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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN BRIEFING TO SECURITY COUNCIL, UNDERSCORES

BETWEEN ASPIRATIONS OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, REALITY ON GROUND

Condemning Collective Punishment, Rocket Attacks, Speakers Endorse Arab League Mediation in Palestinian, Lebanese Crises

The past month had underscored the gap between the aspirations of the political process in the Middle East and the grim realities of the situation on the ground, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the Security Council today in a briefing that opened a debate concerning the intensified violence in Gaza and southern Israel, and the closure of the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Pascoe reported that since 18 January, when Israel had imposed a comprehensive closure on the Gaza Strip, only 32 truckloads of goods had entered the territory, as compared to a daily average of 93 trucks during the first two weeks of 2008 and 250 before June 2007. There was now a backlog of approximately 224 trucks of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP). However, 35 trucks of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were scheduled to enter the territory today.

The Under-Secretary-General reiterated his concern for the 1.4 million residents of Gaza, including the old, the young and the sick, who were already suffering under the impact of prolonged closure, stressing that they should not be punished for the unacceptable actions of militants and extremists. Palestinian militants had fired 77 rockets and mortars into Israel in the last week, while Israeli forces had launched four into Gaza, including air strikes.

He said that since 22 January, the date of his last briefing to the Council, there had been significant developments in the Gaza crisis. On 23 January, Palestinian militants had destroyed entire sections of the border fence with Egypt and since then, hundreds of thousands of Gazans had crossed over into that country, while many who had earlier been stranded there had returned to Gaza. Following efforts by Egyptian security forces to close the border on 25 January, shops in the border area had largely run out of goods and Egyptian forces had taken steps to begin sealing the border. In Egypt, Palestinians had purchased food, medicine, and other supplies.

Emphasizing that the crisis added new urgency to the Palestinian Authority's proposal to operate the Gaza crossings, he reiterated United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's strong support for the initiative, and called on all parties to work urgently for the controlled reopening of the crossings in and out of the Gaza Strip, for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows, in accordance with the Access and Movement Agreement concluded in November 2005.

The Permanent Observer for Palestine said the situation on the Gaza-Egypt border at Rafah was a stark sign of Palestinian desperation, adding that no logic could justify such inhumane treatment of civilians. The prevailing crisis involved the illegal collective punishment of the population, whom international law was intended to protect. The Security Council had sought to respond to the humanitarian tragedy by calling on Israel to open the border crossings, but its members had once again failed to reach consensus. Though the draft presidential statement fell short of adequately addressing the situation, it would have at least constituted a "minimal response" to the crisis.

Israel's representative, recalling that his country had disengaged from the Gaza Strip more than two years ago with the hope that the Palestinians would govern the territory responsibly, said that had regrettably not happened. Instead, Hamas directed its terrorist campaign from the Gaza Strip in order to menace, maim, and murder innocent civilians. More than 230,000 Israelis continued to live within range of Palestinian rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, and since Hamas had come to power, more than 4,200 rockets and mortar rounds had been fired at Israel's southern cities and towns.

He stressed that the Israeli Government had been clear in words and deeds: it would do everything possible to ensure the humanitarian needs of all civilian populations. The flow of electricity to Gaza continued; supplies, including cooking gas, diesel fuel for generators – primarily for hospitals – industrial fuel for power plants; and 50 trucks of humanitarian aid had all entered the Gaza Strip since last week. But Hamas diverted the fuel supply from domestic power and kept

the population in the dark so it could manufacture more rockets to fire at Israel.

In the ensuing debate, Council members expressed their deep concern about the evolving situation in Gaza and southern Israel and its humanitarian repercussions, denouncing "collective punishment" of civilians and expressing hope that the flow of goods across the border would quickly resume. Some speakers also firmly condemned the firing of rockets into Israel and, while recognizing Israel's right to self-defence, said the consequences should not be borne by innocent civilians. Widespread support emerged for the Arab League proposal that the Palestinian Authority take control of the Gaza border crossings, and for the resumption of the European Union monitoring of Rafah.

Speakers making statements today were the representatives of the United Kingdom, France, South Africa, Russian Federation, Costa Rica, Panama, Belgium, Italy, Viet Nam, Burkina Faso, Croatia, Indonesia, China, United States, Libya, Lebanon and Syria.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and adjourned at 2 p.m.

Background

Meeting this morning to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the Security Council heard a briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Briefing by Under-Secretary-General

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said the past month had underscored the gap between the aspirations of the political process and the grim realities of the situation on the ground. Continued efforts to progress along the Annapolis track had been overshadowed by an intensification of violence in Gaza and southern Israel, combined with periods of total closure of the Gaza Strip and increased humanitarian suffering and human rights violations.

He said that since his last briefing, on 22 January, there had been significant developments in the crisis in Gaza. On 23 January, Palestinian militants had destroyed entire sections of the border fence with Egypt and since then, hundreds of thousands of Gazans had crossed the border while many who had earlier been stranded in Egypt had returned to Gaza. Following efforts by Egyptian security forces to close the border on 25 January, shops in the border area had largely run out of goods and Egyptian forces had taken steps to begin sealing the border. In Egypt, Palestinians had purchased food, medicine, and other supplies. There had also been claims, so far unverified, of weapons and explosives entering Gaza.

From 18 January, when Israel had imposed a comprehensive closure, until yesterday, only 32 truckloads of goods had entered Gaza, including 10 from a Jordanian donation, he said. That compared to a daily average of 93 trucks during the first two weeks of 2008 and 250 before June 2007. There was now a backlog of approximately 224 trucks of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP). However, 35 trucks of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were scheduled to enter the territory today.

Some areas of Gaza had already run out of sugar and salt, and UNRWA had reported that its stocks of canned meat would run out within a week, he said. At the current fuel-supply level, electricity cuts would continue for as much as eight hours a day in some areas. Some water wells were functioning again after having been reconnected to functioning electricity generators, but the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had reported that 40 per cent of Gazans still had only limited access to safe water.

