity in the West Bank, and some also emphasized the need for Palestinian reconciliation. Others condemned attacks by militants on children's camps in Gaza as well as breaches of human rights by the de facto authorities there.

Also speaking today were representatives of Japan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russian Federation, Mexico, Brazil, Gabon, United Kingdom, Austria, Turkey, France, Uganda, China, Nigeria, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Norway, South Africa, Jordan, Pakistan, Tajikistan (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Iran, Cuba, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, Philippines, Iceland and Ecuador.

Also delivering statements were the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

The meeting began at 10:13 a.m., suspended at 1 p.m., resumed at 3:08 p.m. and ended at 5:20 p.m.

Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said the effort to move to serious Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at achieving a two-State solution was once again at a critical juncture. United States Special Envoy George Mitchell had now facilitated six rounds of proximity talks, and both President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel had visited Washington, D.C. All three had met with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Cairo on 18 July, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had met Prime Minister Netanyahu on 7 July. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, had seen President Abbas in Ramallah earlier today, he added.

The Quartet's goal was to bring about United States-facilitated direct negotiations as soon as possible and in a framework of respect for obligations and commitments concerning negotiations. Intensive discussions on that centrally important matter were continuing, with the League of Arab States follow-up committee due to meet on 29 July to review progress. "I urge the parties not to miss the current opportunity to make progress and move to direct negotiations with active third-party involvement and close Quartet support," the Under-Secretary-General said.

He recalled that, on 20 June, Israel had announced measures to ease the blockade of Gaza, and the Quartet was closely following their implementation. It had switched from a positive list of goods allowed in to a negative one for those restricted, with construction items only allowed for projects authorized by the Palestinian Authority and implemented by the international community. New food and productive items had increased along with the volume of all imports, with 40 per cent more trucks entering per week, compared to the period prior to the announcement, he said, adding that approval had been given for a number of additional projects in the vital areas of education and health.

However, further measures would be needed to enable export and the movement of people, and to streamline procedures for project approval, he said, noting that the goal was the full opening of land crossings within the framework of the Agreement on Movement and Access. In addition, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) had been playing an active role in urging the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza to work for a Palestinian solution to the electricity crisis caused by disputes over funds.

The Rafah border-crossing with Egypt remained open, and Egypt continued its efforts to counter smuggling, he said, adding that UNSCO had agreed to arrangements to ensure that the cargo of the Turkish vessels from the 31 May convoy had reached Gaza, and similar arrangements had been made for other aid ships. However, such convoys were not helpful in resolving Gaza's basic economic problems and needlessly carried the potential for escalation, he cautioned. Describing progress in the Israeli investigations into the 31 May flotilla violence, he said the Secretary-General continued to seek agreement for his proposed international panel of inquiry, based on domestic inquiries.

Calling for the immediate release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit, in his fifth year of captivity, he said the lack of humanitarian access to the captured soldier was inexcusable. He also urged the completion of a prison-exchange agreement, involving the release to the Palestinian Authority of Palestinian detainees, of whom there were more than 9,000 in Israeli jails.

There was a lack of progress in intra-Palestinian reconciliation, he noted, restating support for unity within the framework of the Palestinian Authority. Reiterating condemnation of attacks by "militant elements" against children's camps of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), he also reiterated the responsibility of the de facto authorities in that regard, and expressed concern over reports of political arrests by the de facto authorities.

Reporting on recent incidents, he said Palestinian militant groups had fired 41 rockets and mortars into southern Israel, causing no injuries, he said. Israel had conducted 6 air strikes and 21 incursions, killing four Gazans, including one alleged militant, and injuring twenty-three. Warning fire to enforce border restrictions

had also killed one person and injured eighteen, including children.

As for developments in Jerusalem, he said four Hamas-associated Palestinian legislators from the city were battling expulsion, which, he stressed, would undermine the peace process. Describing the approval of plans for the construction of new apartments and the destruction of Palestinian homes, he reiterated that the international community did not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, stressing that the Fourth Geneva Convention was applicable, while the city's future would be determined in final-status negotiations.

He called for the extension and expansion of the 10-month moratorium on the construction of settlements on the West Bank, to cover all Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. A total of 106 structures had been demolished in area C of the West Bank, and the separation barrier continued to pose significant challenges. The number of obstacles to movement in the West Bank remained at 505, he said.

Palestinian forces continued to maintain law and order and to fight extremism in the West Bank, he said, adding that the Israelis had conducted 376 incursions there, resulting in 74 Palestinians injured and 322 arrested, while 11 security force members had suffered injury. Demonstrations against the barrier had also resulted in dozens of injuries. A total of 21 violent clashes between Israeli settlers in the West Bank had occurred, with the settlers sometimes using their vehicles to run over Palestinians, while in turn being injured by stones thrown at their vehicles. However, according to preliminary figures, gross domestic product (GDP) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had risen by 12.5 per cent in the first quarter this year, compared to the same period in 2009. Continued external financing was critical to support reforms undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, he stressed.

Turning to the occupied Syrian Golan, he described an 11 July clash between local demonstrators and Israeli police. On Lebanon, he referred to a briefing to the Council on 14 July by the Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. He said that, since the tensions in Lebanon earlier this month, the situation had remained quiet, though Israeli air violations continued. There had been progress in cooperation between Lebanon and Syria, he said, welcoming continuing discussions on legislation to support the civil rights of Palestinian refugees. Reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp continued, he said, urging donors to continue to provide financial assistance, and reiterating the need to ease restrictions on access to the camp.

