



## Security Council SC/9085

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Security Council  
5723<sup>rd</sup> Meeting\* (AM)

### **RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN MIDDLE EAST 'CAUSE FOR HOPE'**

#### **SPECIAL COORDINATOR TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL**

#### **Michael Williams Says Diplomatic Momentum Impressive, Although Offset by Complex Reality on Ground, Where Violence Continues**

A number of political developments in the Middle East during the last month, including the re-engagement of the international community and Israel with the Government of Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, had given cause for hope, Michael C. Williams, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, told the Security Council this morning.

He said other developments included the summit of Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, King Abdullah II of Jordan and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on 25 June, hosted by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Sharm el-Sheikh. On 16 July, United States President George Bush had announced an international meeting later this year. Also on 16 July, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert had had a very positive bilateral meeting. On 19 July, the Quartet had met in Lisbon, Portugal, with its new special envoy, Tony Blair. Today, the Foreign Ministers of Jordan and Egypt had arrived in Israel to discuss the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Palestinian Authority under President Abbas remained the only legitimate authority in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and he was pleased to see the timely support rendered to Prime Minister Fayyad's caretaker Government, he said. However, it was important that the people of Gaza not be punished for the Hamas takeover, and reopening the crossings to prevent the complete collapse of the economy there remained priority. The emergency humanitarian response had been effective in the short term, but a long-term solution was an urgent necessity.

In the longer term, Gaza and the West Bank could not remain separated, he said, and both must be incorporated into a future Palestinian State. The new relationship of Prime Minister Olmert, President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad was a promising start, and the parties must be encouraged to build confidence through the fulfilment of their Road Map commitments – freezing settlements and removing roadblocks on the part of Israel, ending violence and reforming institutions on the part of the Palestinians. That would constitute a solid foundation for the international meeting later this year, which could be a step towards bilateral negotiations for a just and lasting peace.

Addressing matters of security and violence, Mr. Williams said the massive diplomatic momentum of the past month had been offset by a problematic and complex reality on the ground, where violence continued. The situation in the Gaza Strip had stabilized somewhat. Hamas had detained political opponents and those accused of collaboration with Israel, as well as 12 members of the Army of Islam, said to be behind the kidnapping of BBC journalist Alan Johnston, who had been released on 4 July. There had been 20 incidents of Palestinian attacks, involving 192 rocket and mortar shells, against the Gaza crossings and into Israel. Israeli military actions had continued, leading to 52 Palestinian fatalities, including four children.

As for the humanitarian situation, he pointed out that the crossings to Gaza were mostly inoperable. United Nations agencies had redoubled efforts to ensure the flow of basic humanitarian goods through the Kerem Shalom crossing, and 88 per cent of the population's basic minimum food needs had been met. However, the closure of the Karni crossing since early June had meant that there had not been any exports and that materials for the production of industrial goods and construction were not entering Gaza. The World Bank now estimated that over 75 per cent of Gaza's factories had closed operations and over 68,000 workers had temporarily been laid off.

On the political front, he said Prime Minister Fayyad's emergency Government had been reappointed on 13 July as a caretaker Government until there was a vote in the Palestinian legislature. Due to alternate boycotts by Hamas and Fatah, no sessions of the Palestinian Legislative Council had been held. The continued Israeli detention of 45 Palestinian legislators was an aggravating factor. On 16 July, President Abbas had called for early presidential and legislative elections. Based on his own meetings in the region, Mr. Williams noted that there were no immediate prospects for reconciliation between Hamas and the Fatah movement.

The creation of the independent emergency Government had led to the renewal of direct financial assistance from the donor community. Prime Minister Olmert had made commitments to support the new Government. On 1 July, Israel had transferred \$117 million in Palestinian tax revenues, and on 20 July it had released 225 Palestinian prisoners. As the result of an agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, 178 wanted militants had given up their arms and signed peace pledges in return for being removed from Israel's wanted list. For the first time in 15 months, salaries had been paid to Palestinian Authority employees.

Regarding the bilateral dialogue between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert on 16 July, he said he had been informed that "all issues were put on the table", from prisoners to serious discussion on final status. In a significant speech on 16 July, President Bush had expressed support for Palestinian institution-building ahead of "serious negotiations" towards the creation of a Palestinian State. He had also proposed an international meeting later this year to be chaired by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, with the participation of Israel, the Palestinians and regional States.

He said the process of institution-building would be led by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Quartet's Representative since 27 June. The Quartet urged the parties and all States in the region to work closely with Mr. Blair and encouraged "robust" international support for his efforts. The Secretary-General and the Quartet partners were committed to giving Mr. Blair all support necessary to ensure the success of his mission. He welcomed, in that context, Norway's proposal to reactivate the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to discuss assistance management, financial support to the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian institutional reform.

Turning to Lebanon, he called the political and security situation there precarious, including two terrorist attacks in less than a month that had targeted the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The political impasse remained and he supported efforts of France and the Arab League to attempt to achieve consensus.

In addition, he said that the Lebanese Army continued to battle the militant organization Fatah al-Islam in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nar el-Bared, with a major assault on 13 July against the estimated 100 fighters that remained. The fighting since 20 May had claimed the lives of 114 soldiers, at least 47 militants and an unidentified number of civilians. The militants had fired Katyusha rockets from the camp on surrounding settlements on 17 July, killing one civilian.

At the outset of the meeting, Council President Wang Guangya ( China), on behalf of Council members, bade Jean-Marc de La Sablière, France's Permanent Representative, farewell as he participated in the Council's deliberations for the last time.

Mr. de La Sablière, in thanking the President and Council members, said it had been an honour for him to have represented France. The fact that threats to international peace and security in an unstable world could accumulate dangerously, called for active international cooperation, a strong United Nations and a Council commensurate with the responsibilities entrusted to it under the Charter of the Organization. Although the Council's work was difficult, it was often successful, especially when the Council was at its strongest, namely when it was united. His country was, therefore, in favour of consensus, for which a spirit of cooperation was essential.

The meeting started at 10:10 a.m. and was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

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\* The 5722<sup>nd</sup> Meeting was closed.