Emphasizing that the crisis added new urgency to the Palestinian Authority's proposal to operate the Gaza crossings, he reiterated the Secretary-General's strong support for that proposal and called on all parties to work urgently for the controlled reopening of the crossings in and out of the Gaza Strip for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows, in accordance with the Access and Movement Agreement concluded in November 2005. The flows should include materials and equipment to enable the resumption of United Nations re-housing and rubble removal projects. The Organization was ready to assist efforts to implement the Palestinian Authority's proposals in any way it could.

The month had been one of heavy bloodshed, he said, with a total of 108 Palestinians having been killed and 229 injured in conflict with the Israel Defense Forces. Three Israelis had been killed and 24 injured by Palestinian militants. Israeli incursions into West Bank cities and towns continued on a regular basis and the entire city of Nablus had been placed under curfew for three days in early January. There had also been several violent incidents in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem, where Palestinian militants had attacked Israeli border police and religious seminary students. Today, Israel's Supreme Court had declared legal the reductions in fuel and electricity supply to Gaza, a ruling that effectively approved the Government's decision of 19 September 2007 to impose sanctions on the Gaza Strip in response to continued rocket and mortar fire into Israel.

Recalling the Secretary-General's statement of 19 September 2007, the Under-Secretary-General reiterated his concern for the 1.4 million residents of Gaza, including the old, the young and the sick, who were already suffering under the impact of prolonged closure, stressing that they should not be punished for the unacceptable actions of militants and extremists. Palestinian militants had fired 77 rockets and mortars in the last week while Israeli forces had launched four incursions and air strikes on Gaza.

In last week's briefing, the United Nations had condemned the firing of rockets against civilians in southern Israel and called on all parties to abide by international law and avoid endangering civilians, he recalled. The Organization had also stated clearly its deep concerns about Israeli military actions, including targeted killings and the grave humanitarian consequences of Israel's closure policy. Palestinian reform efforts and the assistance of donors could not make a sustained impact without a significant easing of the closure. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had reported 563 obstacles to Palestinian movement in the West Bank. It was vitally important to ease the closures in a context of increased mobility, security and confidence. In that regard, Palestinian Authority security forces continued their efforts to maintain law and order, including by disarming and arresting militants. The Palestinian Authority was encouraged to continue and deepen its efforts to meet its Phase I "Road Map" obligations on security.

He recalled that the Secretary-General had also reaffirmed the position of the United Nations on the illegality of settlements, noting that Phase I of the Road Map required Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including "natural growth". Israel must meet that obligation, dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001 and reopen Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. Construction work on the barrier continued within Occupied Palestinian Territory, in deviation from the Green Line and contrary to the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice.

Turning to Lebanon, he said political and security developments in that country continued to cause serious concern. On the political front, the parliamentary session to elect a new President had been delayed for the thirteenth time, until 11 February. Despite the diplomatic effort led by the League of Arab States, the parties were no closer to reaching an agreement. The presidential vacuum had persisted since 24 November, leading to a dangerous and ultimately unsustainable situation. Lebanon's leaders must act immediately to bridge their differences and return the country to normal political activity.

Political uncertainty had been exacerbated by the increased frequency of grave security incidents, he said. On 27 January, demonstrations had begun in a southern suburb of Beirut, apparently to protest against interruptions to the area's electricity supply. The unrest had led to the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces and security services in an attempt to restore calm. Demonstrations had spread to the towns of Tyre and Khiam in southern Lebanon, as well as the north-eastern parts of the Bekaa Valley. By nightfall, seven people had been killed and up to 40 wounded. The Lebanese Army had announced that it would

investigate the deaths.

He said that on 25 January, Lebanon had suffered yet another targeted assassination with the killing of Captain Wissam Eid and Adjutant Osama Merib of the Internal Security Forces in an explosion in Beirut. Four others had also been killed and up to 20 people injured. On 15 January, a car bomb explosion in an industrial area of Beirut had killed three passers-by and wounded dozens more. A diplomatic vehicle from the United States Embassy had also been impacted in the bombing and both occupants wounded. Besides attacks on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), that was the first attack on a diplomatic target in Beirut since Lebanon's civil war. Additionally, on 21 January, a hand grenade had been detonated in a residential area of Beirut, causing material damage but no injuries. There had been no claims of responsibility for those incidents.

The situation in the UNIFIL area of operations had remained mostly quiet but tense, he said, particularly in the wake of several incidents on 7 and 8 January, on which the Council had already been briefed. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces were continuing their investigations into the 8 January attack against a UNIFIL vehicle. An investigation into the firing of rockets into the northern Israeli town of Shelomi on 8 January was also continuing. The Secretary-General had issued statements condemning both incidents. On 21 January, the Lebanese Armed Forces had fired on two Israeli aircraft within Lebanese airspace and inside UNIFIL's area of operations. The Secretary-General had strongly condemned the grave security incidents during the last month and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

He said that in northern Lebanon, the United Nations system, under the operational guidance of UNRWA, continued to provide humanitarian assistance and undertake emergency rehabilitation initiatives in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el Bared, where the Lebanese Army had confronted the Fatah al-Islam armed group from May to September last year.

Returning to the Palestinian question, he said the Secretary-General fully supported the efforts of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas to reach a peace treaty in 2008, and encouraged them to make tangible progress on all core issues, including final status issues. However, it was equally critical that the situation on the ground stabilize and improve in order to sustain the Annapolis process. The Secretary-General would continue to work closely with his Quartet partners, regional countries and the Council towards implementation of the Road Map and a two-State solution, resulting in the coexistence in peace and security of the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, in fulfilment of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer for Palestine, said the prevailing crisis involved the illegal collective punishment of the population through the total closure of Gaza's border crossings and obstruction of access to essential humanitarian supplies and fuel. While the Council's efforts were intended to respond to the humanitarian tragedy by calling on Israel to open the border crossings, it had once again been unable to reach consensus and thus, effectively to act. Though the draft presidential statement fell short of adequately addressing the situation, it would constitute a "minimal response" to the crisis. The Observer Mission of Palestine thanked all delegations that had participated in last week's debate, in which the Arab Group had engaged constructively, demonstrating a "high degree of flexibility". However, it was disappointing that, after appealing to the Council for action, no outcome had been reached.