In conclusion, he said the parties must be brought into direct talks without delay, on a basis that would build confidence in the possibility of genuine progress on the ground on core issues. It was also important to ensure full implementation of Israel's policy change towards Gaza, and to follow up with further steps. All those efforts must be placed in the larger regional context of reinvigorating the search for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, he said.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer for Palestine, said he had hoped to inform the Council today of progress in the proximity talks, but had been forced to report with regret that the situation remained volatile due to Israel's ongoing aggression, colonization and provocations against the Palestinian people and their land. It was a situation requiring immediate redress if the opportunity to make peace was not to be lost, he said, warning that the alternative would be rising tensions igniting another cycle of violence, suffering, insecurity and instability.

He reiterated that a cessation of all settlement activity, including so-called natural growth, was essential to the resumption of a credible process aimed at achieving a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. While there was a strong international consensus in support of the terms of reference for the proximity talks, including among Arab countries, which remained committed to the Arab Peace Initiative, it was clear that Israel continued to reject adherence to those terms of reference and to carry out policies undermining them. The Palestinian side, on the other hand, had engaged in good faith.

In the two-month period since the beginning of the talks, Israel had continued its construction of settlements and the separation wall, as well as its punitive blockade of the Gaza Strip, he continued. It had carried out more than 900 military incursions into the West Bank and several raids against Gaza, some of which had resulted in Palestinian deaths, threatened deportations, demolished homes, arrested more than 380 Palestinians and detained several hundred others, as well as other forms of incitement.

All that threatened the two-State solution, he said, reiterating his call for a full, independent investigation into the attack on the Gaza aid flotilla. It was high time the international community, with the Security Council and the Quartet in the forefront, ceased its appeasement of Israel and genuinely considered collective actions that must be taken to bring it into compliance with its legal obligations, and to advance the realization of the two-State solution within an accelerated time frame. Despite the prevailing harsh reality, the Palestinian leadership remained fully committed to peace and engagement in the peace process, he reaffirmed.

GABRIELASHALEV (Israel) called for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, without preconditions or delays. Commending the important work carried out by George Mitchell on behalf of President Barack Obama of the United States, she said that, despite those efforts and progress towards direct negotiations, so-called activists, under the guise of delivering humanitarian aid, were supporting terrorist forces in the region, particularly in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, though the organizers were fully aware of the internationally recognized and unimpeded channels for delivering aid. "Yet these provocateurs seek nothing but confrontation. They choose violence, escalation and instant media headlines in an effort to de-legitimize Israel," she said.

She went on to note that, in Lebanon, the terrorist organization Hizbullah continued to build and embed its military infrastructure in the civilian population. The transfer of sophisticated weapons from Syria and Iran to Hizbullah was in systematic violation of the arms embargo, she said, adding that recent confrontations in southern Lebanon between the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and so-called Lebanese civilians reflected Hizbullah's efforts to redeploy its forces, further harassed and assaulted the mission's critical work and violated Council resolution 1701 (2006). Hizbullah's provocations must not go unanswered by the Council, she stressed.

Vowing that her country's security would never be compromised, she said that the threats facing Israel had grown more diverse and dangerous since the advent of the peace talks. Yet Israel was ready to take political risks for peace and had taken a "major step" in its policy towards the closure of Gaza. All goods were now entering the enclave except weapons or materials for war-like purposes, she said, adding that Israel was also working with the Palestinian Authority to build a flourishing economy in the West Bank. It was necessary to pursue a definitive end to the conflict based on mutual recognition, with Israel recognizing a Palestinian State and the Palestinians recognizing the Jewish State.

BROOKE ANDERSON (United States) said that, based on the recent meetings between the President of the United States and the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, there was an opportunity for progress towards peace. Only through good-faith negotiations could the parties agree on an outcome that would end the conflict and lead to a two-State solution. It was essential to assist the parties while doing nothing to hinder them, she said, hailing Israel's new policy towards Gaza and its 5 July announcement of the list of controlled items for Gaza. As a result, the scope and quality of goods entering Gaza had already expanded, she said, adding that the new arrangement should improve conditions in the enclave while preventing the entry of weapons for Hamas. She urged all aid providers to deliver goods through established channels.

Hamas' interference with international humanitarian work continued to complicate efforts in Gaza, she said, condemning the attack on the UNRWA "Summer Games" while hailing UNRWA for setting up a children's camp that promoted human rights. Hamas' commitment to arms smuggling undermined security and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis alike, she noted, also calling for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit. In terms of the proximity talks, she urged the international community to shun unilateral action and confrontation, and to embrace conciliatory steps.

She called on all to help rebuild Gaza, particularly its private sector, while emphasizing that Israel was capable of conducting a serious, transparent and credible

investigation into the Gaza flotilla event. The United States would not prejudge that process or its outcome, she added. Regarding settlement construction in East Jerusalem, she urged all parties to avoid all actions likely to undermine trust, as well as unilateral actions that would prejudice final-status talks. As for the situation in Lebanon, she said UNIFIL was integral to implementing resolution 1701 (2006) and pledged her country's full support for it.

YUKIO TAKASU ([Japan](#)) said he supported efforts by the United States to ensure that the proximity talks continued, as well as the efforts of the Palestinian authorities to establish a Palestinian State within two years. Both sides needed to build mutual trust, he said, urging them to avoid any actions likely to undermine such trust. In that context, he called for an end to the destruction of Palestinian homes and the construction of settlements in East Jerusalem. As for Gaza, he called for full implementation of the relevant Council resolutions and for an investigation into the flotilla incident, consistent with Security Council principles, while reiterating that Japan would continue to lend its full support to all efforts for a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East.

