

Division for Palestinian Rights
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine**
 Monthly media monitoring review
 February 2010

Monthly highlights

- Secretary-General reports to General Assembly on Israeli and Palestinian responses to Goldstone report ([4 February](#))
- PA announces plans to hold municipal elections on 17 July, immediately rejected by Hamas ([8 February](#))
- UN Palestinian Rights Committee and Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean convene International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace in Malta. ([12, 13 February](#))
- Israel announces plan to include West Bank holy sites on its national heritage list ([21, 22 February](#))
- General Assembly gives Israel and the Palestinians five more months to investigate Goldstone report findings ([25 February](#))

1

Israeli forces had detained two Palestinians from the village of Awarta, south of Nablus, after raiding the family's homes, locals said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A Palestinian was arrested by Israeli troops in Bil'in. (*Wafa*)

Israeli tanks rolled into Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. "Israeli forces started bulldozing Palestinian farmland amid heavy random fire", sources added. (*Petra*)

Israeli police discovered two barrels filled with explosives on beaches in Ashkelon and Ashdod. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces reportedly detained a group of Palestinians east of Bethlehem, about to plant almond trees on lands near the "Teqoa" and "Nokdim" settlements. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

At a press conference with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that she and President Abbas had both agreed that the peace process with Israel must be relaunched as soon as possible. Mr Abbas said that he was open to further talks in exchange for a three-month freeze of Israeli settlement building in the West Bank and the recognition of the 1967 borders as the basis for land swaps. (*Reuters, Deutsche Welle*)

Israel had no intention of acceding to PA President Abbas' call for a freeze of all settlement construction for three months in order to resume direct negotiations with the PA, a senior Israeli official said. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan received a telephone call from US President Barack Obama and discussed with him the need to intensify efforts to jump-start negotiations towards an internationally accepted two-State solution, in line with a clear action plan and a specific time frame leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. (*The Jordan Times*)

Hamas had issued a statement challenging the legitimacy of PA President Abbas. Hamas further warned of returning to the same "cycle of arbitrary negotiations that only serve the American and Zionist interests in providing a cover [for] Israel's illegal settlement activities and the attacks against Jerusalem". (*IMEMC*)

Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, arrived in Israel and in an interview with *Haaretz*, he said, "Israel's settlement policy could be an obstacle to peace. I would like to say to the people and Government of Israel, as a friend, with my hand on my heart, that persisting with this policy is a mistake". (*Haaretz*)

In its latest Protection of Civilians [Report](#), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted that during the previous week, 12 Palestinians had been injured in the West Bank by Israeli forces but that there were no conflict-related casualties in Gaza for the second week in a row. Settler-related incidents continued with five Palestinians and three settlers wounded. In addition, new demolition orders were issued in "Area C". Gaza had been experiencing up to 12-hour rolling blackouts, while exports of flowers and strawberries had continued. (www.ochaopt.org)

Jordan should stop withdrawing nationality arbitrarily from Jordanians of Palestinian origin, Human Rights Watch said in a [report](#). Authorities had stripped more than 2,700 of these Jordanians of their nationality between 2004 and 2008, and the practice continued in 2009, the organization reported. (www.hrw.org)

Egyptian authorities allowed the transfer of medical aid through the Rafah crossing into Gaza. The aid included a donation from the United Arab Emirates of some five tons of medicine for the treatment of cancer, kidney and heart disease, worth approximately four million dirhams (\$1 million). (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli troops and workers for the Jerusalem municipality raided Palestinian owned homes and shops near Jerusalem's old city. The municipality claimed that the residents and shop owners had not paid property taxes that Israel enforces on the Palestinian residents. (*IMEMC*)

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) denied that two of its senior officers had been summoned for disciplinary action after headquarters staff found that the men had exceeded their authority in approving the use of white phosphorus shells during last year's military campaign in the Gaza Strip, contradicting the Israeli Government's response to the Goldstone report. (*Haaretz*)

During a private, closed-door meeting in Tel Aviv, the head of the Military Advocate General's international law department during Operation Cast Lead, Col. Phina Sharvit-Baruch, said that it may be necessary to establish a commission of inquiry to respond to the Goldstone report. According to *Haaretz*, she said that "it's possible that had we cooperated with the [fact-finding mission], its report wouldn't have been as bad. I don't think anyone thought the report would be so severe". (*Haaretz*)