Despite the Palestinian observer delegation's appeals and the international outcry following the escalation of Israel's siege against Gaza, no real action had been taken, he said. The situation on the Gaza-Egypt border at Rafah was a stark sign of Palestinian desperation and the Observer Mission of Palestine thanked Egypt for its "calm and sensitivity" in dealing with that development. No logic could justify such inhumane treatment of civilians. International law was intended to protect civilians from collective punishment during armed conflict. States were urged to call on Israel immediately to cease its unlawful policies and practices, and to abide by its obligations under international law, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention. There was a need to respond to the Palestinian Authority's proposal that it assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of Gaza's border crossings, as that could allow the necessary movement of people and goods.

He said the picture in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was bleak and the hope generated at the Annapolis Conference was being seriously harmed by Israel's unlawful practices vis-à-vis Gaza and the West Bank. The Quartet had repeatedly called on Israel to abide by its obligation under the Road Map to freeze all settlement activity and dismantle "outposts". The settlements and the Wall were gravely impacting Palestinian socio-economic conditions and threatening prospects for achieving peace on the basis of a two-State solution. The international community should compel Israel to cease all illegal settlement activities and construction of the Wall. In the West Bank, checkpoints and roadblocks had severely restricted movement, while daily arrests of Palestinians and military raids on their Palestinian towns had undermined the Palestinian Authority's efforts to promote security.

There was no justice in the continuation of such a situation, he said. While both sides had responsibilities under international law, and despite commitments under agreements reached in the peace process, the situation remained unbearable. It must be redressed. There was no military solution and a just political solution was needed, based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the Madrid principle of land for peace. The Palestinian delegation would continue to turn to States for support in upholding international law, and strongly believed in the international community's important role in advancing the peace process. For that reason, it would continue to call on the Council actively to uphold its duties on the question of Palestine.

DAN GILLERMAN (Israel) said the growing instability in Lebanon, and the dangers it posed to international peace and security, were more severe today than ever before, as exemplified by the two Katyusha rockets fired on northern Israel on 8 January and the terrorist attack that had wounded two Irish peacekeepers on the same day. Weapons continued to pass through the porous Syrian-Lebanese border, in violation of the arms embargo. Moreover, some of those weapons were destined for areas south of the Litani River, where a rearméd Hizbullah maintained a presence. The two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by the Lebanese group on 12 July 2006 were still being held without any sign of life or visit by the Red Cross. Resolution 1701 (2006) was explicit in its call for their immediate and unconditional release, and Israel called on the Council to implement it and help bring them home, without delay.

He said Palestinian terrorism was the greatest threat to human rights, peace and stability in the region. Israel called on the moderate Palestinian Authority leadership to shoulder its responsibilities under the various agreements, including the Road Map, and end the violence, terrorism and incitement to commit those acts against its people. More than 230,000 Israelis continued to live within range of Palestinian rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. Since Hamas had come to power, more than 4,200 rockets and mortar rounds had been fired at Israel's southern cities and towns. The city of Sderot had sustained the majority of those rocket attacks, with astonishing courage, but also tremendous pain and suffering.

Recalling that Israel had disengaged from the Gaza Strip more than two years ago with the hope that the Palestinians would govern the area responsibly, he said that, regrettably, that had not happened. Instead, Hamas directed its terrorist campaign from the Gaza Strip in order to menace, maim, and murder innocent civilians. Two weeks ago, a Hamas sniper had murdered a 20-year-old volunteer from Ecuador in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha. Not only did Hamas fire rockets indiscriminately, but now they targeted civilians with precision weapons. The Permanent Observer for Palestine had used the word "occupation" 13 times, but had not used the word "Hamas" even once.

He said the Israeli Government had been clear in words and deeds: it would do everything possible to ensure the humanitarian needs of all civilian populations. The flow of electricity to Gaza continued, meeting at least three quarters of the territory's needs. Supplies, including cooking gas, 500,000 litres of diesel fuel for generators – primarily for hospitals – 2.2 million litres of industrial fuel for power plants and 50 trucks of humanitarian aid had all entered the Gaza Strip since last week. Israel had worked closely with the relevant United Nations and humanitarian agencies on the ground to ensure that civilian needs were met.

But what could be said of Hamas' commitment to Gaza's humanitarian needs? he asked. It diverted the fuel supply from domestic power and kept the population in the dark so it could manufacture more rockets to fire at Israel. By firing on border crossings, the terrorists cynically forced closures, which hampered efforts to

deliver humanitarian aid. Terrorists depended on States for support, and Syria was home and headquarters to numerous terrorist organizations, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Khaled Mashal, the latter's political leader, lived in that country while continuing to orchestrate the killing of Israelis. Iran also funded Hamas, as well as Hizbullah. Responsible Member States could play a constructive role by supporting the bilateral process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

JOHN SAWERS (United Kingdom) said the current high-level contacts between Israel and Palestine demonstrated the determination of the political leaders, particularly as events on the ground threatened to derail the political process. The international community had the responsibility to support the process with the goal of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, both countries enjoying peace and security. For its part, the Government of the United Kingdom would continue to offer support to both Israel and Palestine.

While the Annapolis conference had launched the negotiations process, the situation in Gaza continued to cause serious concern. During last week's debate, the United Kingdom delegation had made clear its position, condemning both the nearly daily rocket attacks from Gaza and the closing of all crossings. Such measures as stopping the supply of goods were not the right response. The United Kingdom welcomed Israel's decision to reinstate the movement of supplies into Gaza and called for an end to rocket attacks against Israel. It also supported the Egyptian Government's response and encouraged all concerned to work for the normal operation of the Rafah crossing.

On Lebanon, he expressed alarm at the deteriorating humanitarian situation and condemned attacks against UNIFIL and the United States Embassy, as well as the firing of Katyusha rockets into Israel. The United Kingdom was also concerned about the number of demonstrators killed on 27 January. Lebanon's presidential election should proceed without outside interference and the United Kingdom welcomed the efforts of the Arab League in that regard. The United Nations had an important role to play, in particular as a member of the Quartet, provider of aid and facilitator of the peace progress. The Council's discussion should add value and support the common goal of peace in the Middle East.