MIRSADA ČOLAKOMĆ ([Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)) said recent events further demonstrated that the counterproductive and unacceptable blockade of Gaza was a grave obstacle to security, prosperity and opportunity. Israel's recent announcement, once fully implemented, would be a significant step towards a review of its policy on Gaza. However, it was not enough and more must be done, she said, emphasizing the need for full implementation of Council resolution 1860 (2009) in order to meet the basic needs of 1.5 million Gaza residents. She reiterated the call on Israel to allow the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings to humanitarian aid, commercial goods and people moving to and from Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009) and the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

Stressing that settlements, the separation barrier built on occupied land, home demolitions and evictions were illegal under international law, contrary to Israel's Road Map obligations and a major obstacle to peace, she said Israel must end all settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including "natural growth", and dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001. Bosnia and Herzegovina did not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem, the status of which must be resolved through negotiations, she said.

Condemning the latest attack on the children's recreational facility in Gaza, she called on Hamas to allow unconditional access for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and for an end to its interference with the operations of non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies in Gaza. She also reiterated the call for a prompt, impartial credible and transparent investigation into the tragic incident involving the humanitarian aid flotilla, expressing support for the Secretary-General's proposed international inquiry.

CAROLINE ZIADE ([Lebanon](#)) described Israel's raid on the Gaza aid flotilla as a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the Law of the Sea, as well as an act of piracy. The tragedy could have been averted had Israel responded to the recurrent appeals by the international community for an end to its blockade on the enclave, she said, urging the Secretary-General to conduct an impartial, credible and fair investigation into the flotilla event, and calling for those responsible to be punished and the victims compensated. Lebanon rejected a unilateral Israeli investigation, which would be neither transparent nor impartial, she said, pointing out that such an inquiry would not be in conformity with international law since Israel was the aggressor.

She also condemned Israel's settlement policy, saying it thwarted chances for a two-State solution, and stressed the need for a follow-up to the Goldstone Report. Israel intentionally hampered peace endeavours, as evidenced by its refusal to freeze settlement construction at a time when Arab States were attempting to negotiate final status. As for the occupied Syrian Golan, it was essential to apply resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), she said, emphasizing that Israel must not transform the Syrian Golan's legal status through settlement construction and expansion. Regarding UNIFIL, she said Lebanon's Council of Ministers had met on 8 July and issued statements on the important intact nature of the Force and its inextricable link with Lebanese citizens. She called on the international community to end all Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty once and for all.

VITALY CHURKIN ([Russian Federation](#)), emphasizing that the chance for direct talks could not be allowed to slip away, called for an end to unilateral Israeli actions on the ground that could prejudice a settlement in Jerusalem. The Quartet remained the primary proponent of peace in the Middle East and the visit by the Russian Federation's Foreign Minister should be placed in that context.

Easing the embargo on Gaza was a step on the right direction that should be taken further, with a complete lifting of the blockade while ensuring Israel's security, he said. While awaiting further information on the investigation into the flotilla incident, the Russian Federation stressed the need for Palestinian unity, which it would continue to support, he said, reiterating his country's commitment to a just and lasting peace through a two-State solution.

CLAUDE HELLER ([Mexico](#)) said the Council must encourage intensified negotiations for peace on the basis of previous agreements and ongoing diplomatic efforts. The attack on the flotilla demonstrated the fragility of the humanitarian situation, he said, reiterating the need for a credible investigation into the incident. Mexico took note of the Israeli commission, but there must also be a complementary international commission to establish international trust in the results, he said, stressing at the same time the importance of refraining from provocative actions, and for the delivery of aid through established channels.

Welcoming the easing of restrictions on Gaza, he stressed, however, that there must be a complete lifting of the blockade. Security could only be achieved through the establishment of an international monitoring mechanism to allow access, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). Palestinian reconciliation was also critical, he said, emphasizing that frank dialogue was the only way to a solution of the crisis in the Middle East. Mexico supported the proximity talks as long as they led to direct talks within a reasonable time frame, he said, warning that the alternative was a closing of the window of opportunity.

Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority must comply with the principles contained in the Road Map and avoid provocations and actions that contravened international law, he said. In that context, settlement activity and the destruction of houses in East Jerusalem were reprehensible, and Israel must cease such practices. He also called for a further easing of movement in the West Bank, and expressed support for the building of institutions for the establishment of a Palestinian State. In closing, he called on all parties to respect the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006).

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VOTTI ([Brazil](#)) said that making substantial progress on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the single most important pending business in the Security Council today, and would have a positive effect on many other areas. Brazil supported the United States Administration's mediation efforts in the proximity talks, which it hoped would lead to direct negotiations. Unless real progress was made in the coming weeks, the fragile support obtained by both sides for engaging in direct negotiations might be "gravely eroded", she warned, emphasizing also the importance of sustained international involvement when direct talks resumed.

The Security Council had called for a "prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation, conforming to international standards" into the Israeli action against the Gaza-bound humanitarian flotilla, but Israel's inquiry did not meet those requirements. Due to the gravity of the incident, the fact that it had taken place in international waters and involved entities from other countries, the investigation should take place under the auspices of the United Nations, she said. Welcoming Israel's decision to expand the list of goods allowed into Gaza, she said the country must find ways to reconcile its legitimate security concerns with the normalization of life in Gaza. Israeli policies that prejudged the result of negotiations and forcefully changed the demographics of the West Bank and East Jerusalem made it more difficult for negotiations to resume.