2

Ten Palestinians were arrested in the West Bank, as Israeli troops served six demolition orders for homes which they claimed had been built without the necessary permits. (*IMEMC*)

A senior Israeli Navy official said that barrels filled with explosives, reportedly set to sea from Gaza, had been putting Palestinian fishermen in danger. (*Ynetnews*)

Witnesses and security sources said that Israeli fighter jets had attacked two tunnels in southern Gaza, reportedly injuring three Palestinians. (www.idfil.com, *Xinhua, Ynetnews*)

The private car of Youssef Sarsour, a Hamas leader, had been destroyed by explosives in front of his home in Khan Yunis, medics said. Two children had been hit by shrapnel and flying glass. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired a Qassam rocket at western Negev, striking an open field. (*Haaretz*)

US Special Envoy George Mitchell had urged Europe to step up pressure on PA President Abbas, *Asharq al-Awsat* reported. "The time has come to stop finding excuses for avoiding a return to the negotiating table", the paper quoted Mr. Mitchell as saying, citing French officials. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner reportedly proposed reassuring Mr. Abbas with a clear declaration that the aim of any new talks would be the creation of a Palestinian State, within a set time frame of anything up to two years, the paper said. The declaration could come from the Quartet, the Security Council or an international committee set up for the purpose, Mr. Kouchner said. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad attended a joint discussion on the peace process at the Tenth Annual Herzliya Conference.

Recalling his two-year State-building plan, Mr. Fayyad called for a complete settlement freeze and stated that "the Palestinian State must be built in the areas where the settlements are today". Prime Minister Barak stated that "Israel has a silent majority in favour of peace, although it leans to the right at the voting station". At the same time, Mr. Barak warned that without a peace agreement, Israel would be either a binational State or an undemocratic apartheid State. Meanwhile, Hamas Spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri condemned Prime Minister Fayyad's participation in the conference. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos, during a visit in Ramallah, met with both President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. The latter subsequently stressed the important role that the EU could play under its Spanish Presidency. (*Wafa*)

PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki met with his Spanish counterpart, Miguel Angel Moratinos, in Ramallah and told Mr. Moratinos that a successful and credible political process necessitated a complete halt to Israeli settlement activity, including in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Israel must cease all violations of international law and resolutions, as well as all detentions, assassinations, and incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory within the framework of a given timeline, he said. The right of return, self-determination, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State should also be guaranteed, added Mr. Malki. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a telephone call with German Chancellor Merkel, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak underlined the necessity that Israel should adhere to its commitment by taking tangible steps and adopting positive stances that open the way to resume peace negotiations. The phone call came before Chancellor Merkel's meeting with PA President Abbas. (*Egypt State Information Service*)

The PA Cabinet called on the international community to exert effective pressure on Israel in order to end the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and enable the PA to start reconstruction. The Cabinet also decided that an industrial zone would be built on an area of about 1,000 dunams (1 million square metres) in Jenin. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli authorities decided to open the Kerem Shalom crossing for the transfer of fuel and food stuffs and export of strawberries and flowers. However, the Kami crossing was ordered to remain closed. (*Palestine Press Agency*)

Prisoner swap negotiations had collapsed, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahhar said in an interview with the *BBC*. "The main cause [...] is that after the interference of the political element, after the interference of Netanyahu personally, there was a big regression and retraction", he said. (*BBC, Haaretz*)

Issa Qaraqi, PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs concluded an agreement with the Arab Dentists' Society under which 65 specialists, holding Israeli citizenship, would attend to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The United Nations mine action team, which handled ordnance disposal in Gaza, told *The Guardian* that the remains of a 500-pound aircraft-dropped bomb had been found in the ruins of a flour mill last January. This evidence directly contradicted the finding of the Israeli report, which challenged the Goldstone report allegations that the building had been deliberately targeted and specifically stated that there was no evidence of an air strike. (*The Guardian*)

The Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, sent an urgent letter to IDF Chief Military Advocate General Avichai Mandelblit, demanding an immediate investigation into the circumstances of the firing of phosphorus shells at the compound of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead. In a statement, B'Tselem said: "The cover-up of this affair demonstrates, yet again, that the army cannot investigate itself". (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Peace Now movement and Americans for Peace Now condemned attacks on the New Israel Fund, and its chair, Naomi Chazan, who had come under fire for funding human rights organizations whose information appeared in the Goldstone report. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

3

Ten Israeli tanks and a number of bulldozers had invaded residential areas and farm lands, east of Gaza City, witnesses said. (*IMEMC*)

Police bomb disposal experts confirmed that a third explosive device washed ashore south of Tel Aviv and was being detonated. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

The IDF reported that 12 wanted Palestinians had been detained overnight in the West Bank. (www.idfil.com)

A 27-year-old US female activist had been detained, along with two Palestinians, by Israeli forces during a night raid in the village of Bil'in. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

A Palestinian had been killed and two had been injured when Israeli jet fighters shelled a number of areas in the Gaza Strip. Hamas' armed wing announced that a "combatant" had been killed during a mission. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

Two Qassam rockets fired by militants in Gaza hit an open area near Sderot. No one was wounded and no damage was reported. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

Palestinians hurled two Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles travelling south-west of Bethlehem. No injuries were reported but the vehicles were damaged. (*Ynetnews*)

Palestinian sources reported that Israeli forces had broken into the West Bank home of Hatem Qafisha, a Palestinian Legislator. The house was searched and vandalized, and Mr. Qafisha was sent to an Israeli military camp for interrogation. (*IMEMC*)

Former Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz urged Defense Minister Ehud Barak to deploy the Iron Dome system as soon as possible to protect the town of Sderot against rocket attacks. The IDF had earlier announced that it had no intention of permanently deploying the system. (*Haaretz*)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said that Hamas was ready for dialogue with the international community, including the United States and European Union, adding that the movement had come "closer in political terms" to conditions issued by the Quartet. He said that Hamas supported "the establishment of a Palestinian State with the 1967 borders" and was determined to "establish Palestinian reconciliation and to have fair elections [...] in all Palestinian homes, including Jerusalem". (*AFP*)

President Abbas was scheduled to meet Egyptian President Mubarak in Cairo on 6 February to discuss US Special Envoy George Mitchell's suggestions for the possible resumption of peace talks. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

During his three-day visit to Israel, Italy's Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, met with PA President Abbas in Ramallah where he called for empathy for all victims, whether from the Nazi Holocaust or Israel's war in Gaza. Earlier, during a speech to the Knesset, Mr. Berlusconi called Israel's war against Gaza militants last year justified self-defence. He said that a United Nations report accusing Israel of war crimes tried to "incriminate Israel for its legitimate response" to Palestinian militants' rocket attacks. (*AP*)

The Rafah crossing was opened for patients undergoing treatment outside Gaza to return to the area. Egyptian officials said that a similar arrangement would be made on 4 February. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Ayman Taha, a senior political leader of Hamas, stated that indirect prisoner exchange talks had been fully halted, and that they could not resume under the current circumstances. Meanwhile, the head of the Campaign to Free Gilad Shalit, Shimshon Liebman, told Voice of Israel's morning programme that the German mediator involved in prisoner swap talks would return to Israel this week. (*IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency*)

A high-ranking Israeli officer, who had served as commander during Operation Cast Lead, acknowledged for the first time that the Israeli army had gone beyond its previous rules of engagement regarding the protection of civilian lives in order to minimize military casualties during last year's war in Gaza. (*The Independent*)

Hamas said that it had submitted to a United Nations official in Gaza its 52-page response to the Goldstone report, which formally rejected all allegations that it had committed war crimes during last year's war in Gaza. (*Reuters*)

At a press encounter in New York, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasized that one of his priorities had been to help people in Gaza to have more humanitarian assistance and more freedom of movement, which he had been urging the Israeli authorities to do. In addition to their payment of \$10.5 million for the

damages and losses of United Nations facilities, it would be very important for the Israeli authorities to allow construction material in, so that "we can go on with the reconstruction and repairs". (UN News Centre)