JEAN-MAURICE RIPERT (France) condemned the attacks that had occurred since the end of October and the worsening of the security situation in Lebanon. Following recent events, the preservation of the State had been seriously hampered and it was extremely important that those responsible be brought to justice. France supported the Secretary-General's efforts to set up a special court as soon as possible. The French delegation had followed closely the events of the past weekend, which were even more disturbing in view of the empty seat at the head of the Lebanese political system. The presidential election must be held with the broadest political representation, and France supported the initiative of the Arab League. It was important to guarantee Lebanon's sovereignty, stability and unity and France reiterated its full support for the country's legitimate Government and its Armed Forces. The international community must call upon the parties to shoulder their responsibilities immediately.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian track, he said it was regrettable that the Council had been unable to arrive at a consensus on a presidential statement, adding that it was important to focus on the objective and complete understanding of the realities on the ground. An unacceptable increase in violence must be condemned. It was also necessary to call for an end to rocket attacks. No country would accept such attacks without defending itself, but greater restraint must be shown to avoid further damaging the civilian population. France was also concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which had worsened considerably in recent days. Cuts in electricity and the blockade on Gaza were punishing the entire civilian population, and France called for the resumption of the supply of goods. Israel must ensure the safety of the civilian population, lift all obstacles and close the checkpoints. France supported the initiative of the European Union regarding the monitoring of the checkpoints and welcomed the efforts of Egypt, which would help stabilize the situation.

Highlighting the need for increased trust on the ground in order to facilitate implementation of the Annapolis track, he noted that, for the time being, the situation had worsened. The parties must implement their commitments. Among other things, Israel must do more with respect to the release of prisoners, ending further settlement activity and dismantling outposts. France was disturbed by recent settlement activity, in particular recent bids for new construction. For their part, the Palestinians must increase their security efforts and combat terrorist activities. France would provide all support for the supervision of the parties in implementation of their agreements, as underscored in Annapolis.

Calling on both sides to show boldness and creativity to find a settlement, he also stressed that it was essential to continue providing support to the Palestinian Authority Government of President Abbas. To improve the Palestinian economy, donors must honour their pledges as soon as possible. It was also necessary to implement the reform plan. Israel must ensure free movement of goods and people. The contribution of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was seen as an important element for economic recovery. France would do everything possible to promote peace in the Middle East.

DUMISANI KUMALO (South Africa) expressed deep concern at Israel's continued illegal settlement activity, despite its stated commitment to halt the building of settlements in the West Bank. The planned expansion of the Har Homa settlement not only expanded illegal settlements, but also predetermined the future of Jerusalem. The existing network of hundreds of illegal settlements, military posts, checkpoints and the separation wall undermined the prospects for a viable and contiguous Palestinian State, and violated United Nations resolutions and the Road Map.

The situation in Gaza could no longer be ignored, he said, adding that, try as it might, the Security Council could not remain silent about it. Silence was more dangerous than a discussion in which temperatures were raised. South Africa hoped for a change in the Gaza situation, which had left 1.5 million residents without water, electricity and basic sewage systems. Reports yesterday that all crossings from Israel into Gaza remained closed except for fuel imports contradicted the expressed Israeli intention to ease the blockade.

He said the continuing occupation undermined the credibility of the peace process, adding that his country was on record as supporting a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. The international community had a duty to support the parties in reaching a settlement and ensuring that political progress was coupled with an improvement in the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. The United Nations, and the Council in particular, had an obligation to assist the respective parties in their quest for lasting peace.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) firmly condemned both the rocket fire into southern Israel and the consequent blockade into and out of Gaza, emphasizing the need for both sides to demonstrate resolve and political will as the only way to curb violence and terrorism, and to achieve the ultimate aim of two coexisting States. Contacts had recently been re-launched at Annapolis, where hopes had been reignited. Given recent developments in and around Gaza, however, that positive momentum was in jeopardy. The Russian Federation supported any agreements in keeping with existing accords and obligations, and considered outside support for resumed negotiations to be particularly important.

Stressing that the crisis in Gaza eroded mutual trust, he advocated talks on the issue of national unity among the Palestinians and expressed support for efforts by the Egyptian President to restore unity among the Palestinian factions. For its part, the Russian Federation had intensified its daily contacts with the parties through its Foreign Minister. It also continued to advocate its proposal to hold a meeting on a Middle East settlement. Such an event called for serious preliminary preparations and efforts by the parties.

Clearly, the path to a settlement lay in the resumption of negotiations on the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks, he said, adding that only a comprehensive approach could help the people of the Middle East realize their long-awaited aspiration of peace and stability. The unrest in the Lebanese capital was also a cause of deep concern, as were the persistent delays in electing a President. All Lebanese political leaders should not only display restraint and calm, but also avert a further escalation of the situation and pursue dialogue within a constitutional framework.

JORGE URBINA (Costa Rica) said that, when voting on resolution 181 in 1947 with 32 other nations, his country had supported the independence of Palestine and its partition into two States, while also supporting the delineation of its borders and economic union. Today, Costa Rica was still prepared to promote the

idea of two States living side by side in peace.

Less than two decades ago, blood had been shed in Latin America for the same reasons as in Palestine and Israel, he recalled, adding: "Others provided the weapons and we provided the dead." One could clearly see interference by outside interests in the Middle East, which had kept the Palestinians and Israelis from resolving their differences peacefully. It had taken Latin America time to understand that the solution lay with its peoples themselves. One had to live with the pain to understand that in the end it was braver to agree than disagree, although it was easier to build walls than bridges. Sometimes suffering was fertile soil on which hope could flourish.

While the Security Council had an important role to play, it must overcome its own contradictions, he said. It was necessary to give up phased negotiations, which often became the trap that imprisoned hope. It was also important to deal with core issues, as expressed at Annapolis, including those concerning borders and settlements, refugees and the status of Jerusalem, which could no longer be postponed. The Council must ensure the conditions for the negotiations, making it possible for the Israelis and Palestinians to take their fate into their own hands, without interference. Once they had secured ownership of the process, the international community must facilitate negotiations on core issues and ensure respect for the decisions reached.