MICHEL RÉGIS ONANGANDIAYE ([Gabon](#)), expressing concern over the lack of progress since the last debate on the issue, hailed the Meeting held in Rabat, Morocco, on 1 and 2 July to strengthen African support for a just, lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The only solution lay in a negotiated agreement between the two parties, and only a two-State solution could bring peace to the region, he said, adding that without a comprehensive settlement the situation would remain tense. Israeli security concerns and the demarcation of the pre-1967 borders were essential, he noted, adding that the political situation in the

Middle East could only be solved by resolving the security situation, as advocated by the Quartet in its statement of 21 June. (See Press Release [SG/2160](#))

Hailing Israel's recent easing of restrictions to allow humanitarian and commercial goods into Gaza, he said he favoured a complete lifting of the blockade. Gabon also called for the release of all political prisoners, including Gilad Shalit. He deplored Israel's destruction of homes in certain villages on 13 July, saying it was a violation of international law and thwarted international confidence. Gabon was committed to a solution reached through peaceful negotiations, he said, noting that several Council members had emphasized the need to focus on the root causes of the conflict. He called for intensified negotiations leading to a comprehensive solution, stressing that all parties must show restraint, and inviting international partners to promote a climate of trust.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) said it was in the Council's interest to encourage direct negotiations between the parties in order to achieve lasting peace. Israel's moratorium on settlements and Arab support for proximity talks highlighted the urgent need for progress towards a two-State solution, and while strongly supporting efforts by the United States on proximity talks, the United Kingdom stressed the need to resolve final-status issues. The parties should move to direct negotiations as soon as possible while avoiding actions that could jeopardize the process. Israel must continue its settlement moratorium indefinitely, he said, calling for the complete cessation of all settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Settlements were illegal under international law, he pointed out.

Calling on the Palestinian Authority and the Arab States not to back away from the opportunity presented by the United States Government, he said the Palestinian leadership must be prepared to make bold decisions in the interests of its people. There must be a complete halt to rocket attacks by Hamas into Israel, he said, describing the group's attacks on the UNRWA Summer Games as "deeply deplorable". The United Kingdom also regretted the loss of life during the Gaza flotilla event, he said, adding that Israel's investigation should proceed transparently and swiftly. The international community would be better able to draw further conclusions in that regard once the outcome of that investigation became available. Meanwhile, he called on Israel to enable a return to economic normality in Gaza, and welcomed Israel's move to reduce its list of specific goods barred from the enclave.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING (Austria), aligning himself with the statement to be made by the European Union, agreed that the coming weeks would be crucial for the peace process, since progress must be made before various review deadlines. He called on both parties to honour the obligations to which they had agreed under the Road Map and refrain from any actions that could undermine the peace process. In that context, the recent demolition of Palestinian homes and plans for new construction were causes of concern, he said.

He called for an end to attacks on Israel from Gaza, but also for an end to Israel's blockade on Gaza, which could help create a better environment for peace. Hamas bore responsibility for ending attacks on humanitarian facilities in Gaza, he said, expressing support for the Secretary-General's ongoing efforts for an international investigation into the flotilla incident. Austria welcomed the building of institutions and economic stability in the West Bank, and called for Palestinian reconciliation.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) expressed his country's full support for the proximity talks, but said it remained deeply concerned about Israeli policies on the ground, particularly its efforts to change the status of Jerusalem, which were obstacles to the peace process. Turkey was also deeply concerned about the continuing suffering of Palestinians in Gaza as a result of unacceptable collective punishment. He said his country continued to support the Secretary-General's efforts to establish an impartial, international investigation of the attack on the Gaza aid flotilla.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France) condemned the disproportionate use of force during the Gaza flotilla event and called for full implementation of the Council's 1 June presidential statement, which called for a full, transparent investigation into the incident, in line with international standards. (See Press Release [SC/9940](#)) The raid highlighted the unacceptable and counterproductive nature of the blockade, he said, welcoming Israel's decision to ease restrictions and urging it to go further to improve the lives of Gaza's civilian population and spur economic recovery there. That should be done by improving capacity at the border crossings and easing restrictions on the movement of persons into and out of the enclave, he said, adding that the European Union was ready to contribute to a mechanism to ensure the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009).

He called for the immediate cessation of all violence, including rocket fire, and for the release of Gilad Shalit. The flotilla incident showed the need to reintegrate Gaza into the peace process, he said, emphasizing that it was important not to lose sight of the main aim — launching the peace process and achieving a two-State solution. France would work closely with the United States and Egyptian authorities to define the terms for re-launching negotiations. Deploping the demolition of homes in East Jerusalem, he said Israel's moratorium on new construction and building permits was a step in the right direction, but there would be no peace without a complete halt to settlement construction.

Israel's implementation of confidence-building measures would help expedite talks, he said, calling also for the release of Palestinian prisoners and the continued lifting of restrictions on access and movement in the West Bank. The Palestinians must continue to strengthen its security sector and establish the rule of law, while the international community provided strong support for the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas. The Palestinians must be able to see that developments on the ground would lead to an end of the occupation, he said, recalling that his country's Foreign Minister had held a follow-up meeting on 1 July to advance the process discussed at the Paris meeting. He also reaffirmed UNIFIL's crucial role in Lebanon.

RUHAKANA RUGUNDA (Uganda) expressed regret at the lack of tangible progress in the Middle East, but commended the efforts of the United States and the Quartet. He encouraged Israel and the Palestinians to take practical steps to start direct negotiations towards a two-State solution, stressing that a lasting peace would only be achieved through the efforts of both parties. Commending Palestinian efforts to fulfil their Road Map obligations on State-building and economic development, he called on the Palestinians to overcome their differences and forge unity.