4

IDF soldiers arrested 22 wanted Palestinians in the West Bank. A makeshift weapon was found during the arrest of one of the Palestinians south-west of Jenin. (The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews.com)

A roadside explosion in the Gaza Strip blew out the windows of a jeep travelling in a Red Cross convoy, but the organization reported no injuries in the blast. (Ynetnews)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh received Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Sha'ath at his home in the Shati refugee camp, along with delegations of Fatah and Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Sha'ath had spent the day touring Al-Azhar University and civil service institutions in the Gaza Strip. He also visited the home of the late PA President, Yasser Arafat. (Ma'an News Agency)

Officials said that PA President Abbas would visit South Korea on 10 February for a two-day visit, which would include talks with President Lee Myung-bak and Prime Minister Chung Un-chan. (AFP)

The European Union [announced](#) a contribution of €21 million to the Palestinian Authority's payment of January salaries and pensions through the European mechanism for support to the Palestinians, the Mécanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion de l'Aide Socio-Economique (PEGASE). The Government of the Netherlands [announced](#) a contribution of NIS 10,356,096 (€1,964,134) towards the January wage bill of 17,376 Palestinian civil policemen and members of the civil defence services, such as firemen and rescue services. More than 10,500 of the recipients of this payment were based in Gaza. (www.reliefweb.int)

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat had agreed to evacuate a Jewish settler's house built illegally in the heart of a predominantly Palestinian neighbourhood. At the same time, his spokesperson said that he planned to demolish dozens of Palestinian buildings erected without permission in the area. (AP)

A group of armed Israeli settlers occupied 500 dunams on a mountain south of Nablus, with the intention of creating a new settlement outpost. (IMEMC)

Israeli police handed Jerusalem researcher and Director of the Cartographic Section of the Arab Studies Society (Orient House) Khalil At-Tafkahi a signed order by the Minister of Internal Security preventing him from traveling outside the country for a period of six months. The order cited "security reasons" for the ban. Mr. At-Tafkahi, an expert on settlements and settlement expansion, said that the order was evidence that Israel did not want peace, recalling he was part of the Palestinian peace talks delegations from Oslo to Taba. (Ma'an News Agency)

At a signing ceremony in Dheisheh refugee camp, US Consul General Daniel Rubinstein announced a contribution of \$40 million to support UNRWA's regular budget and emergency programmes in the West Bank and Gaza. The Consul General noted the importance of providing robust and early contributions to UNRWA in light of the agency's anticipated funding deficit for 2010. (Wafa)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon submitted a report (A/64/651) on the follow-up to the Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict. It said, "I note from the materials received that the processes initiated by the Government of Israel and the Government of Switzerland are ongoing, and that the Palestinian side initiated its process on 25 January 2010. As such, no determination can be made on the implementation of the resolution [64/10] by the parties concerned". (www.un.org)

5

Senior Hamas leader Khalil Al-Haya said: "There will be changes within the coming days toward achieving conciliation", following a meeting of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh with Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Sha'ath. Mr. Al-Haya said that the two had exchanged documents detailing the means of overcoming issues related to the ratification of the Egyptian reconciliation document. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Palestinian Investment Promotion Agency had announced the convening of the Palestine Investment Conference 2010 – Bethlehem, entitled "Investing in Palestinian Small and Medium Businesses: Empowerment of SMEs", on 2 and 3 June 2010. (Ma'an News Agency, www.pic-palestine.ps)

Officials said the Gaza Strip's sole power plant would cease all operations late at night due to a lack of fuel. (Ma'an News Agency)

Popular anti-wall protests continued in Bil'in, Ni'in and Al-Ma'asara, with increasing international support. In Bil'in, scores of protesters suffered tear gas inhalation as they attempted to access land behind the separation wall. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, told reporters: "The Security Council is not showing a commitment to take care of the [Goldstone] report", adding that the International [Criminal] Court at The Hague was ignoring Palestinian appeals to "investigate the crimes carried out in Palestinian territory". "Our desire is for the Secretary-General to clearly say that the Israeli report is not in compliance with the mandate of the General Assembly, but the fact that he did not say that [it is in compliance], is his own way of criticizing it in a mild way and we acknowledge that", he continued. (NAM News Network, Ynetnews)