RICARDO ALBERTO ARIAS ([Panama](#)) said his country had been optimistic about the outcome of the Annapolis conference, but recent events were not conducive to productive negotiations. In response to rocket attacks, Israel had responded excessively and in unprecedented fashion, in contravention of international norms, thus threatening the lives of thousands of innocent people and further destabilizing the region. Its actions also undermined the understanding reached by the parties at Annapolis. In that context, the Security Council remained removed from the issue, following the failure last week of the lengthy negotiations to arrive at an agreement on the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in the Gaza Strip.

The international community must find innovative ways to urge the parties to take the difficult decisions required for a peace agreement, he said. Unlike the General Assembly, the Security Council was not the primary body where Member States could opine on various issues. Unfortunately, however, it had been unable on many occasions to carry out its work because it was used by Member States in that way, rather than in exercise of its mandate to maintain international peace, security and calm.

He said his delegation regretted enormously that the debates on the Middle East in which it had taken part had not contributed effectively to ensuring peace and security in the region. Last week's failure to reach agreement on the humanitarian situation in Gaza was clear proof of that. Moreover, actors involved in the peace must deal with the new dimensions that the conflict had assumed in recent years. Lasting peace required Palestinian unity and an end to terrorism, regardless of its motives and origin. In Lebanon, only an agreed solution between the Government and opposition, without external interference, could end the stalemate.

JOHAN VERBEKE ([Belgium](#)), noting that the Council was holding its second debate on the Middle East in a week, expressed regret that repeated efforts to reach consensus on a presidential statement had not been successful. The international community's role was to create the most favourable context for the parties to reach a long-awaited peace agreement. The Annapolis conference had sparked new hopes, which had led to regular meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas. Even though the parameters for final status were known, only the parties could legitimately finalize the terms.

Turning to the political and security situation, he welcomed efforts by the United States to work with the parties in that regard and expressed hope that they would complement the efforts of the Quartet. The European Union continued to be present, both diplomatically and in its field missions. The international community was also committed on the economic front through the work of Quartet representative Tony Blair, the pledges made at the Paris donors' conference and the establishment of the new European Commission mechanism to bring together humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian Authority. Those commitments must go hand in hand with accountability on the part of all players on the ground, whose first duty was to refrain from any initiative to hamper the peace process.

He also expressed deep concern over the situation in Lebanon, saying that each postponement of the presidential election heightened tensions and the risk of violent incidents. Week after week, there was a campaign of terrorist attacks that threatened to destabilize the country. Lebanon's history demonstrated the dangers involved. It was inconceivable that certain people continued to impede the election. Belgium supported Arab League mediation efforts, which must continue.

MARCELLO SPATAFORA ([Italy](#)) said the Under-Secretary-General's clear-cut language spoke for itself in describing the grim realities on the ground, including the intensified violence, human rights violations and increased human suffering. While Italy welcomed Israel's decision, in principle, to suspend the blockade, it hoped the flow of goods across the border would resume as quickly and effectively as possible for humanitarian and trade purposes. At the same time, Italy firmly condemned the firing of rockets into Israel, but noted that, while recognizing that country's right to self-defence, the consequences should not be borne by innocent civilians, who should not be subjected to indiscriminate attacks.

He said the Palestinian Authority must take control of the border crossings. In that regard, Italy supported the Arab League initiative and the resumption of the European Union monitoring mission at Rafah. The parties should maintain a spirit consistent with that displayed at Annapolis and abstain from taking stands in conflict with the Road Map or sending the wrong signals about their willingness to pursue a successful bilateral dialogue. Settlements on the West Bank should cease, all illegal outposts should be dismantled, and freedom of movement and access for Palestinians should be eased.

Turning to Lebanon, he condemned the recent terrorist attack in Beirut, saying he agreed fully with the remarks made by the representative of France. Italy welcomed mediation efforts by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and strongly supported that organization's role in the search for a rapid solution to Lebanon's political crisis. It would be short-sighted to dismiss the important role of both the Security Council and the General Assembly in addressing the Middle East issues.

LE LUONG MINH ([Viet Nam](#)) welcomed the \$7.4 billion pledged at the Paris donors' conference in support of the development of Palestine, Israel's steps to freeze the construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and the release of prisoners, as well as the Palestinian Authority's efforts to implement economic reforms, restore law and order and seize unlicensed weapons. With the scheduled Moscow conference, the peace process seemed to be moving in the right direction, but unfortunately, the hopes had been injured by recent developments.

There was new tension in the region and crisis in the Gaza Strip, he said, expressing concern about the worsening living conditions in the territory and the cross-border influx of refugees into neighbouring countries. There was a need for the parties to exercise restraint, respect international law and cease all acts of violence. Israel must end restrictions on the movement of people and create conditions for the return of refugees. Durable peace would only come to the Middle East with a lasting solution to Israeli-Palestinian issues. The establishment of an independent Palestinian State coexisting side by side with Israel, on the basis of relevant resolutions and taking into account the legitimate rights and interests of all parties, remained the only viable solution. The forthcoming Moscow Conference should be used towards that end.

Turning to Lebanon, he expressed concern about the volatile situation there and the repeated postponement of the presidential election. All parties should seek a diplomatic solution, which would contribute to regional peace and stability. Regarding recent tension with Israel, Viet Nam urged both sides to exercise restraint and settle disputes by peaceful means.

MICHEL KAFANDO ([Burkina Faso](#)), noting that the situation in the Middle East remained a serious threat to international peace and security, stressed the need for increased vigilance on the Council's part. The refusal to compromise was at the heart of the Middle East tragedy since restoration of territory occupied by Israel since 1967 remained in dispute, without prospects for an early resolution. Settlements also continued unabated. Given that situation, confrontations persisted

among the protagonists. Burkina Faso regretted that the authorities were shirking their responsibilities, leaving civilians to manage their own plight, and called on Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza, which deserved the label of collective punishment, and for an end to military activities in Gaza.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, he said the many terrorist attacks were reason to fear the worst. The international community and the United Nations, while doing their utmost to bring about a settlement of the Middle East question, must hold the protagonists accountable. Hopes for a lasting and viable solution could not be envisaged without the two protagonists and outside a two-State solution. Burkina Faso welcomed the Arab Peace initiative, as well as the Annapolis and Paris conferences. The United Nations and the international community must help the parties reach the goal of two independent States coexisting in peace and serenity as soon as possible.