Uganda was concerned about Israel's continuing settlement activity in East Jerusalem, he said, calling for a freeze on all such activity, including natural growth. He also expressed concern about the demolition of homes in East Jerusalem. Concerned as well about the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza resulting from the blockade, he welcomed Israel's easing of the embargo, but stressed that it was not enough. It must fully open the borders and lift the blockade. Uganda also supported an impartial, credible and transparent investigation into the flotilla incident. He reiterated the call for all parties to exercise maximum restraint, describing last month's attacks on UNRWA summer camps as deplorable. Turning to Lebanon, he saluted its steps towards internal stability, and called on all parties to implement resolution 1701 (2006).

LI BAODONG (China) said political negotiations were the only way to a resolution of the Middle East crisis, and China welcomed the holding of proximity talks. The parties should deal with all core issues in a sustainable manner and refrain from any actions on the ground that could harm the negotiation process. In that context, he called on Israel to refrain from settlement construction and other actions that could prejudice negotiations.

On Gaza, he welcomed the easing of the restriction on some humanitarian assistance and called for a complete end to the blockade. Further incidents like the 31 May flotilla violence must not recur, he said, calling for an impartial international investigation. China supported the early establishment of an independent State of Palestine and pledged to work with the international community to ensure that it was achieved, he said.

Council President U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria), speaking in her national capacity, welcomed the easing of restrictions on goods entering Gaza, and called for an end to the blockade, while commending Egypt's assistance in transferring goods and helping to avert further violent incidents similar to the attack on the flotilla. Nigeria welcomed the Israeli inquiry, but called for a complementary international investigation. She also renewed the call for Israel to refrain from provocative actions such as house demolitions and settlement activity.

Emphasizing that time was running out for the two-State solution, she called on all facilitators to continue their strong efforts to pursue peace. The release of Gilad Shalit could help build new momentum, as could a prisoner exchange, she said. The parties must remove all obstacles to negotiations, with the support of the Council, she said, pledging that her country was committed to a just and lasting solution, which must come on the back of sustained political will. The Middle East needed peace, as did the rest of the world, she stressed.

MOHAMED FATHI EDREES (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that, despite serious efforts to re-launch direct negotiations, a just and lasting solution remained far out of reach as Israel continued to carry out illegal policies and practices, contrary to the two-State objective. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority, with Arab support, had repeatedly affirmed its determination to pursue the path of peace, security and State-building.

He called upon the Secretary-General to initiate a full, impartial investigation into the attack on the Gaza aid convoy, and for an end to the Gaza blockade and illegal colonization of East Jerusalem. The international community must halt all such illegal Israeli measures, including the continuing restrictions on movement in the West Bank, he said, expressing deep concern about Israeli actions in Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan, as well. The Non-Aligned Movement was committed to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, he said, underscoring the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, in that regard.

PAUL BADJI (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said he remained alarmed that, despite the limited moratorium, the pace of settlement construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had not slowed. He called upon Israel to enforce and indefinitely extend the moratorium, and to apply it to East Jerusalem as an important step towards the resumption of direct peace negotiations. Settlement expansion continued in East Jerusalem, he pointed out, adding that house demolitions had resumed, residency rights were being revoked and Palestinian politicians were threatened with deportation.

"This state of affairs is unacceptable and calls for a swift reaction by the international community," he said, warning that Israel's dangerous policies could incite forceful reactions by large parts of the Muslim world, leading to violence and armed conflict. The Council must intervene swiftly and resolutely to prevent a possible escalation, he said, expressing concern over Israel's continuing illegal construction of the separation wall, and calling on the Council to take the required action to encourage respect for, and compliance with, the relevant advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant United Nations resolutions.

He said the deadly raid on the unarmed "Free Gaza" flotilla was more than a human tragedy. That incident, and the ease with which Israel had avoided an impartial investigation into its actions, underscored the reality that politics often still trumped accountability under the law. The Committee supported fully the Secretary-General's recommendation for an international investigation under United Nations auspices, to ensure that those responsible for violations of international law were held to account.

The report of the Gaza fact-finding mission presented a comprehensive, balanced, and authoritative account of the 2008-2009 Israeli incursion, he said, calling for a comprehensive investigation into the actions of both parties and demanding follow-up action. The Council should create an independent committee of experts to monitor ongoing investigations on both sides. Since the Council's last open debate on the Middle East, the Committee had held two international meetings, in Istanbul and in Rabat, to support resumption of the peace process, he noted, stressing that it remained committed to a two-State solution and supported implementation of Council resolutions on the Palestinian question.

BERIT ENGE (Norway), expressing hope that serious, substantive negotiations on permanent status issues would be under way before September, said that direct negotiations could also lock in the past year's modest gains and expand them, in line with key Road Map obligations. As Chair of the Ad-hoc Liaison Committee, Norway stressed the need for a clear political horizon to justify the high levels of global donor support for Palestinian State-building. Earnest negotiations, backed by good-faith efforts to create a favourable environment on the ground, were essential for a two-State solution, she said, noting that a credible process, within the time frame set by the Quartet, would help sustain the donor community's commitment. The Fayyad Government's plan to prepare for Palestinian statehood within two years remained the platform for continued support, she said, emphasizing that statehood could not be realized without Gaza as an integral part.