6

Three Palestinians from the village of Sufa, north of Hebron, were injured when Israeli forces fired rubber-coated bullets as clashes erupted between locals, protesters and soldiers. Israeli forces had declared Sufa a closed military zone, preventing farmers from accessing land. (Ma'an News Agency)

Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, discussed with PA President Abbas efforts for reactivating the peace process. In press statements, Mr. Abbas said that there was no substitute for Egypt regarding its role in Palestinian reconciliation. (Egypt State Information Service)

Saudi Arabian Prince Turki al-Faisal said that his handshake with Deputy Israeli Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon at a security conference in Munich was no step towards the recognition of Israel. He said: "Until Israel heeds US President Barak Obama's call for the removal of all settlements, the Israelis must be under no illusion that Saudi Arabia will offer what they most desire – regional recognition". (AFP)

Gaza's power plant shut down one of its two generators due to a fuel shortage. (The Jerusalem Post)

"Israel expresses satisfaction that the UN Secretary-General faithfully reflected the Israeli document that was presented this week", the Israeli Foreign Ministry said. (The Jerusalem Post)

Hamas authorities in Gaza denied that they had apologized for Israeli civilian deaths during the Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip. They said that the United Nations had not yet responded to the report of Hamas [on the Goldstone report]. (IMEMC)

7

Egyptian authorities had begun construction of a port for boats of the security forces to "prevent all future attempts to smuggle Palestinian contraband through the maritime border", a security official said. (AFP)

The Israeli navy had seized four fishermen off the northern Gaza shore. (The Palestine Telegraph)

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, PA President Abbas said, "I still hope that [Obama] will revive the peace process. At least he has to convince the Israelis to announce a complete freeze on construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem for a few months". He said that there was no point for him to run for President again, since "the way to a diplomatic solution is blocked". (The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Senior Palestinian sources confirmed that PA President Abbas had agreed in principle to the US proposal for indirect talks. According to them, Mr. Abbas intended to ask for a number of clarifications from the US Administration and would consult with Arab leaders prior to giving Washington his final response. (Haaretz)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said at the start of a Cabinet meeting: "We will conduct negotiations without preconditions. [...] It is doubtful whether any peace agreement that is unaccompanied by solid security arrangements on the ground can last". (IMRA)

The Muslim-Christian Commission in the Gaza Strip condemned an Israeli attack on the Emmaus Church in East Jerusalem. It said in a statement that Israeli forces had encircled and stormed the church under "false" pretexts in an escalation that inflamed the passions of Muslims and Christians. (Petra)

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Mohammad Hussein, denounced Israel's closure of the Damascus Gate, a major access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and added that Israel's decision was part of its scheme to Judaize the city after encircling it with the "apartheid" barrier. (Petra)

Israeli security forces made an incursion into Ramallah to arrest women from Spain and Australia belonging to an organization involved in protests against the separation wall. They were later released on bail by decision of the Israeli Supreme Court. (Haaretz, Reuters)

8

Dozens of Palestinians, including journalists, were injured as fierce clashes broke out in the Shu'fat refugee camp after Israeli police had stormed the camp to arrest tax evaders. The number of those detained during the operation was estimated at over 60. (Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

Israeli forces detained the wife of Al-Bireh Mayor Jamal Tawil after searching their home. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A Qassam rocket fired from the Gaza Strip slammed into a field in Israel. No one was hurt and no damage was reported. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli army vehicles had closed off the entrances to Beit Fajjar, shutting down roads to the area from Bethlehem and Hebron, witnesses reported. An Israeli military spokesperson said that a pipe bomb had been tossed earlier by a youth at troops operating in the area. No injuries were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas met with Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. Both sides recognized that the resumption of negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel was urgently needed. President Abbas explained that negotiations should be resumed based on the road map and the internationally agreed terms of reference, and that such negotiations should deal with, among others, borders, Jerusalem, refugees, security and water. Prime Minister Hatoyama stressed the importance of the national reconciliation of the Palestinians under the leadership of President Abbas. Both sides decided to take steps to implement the Japanese-Palestinian Programme of Work to Build a Viable Palestinian State". (www.mofa.go.jp)