AMIR MUHAREM ([Croatia](#)) expressed regret that consensus on a presidential statement had not been reached, despite significant efforts, noting that deep concern was widely shared over the humanitarian situation in Gaza. All measures to target civilians indiscriminately were reprehensible. Croatia welcomed Israel's steps to ease the humanitarian situation, but continued reports of closures were worrying. Following last week's developments on the border between Gaza and Egypt, it was reassuring to see efforts to find a solution. Croatia supported the proposal for the Palestinian Authority to assume responsibility for control of the Gaza crossings. However, the situation in Gaza could not be addressed in isolation from Israel's right to self-defence. Continued rocket attacks against its civilian population were unacceptable.

Reiterating his full support for the goals agreed at Annapolis, he said the sustained contacts between the parties were encouraging, adding that his country had supported negotiations on all issues, including final status. The efforts of both parties, as well as the recent initiative of the United States, must be commended. In that connection, Croatia commended the recent visit by President Bush and emphasized the active role to be played by the wider international community, particularly in building a viable Palestinian economy, as underscored by the Paris Donors' Conference. There was an obligation on both sides to act with commitment and restraint.

Regarding developments in Lebanon, he said every postponement of the presidential election exacerbated the situation. Croatia welcomed the Arab League mediation efforts as violence only added fuel to the political crisis. All sides must work to preserve the sense of political unity in Lebanon.

MARTY M. NATALEGAWA ([Indonesia](#)) said the Annapolis conference had marked a new chapter in negotiations, but the actual outcome of the ongoing dialogue had yet to demonstrate clear movement in the direction of a solution. Violence continued to erupt, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The humanitarian crisis there was dire and unacceptable. During last week's debate, Indonesia had emphasized the importance of a common Council response to that unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. The Council could not remain silent and it was, therefore, a source of deep disappointment that, despite serious and well-intentioned efforts, consensus had not been achieved.

Stressing the crucial importance of an inter-Palestinian dialogue to the success of the peace process, he said that, with different factions advancing positions which sometimes opposed and contradicted each another, deadlock prevented progress. It was imperative that efforts be made to facilitate the dialogue among the Palestinian factions, leading to progress towards a position amenable to all parties.

On Lebanon, he said his delegation remained concerned over the continued political impasse paralysing that country's Government. The country's election of a new President had now been postponed 13 times and there was an urgent need not only for political consensus among contending factions, but also for breakthroughs that could end the political stalemate. Indonesia welcomed efforts by the Arab League Secretary-General to consult with and encourage various quarters in order to achieve unity and successfully hold the presidential election in accordance with the Lebanese Constitution. The process should be nationally owned and be carried out by and for the Lebanese.

LI JUNHUA ([China](#)) recalled last week's emergency meeting during which all parties had expressed deep concern over the situation in Gaza, noting that, over the past week, the unfolding situation had caused deepening concern and regret. The Gazans' current living conditions were unacceptable. While Prime Minister Olmert had committed not to cut off food or necessary medical supplies, and to avoid a further outbreak of the humanitarian crisis, he should carry out that commitment, open all crossings into the territory at an early date and ensure the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid. Further delay would prolong the suffering. The Arab League proposal deserved a positive response.

The Gaza crisis had deep-rooted causes, he said, adding that the only way out was for all parties involved to conduct positive negotiations with the international community's support. China welcomed the negotiation process initiated by the Annapolis conference, but to ensure that those talks yielded progress, Israelis and Palestinians should be more resolute in seeking to build a broader consensus and make the necessary compromises and concessions. The international community should encourage the negotiations, while assisting the Palestinian Authority in building security and accelerating economic development. Efforts should also be made towards a comprehensive ceasefire between Palestinians and Israelis. Israel should lift the closures in Gaza, and cease its construction of the settlements and the separation wall. As for the situation in Lebanon, it was at a crucial point. The presidential election had been delayed repeatedly, and the security situation was deteriorating.

ALEJANDRO WOLFF ([United States](#)) said the troubling developments in Gaza and southern Israel would not discourage his country's commitment to President Bush's vision of two States living side by side in peace and security. They should not discourage the Council from its commitment to the long-term goal of establishing a peaceful, democratic and viable Palestinian State. Israel and the Palestinians were forging ahead with the political process launched in Annapolis. The United States, other Council members and the Quartet must continue to support their efforts.

Both sides must fulfil their commitments under the Road Map, as reaffirmed at Annapolis, he said. For the Israelis, that included ending settlement expansion and removing outposts. For the Palestinians, it meant confronting terrorists and dismantling their infrastructure, as well as building their economy and institutions with the help of Israel and the international community. Quartet special representative Blair was making important progress on Palestinian economic reform and institution-building. On the international track, the United States appreciated the Arab Peace Initiative and believed that Arab States that were committed to regional peace should reach out to Israel. The parties' bilateral negotiations were essential to ending the occupation that had started in 1967. The only way to have lasting peace was if both sides came together to make and implement difficult choices so as to establish trust.

Expressing regret that the Council had been unable to reach agreement on a presidential statement, he said, however, that the lack of agreement on a text should not be interpreted as a lack of concern about the humanitarian situation. The humanitarian needs of the Gazans must be met, and the United States would continue to be a lead bilateral provider of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians suffering as a result of the illegal coup launched by Hamas against legitimate Palestinian Authority institutions. It would not abandon the people of Gaza and would continue to view the territory as an integral part of a future Palestinian State. But that situation had not developed in a vacuum and the Council must address the circumstances that had given rise to the current situation, in particular by calling on Hamas to cease its acts of violence and by taking steps to achieve genuine progress towards the two-State vision.

He said terrorist groups in Gaza continued to target innocent Israeli citizens with rocket and mortar fire on a daily basis, which was unacceptable. Israel, like any Member State, had the right to self-defence. Those who had illegitimately seized power in Gaza bore responsibility for ending terrorist activities emanating from Gaza. Most recently, Hamas had orchestrated attacks on the border between Gaza and Egypt. To address those concerns, the United Nations supported contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to consider ideas, such as the proposal that the Palestinian Authority assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of the Gaza crossing.