Hailing Israel's recent decision to ease its blockade of Gaza, she said prompt and effective implementation of the ensuing measures could be done without prejudice to legitimate Israeli security concerns. In line with resolution 1860 (2009) and through the Joint Liaison Committee, a sub-committee of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee, discussions were under way between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and international partners in an effort to work out ways to implement the package. The overriding objective of reopening Gaza's borders must be to allow trade on a commercial scale that would reverse the enclave's dramatic "de-development". That required strengthened capacity and more efficient control procedures at border crossings, she said, adding that it was just as vital to lift the blockade on people. Gazans could not be fenced in indefinitely, but must be able to exercise their right to freedom of movement, she emphasized.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said Israel had eroded all the remaining trust required for a resumption of peace talks. It continued the construction of its separation wall and its occupation of Palestinian and Syrian lands. Israel violated all international laws and resolutions. It continued to kill women, children and elected Palestinian officials, as well as destroy homes and Muslim holy sites, while obstructing border crossings. He pointed out that, following his meeting with President Obama, Prime Minister Netanyahu had announced the construction of several dozen settlements in East Jerusalem.

The only crime of the nine civilians killed during the raid on the Gaza aid flotilla had been their attempt to help Palestinians in need, he said, stressing that Israel had not only been in violation of international law, but had also violated its bilateral relationships with important countries in the region, thereby threatening regional stability. Referring to the 1 June presidential statement, he said the Council should translate its words into practical deeds. UNRWA's Gaza Operations Director had stated today that Israel's claim to have eased the blockade was untrue, he said. It had taken every measure possible to expel the Syrian inhabitants of the Syrian Golan and replace them with foreign settlers.

He said Israel's recent military exercise in that area had destroyed about 5,000 *dirhum* of Arab land, and had harmed women and children through the use of tear gas and rubber bullets. There was no Israeli partner for peace, he declared, emphasizing that Israel's obsession had always been security at the expense of the Arabs. It was illogical and unacceptable that the Arabs alone must continue to prove their commitment to peace when Israel was the occupier, he pointed out, noting also that Israel was a major importer of weapons and the world's fourth largest weapons exporter.

DOCTOR MASHABANE (South Africa) said Israel's military assault on the aid flotilla had clearly had a negative impact on efforts to find a lasting solution to the region's challenges. South Africa had reacted to the incident by recalling its Ambassador to Israel for consultations and summoning Israel's Ambassador in Pretoria to present him with a *démarche* registering its strongest protest. South Africa called for the immediate lifting of the blockade of Gaza, which had brought untold hardship upon ordinary Palestinians, and supported the Secretary-General's call for an end to the embargo so that humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons could flow through functioning land crossings.

He reiterated his country's call for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation, in line with United Nations recommendations and conducted by independent international investigators. The Council must ensure that Israel upheld its legal obligations under international law. He also reiterated the call for Israel to immediately cease the construction and expansion of settlements and the continuing demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Furthermore, South Africa was deeply concerned about Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and called for full implementation of Council resolution 1701 (2006), as well as Israel's implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) with regard to the occupied Syrian Golan.

KHALID ABDULLAH KRAYYEMSHAWABKAH (Jordan) voiced support for efforts to restart talks and called on Israel to take action to ensure their success so that

direct negotiations on final-status issues could begin. For that to occur, Israel must cease all unilateral actions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, aimed at altering the city's demographic character through demolitions, settlements and expulsions. Threats to Islamic and Christian holy sites were in flagrant violation of international law, offending hundreds of millions of people all over the world and threatening international peace and security, he stressed.

The Arab Peace Initiative reflected the depth of the Arab and Islamic commitment to a permanent and just peace, but it had not enjoyed a commensurate response from Israel, even though it was a "win-win" proposal, he said. It was high time Israel signed up to and implemented that initiative, rather than clinging to its "citadel mentality". A negotiated peace would have many benefits for the region and the world, he said, calling for an end to restrictions in the West Bank, which threatened Palestinian progress there, as well as the lifting of the blockade on Gaza and acts of aggression against those who sought to help its people.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON ([Pakistan](#)), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said it was unfortunate that there was no real progress to report after so many years and initiatives. Meanwhile, the sorry plight of the Palestinian people remained, he noted, calling for collective action to facilitate movement towards a Palestinian State. Israel must end its repressive practices, which had turned the West Bank into a maze not unlike a "New York Times crossword puzzle", he said, emphasizing that the easing of the Gaza blockade was too slow and too little.

Settlement activity must also be stemmed, as it was seen by much of the international community as provocation, he stressed, juxtaposing the threats to Palestinian mosques, churches, houses and cemeteries in Jerusalem with the welcome accorded to Jews by the city's previous Ottoman rulers, and with the Pakistani Government's efforts to preserve the facilities in a Pakistani city previously inhabited by Jews. Israel must seize the opportunity to end its obstructive practices and help convert the proximity talks into direct negotiations for a two-State solution. Power must not be the determining factor in the Middle East, he said, adding that a just and lasting peace must be achieved through negotiations, with the Council helping to bring about that vision.

SIRODJDIN M. ASLOV ([Tajikistan](#)), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, reported that the thirty-seventh session of that body's Council of Foreign Ministers, held on 18-20 May, had stressed once again that the situation in the Middle East would remain tense so long as Israel persisted in its "obstinate and illegal policies and practices", which hindered efforts for a just and lasting peace.

He said that the international community, including the Security Council, should act immediately and effectively to compel Israel to cease its illegal actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly East Jerusalem, where Israel had recently made an "illegal and provocative" decision to build new settlements, and where the demolition of Palestinian homes was aimed at altering the city's character, status and demographic composition.

ESHAGH AL HABIB ([Iran](#)) noted that thousands of innocent Palestinians, including women and children, had lost their lives or suffered injury during Israel's Operation Cast Lead. In the context of that operation — which had wilfully and systematically targeted civilian infrastructure and facilities — the Israeli military had not hesitated to use internationally prohibited and restricted weapons against civilian targets. The report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict was an important step towards remedying Israeli violations in Gaza, and when issued, it had brought hope for swift United Nations action to end the culture of impunity for Israeli war crimes.

"Impunity for perpetrators of crimes of a grave nature, including war crimes, occupation and crimes against humanity, is in itself a cause and incentive for further atrocities," he stressed. The inaction or weak reaction of the relevant United Nations bodies in dealing with Israel's illegal policies and practices had emboldened the regime to continue its crimes against the Palestinian people, he said. Furthermore, the blatant support offered to the regime by certain Powers was "one of the bitterest realities of our world today". The fundamental problem of the long-standing crisis was the continuing occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories, he said, emphasizing his country's view, that lasting peace in the Middle East would only be possible through justice, an end to discrimination and an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine and other Arab lands.

RODOLFO ELISEO BENÍTEZ VERSÓN ([Cuba](#)) said Israel's continuing illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab lands remained the main obstacle to a just and sustainable peace in the region. The international community could not remain indifferent to the untenable situation in Gaza, where closures and restrictions on the movement of goods and people had made reconstruction virtually impossible, further compounding the population's already precarious living conditions. He reiterated his call on Israel to immediately, fully and unconditionally lift its cruel and illegal blockade on Gaza, and to allow the free and permanent flow of humanitarian aid. Cuba condemned the criminal attack, in international waters, on the flotilla of boats delivering humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people, and supported the request of the Human Rights Council for a full, impartial, credible transparent and independent investigation.

Israel could not be allowed to continue with impunity its flagrant violations of international law, he continued, adding that the Security Council must demand that Israel comply with its international obligations. Despite its partial moratorium on settlements, announced in November 2009, Israel's settlement activity continued unabated, with more than 3,700 settlement dwellings presently under construction, and more than 200 Palestinian homes being demolished. He expressed profound concern over the continuing demolitions of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and other acts of incitement, provocation and illegal aggression by extremist settlers against the Palestinians and their holy sites. Such grave and flagrant violations profoundly affected the peace process, he noted, calling on the Council to take urgent action in response.

HAMIDON ALI ([Malaysia](#)) said that, while the world continued to be outraged at Israel's ever-expanding list of aggressive and illegal actions towards the Palestinian people, it remained unable to act. Inaction by the United Nations had further sharpened the perception that there were separate standards for Israel and the rest of the world. It was, therefore, critical that the Organization take all necessary steps to restore its credibility, he said, underscoring the urgently needed establishment of a United Nations-led investigation, pursuant to the Council's presidential statement. Meanwhile, Israel's military had concluded its investigation and exonerated the country by "changing facts on the ground", he said.

Malaysia had requested the reconvening of the Tenth Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly to address the matter, he said. The Session could focus on the causes of situations, rather than simply the symptoms, he said, urging Israel to completely lift its blockade of Gaza. Citing examples of Israel's increasing intransigence, he stressed that the international community, including the Council, must hold the country accountable for its illegal actions. Resolution of the issue at hand required not only that the international community focus its efforts on restoring comprehensive peace in the region, but also that the Council exert the political will to give effect to its own resolutions.

DANILO ROSALES DÍAZ ([Nicaragua](#)), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, reiterated his condemnation of the Israeli occupation, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the fragmentation of the West Bank and the killing of activists in the Gaza aid flotilla. On the latter issue, he called for justice without delay, while demanding an immediate lifting of the blockade on Gaza and the establishment of an international investigative commission on the flotilla incident, with complete cooperation from Israel. Those found guilty must be brought to justice, he stressed.

HEIDI GRAU ([Switzerland](#)) said she was encouraged by measures undertaken by Israel and Egypt to ease the blockade on Gaza, adding that the objective must now be to allow the civilian population to lead a normal life and have the ability to carry out exchanges with the West Bank. Noting the continuing violations of international law by parties to the conflict, she called on Israel to prolong indefinitely its freeze on settlements in the West Bank, extending it to East Jerusalem, and to rescind expulsion orders issued for Palestinian parliamentarians.

She also denounced the arbitrary detention of political opponents in Gaza and the West Bank, calling upon the relevant authorities to respect the rule of law and civil liberties, while continuing the process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which was necessary for a lasting settlement with Israel, including the creation of a Palestinian State. Switzerland was counting on the Security Council's support to ensure that the commitments of all parties were taken seriously, and to make a determined effort to overcome the obstacles that to date had prevented the vision of a Palestinian State from becoming reality.

ABULKALAMABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) expressed his country's full support for the Palestinians' just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom, noting that the continuing occupation of Palestine was the root cause of regional violence, unrest and destabilization. It was a collective failure of the international community that the Palestinians' fundamental right to self-determination and a sovereign State had not been realized. Israel continued to violate international humanitarian law by committing systematic human rights violations and deprivations against the Palestinians.

Commending Israel for its partial lifting of some sanctions, he said a full and unconditional lifting of the embargo was a legitimate expectation of the global community — the right step towards creating the environment of goodwill and trust essential for lasting regional peace. Only full and sincere implementation of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions could resolve the Palestinian crisis, he said, emphasizing that Israel must fully and unconditionally withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab lands.