A Palestinian State would never be born of terror and violence, but only through negotiations, he said, adding that last Friday's draft would have addressed that challenge in a serious and balanced manner. The United States shared the Palestinian observer delegate's regret that the Council had been unable to reach

consensus last Friday, but the credibility of his assessments would have been enhanced had he spoken, as a minimum, about the terrorist rocket launches into Israel from Gaza – the territory controlled by Hamas. It was regrettable that the Council had not heard from him on those points, speaking on behalf of his Government, as it had heard from his own President, who had stated on 22 January: “We, on our part, have condemned and continue to condemn the launch of these futile rockets against anyone. Those rockets are not helping and must stop.” The United States delegation highlighted that point because rhetoric would not help the process. The utility of today's session was also questionable as it served mainly as a platform for rhetoric while providing little concrete support for the Council's clear commitment.

On Lebanon, he condemned the terrorist bombing in Beirut last week, adding that the latest in a series of terrorist attacks targeting those working to secure the country's independence and sovereignty was part of the continuing assault on its legitimate institutions. The United States would not falter in its support for the legitimate and democratically elected Lebanese Government. It appreciated efforts to establish the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which would hold accountable those responsible for such crimes as the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The United States called for the immediate election of a new President and for Syria, Iran and others to stop their obstruction of Lebanon's democratic process.

Council President GIADALLA ETTALHI ([Libya](#)), speaking in his national capacity, said the Palestinians' suffering had been protracted and long, and they had a right to be at the end of their patience. Since 1967, the Zionist occupation authority had tried to change Jerusalem's legal status by building settlements on Occupied Palestinian Territory, all of which were illegal. For years, the occupying authorities had continued to entrench that reality by building the new racist separation wall, which was isolating large tracts of Palestinian territory, reducing its area to less than 12 per cent of the historic Palestinian territory, or what constituted less than 50 per cent of the total territory occupied since 1967. That continued despite the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which had deemed the wall illegal. Regrettably, however, Israel continued to flout international legitimacy and legality.

He said the Zionist escalation, the terrorism practised by the occupation authorities against the Palestinian people and the killings in the past few days amid the closures and siege of occupied Gaza was just one more link in a long chain of actions. They included the detention of more than 11,000 Palestinians, among them, hundreds of women and children, and 900 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Also ongoing were the military incursions into Palestinian towns, the terrorizing of civilians, the bulldozing of farmland and the establishment of blockades and checkpoints – all grievously impacting life for more than 1.5 million Palestinians. The Human Rights Council had called for urgent international measures to end Israel's serious contraventions, including the series of attacks and repeated military incursions and siege imposed on the occupied Gaza Strip. The world had once again seen the reality of Israeli intentions vis-à-vis peace.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, he said that country was still suffering the effects of the Israeli aggression of July 2006, which had led to the complete destruction of its infrastructure and the implantation of munitions and cluster bombs, putting at risk the lives of countless civilians and impeding economic growth. Those factors, in combination with continuing Israeli violations of Lebanese sea, land and airspace, had contributed to the events unfolding in Lebanon today.

NAWAF SALAM ([Lebanon](#)) said that, during the Council's debate on the crisis in Gaza last week, many voices had denounced the collective punishment of civilians. Despite frustrations, many had placed their trust in the Council, believing in its role of maintaining international peace and security. Peace remained the ultimate goal.

Calling for the restoration of the comprehensive peace process, he said measures like the lifting of the blockade and letting institutions work in the occupied territories could become confidence-building measures. Lebanon called for a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East, with Israel's withdrawal from all occupied territories and the resolution of the refugee issue on the basis of relevant resolutions.

Israel's behaviour in the occupied territories was a reminder of recent atrocities during the war that Israel had perpetrated against Lebanon, deliberately targeting civilians, he said. Now the Lebanese Government was working to implement resolution 1701 (2006), but Israel continued to violate it. Last year, it had committed some 872 air violations, 32 sea violations, and 139 land violations. The latest incursion had taken place this year. Israel had not provided the mining maps and information about munitions dropped during the 2006 war. Lebanon called also for the immediate release of Lebanese detainees and for the consideration of its Government's proposal to place the disputed Shebaa Farms under a temporary United Nations mandate.

Since 24 November, the postponement of Lebanon's presidential election had been a source of concern, he said. The country supported a comprehensive plan by the Arab League to facilitate an immediate election. The continuation of the crisis threatened more violence, as seen last weekend with the death of eight citizens. Such incidents had led to special measures and were now under investigation. The Council was aware of terrorist operations that had continued for three years now against Lebanon's stability, independence and sovereignty. Targeted assassinations of Lebanese leaders in 2007 had been followed by new terrorist attacks in 2008. Those crimes had been condemned in the Council President's press statement yesterday. Attempts were also being made to destabilize southern Lebanon. All those terrorist acts had not diverted Lebanon from its path and would not stop its march towards international justice. In that regard, Lebanon commended the Secretary-General's efforts to establish a special international tribunal to try those suspected of assassinating former Prime Minister Hariri and his companions.

BASHAR JA'AFARI ([Syria](#)), stressing that he wished to add his voice to “every word” spoken by the Council President, said Under-Secretary-General Pascoe had sought to gloss over the continuing Israeli breaches of international norms and laws, as well as Security Council resolutions, while hiding the prevailing facts on the ground. However, his briefing could not fail to leave a “very dark image” of the situation on the ground. Those were the conditions that the region had faced for more than 40 years of abhorrent Israeli settlement colonialism. Syria was dissatisfied that the briefing had not taken up the situation prevailing in the occupied Syrian Golan. Today's agenda item was the situation in the Middle East, and the Syrian Golan was an inextricable part of that situation. Syria was participating in today's session as a principal partner, according to Libya's own decision, but it called on the Secretariat to ensure that no similar shortcoming took place in future briefings.

Describing Israel as a truly unique case of outlaw behaviour, persisting in violence, oppression, and moral and political irresponsible acts, he said that country boasted about its shameful behaviour and disregard for international norms. An Israeli human rights organization had reported that the occupation authorities had killed 152 Palestinian children last year, bringing to 866 the total number of Palestinian children killed. Now Israel was inaugurating the new year by closing down the Gaza Strip and darkening the entire district. Meanwhile, it continued to turn a deaf ear to international appeals for an end to the construction of the apartheid wall, the release of Palestinian Legislative Council members, and that of Palestinian leaders held without justification.

Calling on the Security Council to take an immediate decision to end those Israeli crimes and punish the perpetrators, he said the international community could not stand by with its arms folded in the face of such crimes, which rose to the level of genocide and crimes against humanity. The Council's failure to adopt a simple presidential statement condemning Israel for its flagrant human rights violations and collective punishment in Palestinian territory, particularly in Gaza, owing to the position of a permanent Council member – which always endeavoured to tailor the deliberations to Israeli interests, whether or not they contravened international law – sent the wrong message.

Noting that the head of the United States delegation had referred to Syria when discussing the situation in Lebanon, he reminded Council members that his country not only supported the Arab initiative, but had also been party to its creation, and part and parcel of the Foreign Ministers' meeting that had drafted it. Syria, therefore, was most interested in the initiative's success and in helping its brothers in Lebanon reach agreement among themselves for security and an end to the ongoing constitutional crisis. Syria interpreted the call for non-intervention in Lebanon's internal affairs as including the United States and others. No one must intervene in Lebanon's internal affairs. Once non-intervention was achieved, Syria would help the Lebanese end the crisis in their country. Syria “completely” condemned all assassinations in Lebanon, a condemnation had already been made officially, which was now being restated in the Council. Syria had every interest in finding those “dirty hands that have assassinated Lebanese people” and was confident that all attempts to “take our eyes away” from the

truth would be revealed at the end of the investigations now taking place.

The Permanent Observer for Palestine said he had not planned to take the floor for the second time, but wished to respond to the statements by the representatives of the United States and Israel. Repeated assertions by the representative of Israel, the occupying Power, that Gaza was not part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory were a repeated exercise in futility. Many distinguished scholars and authorities in international humanitarian law from all corners of the world, including Israel, had proven without any shadow of doubt the status of Gaza as being under Israeli control.

As for the statement by the United States delegate concerning President Abbas, he said the President's position on the rockets was very well known. Today's Palestinian statement had referred to the fact that President Abbas had succeeded in organizing a unilateral ceasefire against Israel. It had been Israel's continuous incursions, extrajudicial executions and aggression against the Palestinian people that had broken that ceasefire twice. President Abbas had not only repeatedly articulated his position that he was against the firing of rockets, which gave Israel an excuse to continue its aggression, but he had also condemned Israel's aggression, as well as the siege it had imposed on Gaza, its extrajudicial executions and its continued aggression. President Abbas had declared three days of mourning for the massacre in Gaza not long ago. If one referred to the President's position, one should refer to it in its totality.

He said that, as part of the Arab Group, Palestine had demonstrated tremendous flexibility and balance in accepting the draft presidential statement's reference to rockets. It had received the support of 14 Council members two days before last Friday. However, the main reason for the tragedy in Gaza was not the firing of the rockets, but the occupation, the incursions, the starving of 1.5 million civilians in Gaza, the extrajudicial executions, the placing of 1 million people in a huge prison and the inflicting of collective punishment in violation of international law. Looking at only the firing of rockets without looking at other issues was neither balanced nor fair.

In conclusion, he said he was delighted by today's debate and the fact that 15 Council members had supported the Palestinian Authority initiative to deal with the Gaza crossings. That was a concrete solution to the tragedy. Goods and people needed to get in and out. Trying to punish 1.5 million people because some held a political position in favour of a political party that was powerful in Gaza was not viable. It was necessary to concentrate on practical elements, the most important of which was to open the borders.

He thanked everybody who had supported the Palestinian Authority initiative to work with [Egyptian] President [Hosni] Mubarak, the European Union and others to find a solution to the situation. "If we succeed -- and we hope that we'll succeed -- then we can put an end to the tragedy in Gaza." That did not mean success in putting an end to the occupation, but given the negotiations with the Israeli side, with the help of the international community, it was to be hoped that an agreement would be reached by the end of 2008 that would allow the Palestinian State to be born.

The representative of Israel said many had expressed concern over the futility of Council meetings like today's and they might be right, adding that he had felt that way for much of today's meeting, but it ultimately served an important purpose. It had illustrated vividly and graphically how important it was to ensure that Security Council membership was carefully screened, considering how much responsibility it carried, as specified under Article 23 of the United Nations Charter. The importance of that provision had been highlighted today by the litany of bias, distortion, bigotry and hate delivered by a representative of a country, which itself had been under sanctions by the Council not long ago -- the same country that had given the world Lockerbie. That country was trying to lecture the Council on human rights. The fact that Damascus was itself under investigation by the Council only added a surreal element. That today's meeting was led by a Council President who expressed total support for terrorism should alarm everyone and foreshadow what awaited the Council in the next 23 months.

The representative of Syria said Israel had shown disregard for the Organization and for international law. The partition of Palestine had created the conditions for the creation of Israel, the condition being that the Palestinian State was to be established side by side with the new State of Israel in the land of Palestine. Since the adoption of that resolution more than 60 years ago, that had not taken place. Organized State terrorism at the time, led by former Prime Ministers of the State of Israel, had undermined that noble objective. By its organized terrorism, Israel had killed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and occupied Syrian, Lebanese and Egyptian territory by force. It had also assassinated representatives of international legitimacy, as well as United Nations forces in the region. In 1954, Israel had committed the world's first act of piracy against civilian aircraft and introduced nuclear devices to the region, yet the representative of Israel boasted of his disregard for the Presidency of the Security Council.

One could not but say that the words of the Israeli representative increased his isolation both in the Security Council and in the international community, he continued. Such words showed how unprofessional and immoral was his reaction to the very rules that governed the Council's work. Israel's representative had no right to boast about State terrorism waged against the Palestinian and other peoples, including Syrians. Israel's State terrorism had reached Tunisia and Iraq. Israel's State terrorism was naked before the eyes of the international community. The words of Israel's representative were truly the despicable theatre into which he wished to turn the Council. However, the Council's deliberations were not just polemics. They were a responsible dialogue whose main objective was international peace and security, avoiding confrontation in the region and helping the Palestinian people.

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* The 5826th Meeting was closed.