M. R. KEEGEL (Sri Lanka) called on Israel to remove all restrictions in order to enhance the confidence of all concerned and facilitate efforts for regional peace. In order for peace to be viable and sustainable, Israel must return to the pre-1967 borders, he said, calling also for an end to the illegal expansion of settlements. Changing the demographic character of the Palestinian Territory would only increase tensions and animosities in the region. For its part, the Palestinian Authority must continue to implement its security plan and make efforts to improve law and order, while ensuring that its territory was not used for illegal attacks on Israeli civilians. Allegations of illegal arms must be investigated, and both sides must do everything possible to ensure the safety and security of civilians, he added.

Reiterating his support for the Palestinian Authority, he stressed the need to preserve and protect the national and democratic institutions that were vital for a future independent Palestinian State. Palestinian groups should act speedily to reconcile and reunite within the framework of the Palestinian Authority, he said, emphasizing that their unity was their strength. Sri Lanka supported international efforts for the early resumption of direct negotiations, an endeavour for which Palestinian unity was essential. He also voiced concern about the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, including the plight of Syrian detainees, and called for implementation of all relevant Council resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981).

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) condemned Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan and called for the immediate withdrawal of its troops. He also condemned the construction of the separation wall, which aimed to break the unity, integrity and territorial continuity of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. Concerned that no panel had been set up almost two months after the Council's presidential statement, which noted the Secretary-General's call for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation, in line with international standards, he said the investigation must be impartial, credible and transparent, not like Israel's "covered up" investigation, which was intended to hide its crime.

Due to Israel's aggression during Operation Cast Lead and blockade of Gaza, 85 per cent of the population there depended on humanitarian aid, he said, demanding the immediate and unconditional lifting of the embargo and the opening of all border crossings to permit the free movement of goods and people, as well as the right of entry for humanitarian aid. Venezuela fully supported the creation of a Palestinian State within internationally recognized borders, he said.

Israel's possession of nuclear weapons was a threat to international peace and security, particularly in the Middle East. Its militaristic politics led it to ignore repeated international calls for adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to submit its facilities to the Safeguards System of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Venezuela supported the NPT Review Conference's decision to call for an international conference on the creation of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East. The Council must examine Israel's failure to comply with Council and Assembly resolutions, including by possibly adopting sanctions against Israel, he stressed.

PEDRO SERRANO, Acting Head of Delegation for the European Union, called for an immediate, impartial investigation, including credible international participation, of the flotilla event, saying the European Union was ready to contribute to a mechanism that would allow full, regular access to Gaza. The European Union representative had discussed the matter with the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships during her visit to the region last weekend, and she would present options to the bloc's Foreign Affairs Council on Monday. Israel's recent announcement was a significant step forward in the review of its Gaza policy, but the implementation of commitments would be essential, he said, reiterating that the European Union was ready to help open the crossings, but had certain expectations concerning volumes, exports, movement of persons and security, which were applicable to all existing crossings.

The objective remained full implementation of Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, he continued, stressing the importance of addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns and releasing Gilad Shalit without delay or conditions. He called on parties to the proximity talks to pursue them in good faith as a significant step towards resuming direct bilateral negotiations. Substantive discussion of all final-status issues should commence as soon as possible, he said, emphasizing that all parties must refrain from provocative acts. The European Union was deeply concerned about the situation in East Jerusalem and deplored recent home demolitions there, he said. He commended all initiatives to improve the well-being of the Palestinian population, especially in Gaza, and strongly condemned the recent attack on UNRWA's summer camps.

LIBRAN N. CABACTULAN (Philippines), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said his country's position remained clear and consistent. There was merit in a two-State solution, and hopefully both Israel and the Palestinians would cooperate in order to achieve a lasting solution to the conflict. While the Philippines shared Israel's deep concern for its safety and existence as a State, it was clear that "force only begets force", he said, joining the Non-Aligned Movement and other partners in calling for the immediate and total lifting of the blockade.

The blockade's continuing existence only succeeded in alienating and punishing innocent Palestinians, he said, adding that their suffering — particularly women and children — could not be ignored. The United Nations therefore had an "inescapable responsibility" to take the necessary steps to alleviate the embargo. While proximity talks between Israel and Palestine were considered a tortuous and fitful process, he urged both parties to re-establish them, stressing that it was the only viable course of action. On a broader note, he said that countries in the region, including Israel, must be encouraged to explore other avenues to durable peace. The 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference had opened a gateway by which other options could be achieved, he noted.

GUNNAR PÁLSSON (Iceland) welcomed the proximity talks and the steps taken to ease Israel's policy in Gaza, while at the same time expressing deep concern about continuing house demolitions, settlement activities and the building of the wall on occupied Palestinian land, fearing that it might lead to the erosion of a two-State solution. He called upon Israel to lift, immediately and fully, the blockade of Gaza so that the people there could regain their dignity and revive their economy.

He noted that his country strongly condemned the actions that had led to the loss of life during the Israeli raid on the Gaza aid flotilla, and called for an immediate, full and impartial inquiry into the incident, with international participation. The urgent need to move peace talks forward was clear, but it remained unclear whether the parties, in conjunction with the international community, were ready to take the measures necessary. It was to be hoped that all could join forces and overcome the remaining hurdles before time ran out.

DIEGO MOREJÓN (Ecuador), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, reiterated the need for complete compliance with international law and United Nations resolutions, urging Israel to allow free movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. He said all necessary efforts should be undertaken to prevent Israel from continuing its illegal measures in occupied Arab lands, including Jerusalem, and he urged the parties to move towards a fair and lasting solution based on ongoing dialogue and implementation of Road Map commitments.