In a *CNN* interview, Jordan's King Abdullah II, warning that US credibility was at stake, stressed: "We really have to be able to move the [peace] process forward in the next month or so, especially leading to the Arab Summit, so that we don't have any confusion coming out of there". The King also strongly ruled out the option of the West Bank under Jordanian control. (*ynetnews*)

PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki confirmed that the Palestinians were weighing indirect peace talks with Israel to be mediated by the US, adding that they should focus on border issues. He said that he needed more information from Washington, along with support from Arab States, before making a commitment, and that the proximity talks should be limited to a maximum of three to four months. (*Reuters*)

In a speech to the International Peace Institute, Fatah Central Committee member Nasser Al-Kidwa suggested that US Envoy George Mitchell should make it clear that the indirect peace talks the US had proposed would deal with key outstanding issues including borders, settlements and the future status of Jerusalem. He explained that Mr. Mitchell might want to start with borders, and that "the US believes the basis should be the 1967 borders, possibly with agreed upon alterations or exchanges". (*AP*)

Hamas official in Gaza Salah Al-Bardawil said that Hamas was "studying the possibility" of allowing Fatah members to move freely and may reopen the party's headquarters in Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel had sent a letter of protest asking Moscow to clarify whether Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal would meet with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev or Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Russia said that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was the highest-level official Mr. Mashaal would meet. Israel then sent another message to the Russian Ambassador to Israel, in which it expressed its concern over the implications the visit might have on attempts to relaunch the Middle East peace talks. The Ambassador assured Israel that Mr. Lavrov would reiterate Russia's stance that Hamas must abide by the [Quartet] conditions. Mr. Mashaal's visit came just days before Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu's scheduled visit to Moscow. (*Haaretz*)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Mashaal told the Russian newspaper *Vremya Novostei*, as he arrived for talks with Russian officials, that Washington was trying to convince President Abbas "that if he agrees to the reconciliation with us [Hamas], the United States will stop assisting the Palestinian Authority". "Russia seeks Palestinian unity, while the Americans do not care about this", he added. Speaking to reporters following his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, Mr. Mashaal said that Hamas "wants reconciliation with Fatah as soon as possible". (*Ma'an News Agency, RIA Novosti*)

Following a meeting with Japan's Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, PA President Abbas thanked Tokyo for its financial and diplomatic support, which had topped \$1 billion. (*AFP, Khaleej Times Online, www.mofa.go.jp*)

In Cairo, UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi urged Egypt and the Arab League to press Israel to allow reconstruction equipment into the blockaded Gaza Strip. (*AFP*)

Israel's Interior Minister Eli Yishai said that he would use his powers to thwart a court-ordered evacuation of "Beit Yonatan", a home erected by settlers in East Jerusalem without authorization. (*Haaretz*)

PA officials would present more arguments in March urging the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate possible war crimes during the Israeli offensive in Gaza. "We are letting them come here before making any decision", ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo said in an interview. "It is a very complex decision". (*Reuters*)

"We were hoping that the [UN] Secretary-General would give more of an evaluative assessment", said Fred Abrahams, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. Instead, "He clearly avoided the issue". "Israel claims it is conducting credible and impartial investigations, but it has so far failed to make that case", said Joe Stork, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Division of HRW. "An independent investigation is crucial to understand why so many civilians died and to bring justice for the victims of unlawful attacks". (*Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post, www.hrw.org*)

The PA announced plans to hold municipal elections on 17 July. The Cabinet statement said that elections would also be held in Gaza. Hamas rejected the decision saying no elections should be held before Hamas and Fatah had reached a reconciliation deal. (*The Jerusalem Post, Xinhua*)

The United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People [announced](#) that the Committee and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean would be convening the International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace in Qawra, Malta, on 12 and 13 February. The meeting would be held under the theme "The urgency of addressing the permanent status issues – borders, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, water". (*UN press release GA/PAL/1145*)

9

Confrontations had been renewed when schoolchildren clashed with Israeli border guards at the Shufat refugee camp, leading to the detention of a 15-year-old and the injury of a soldier, witnesses said. During overnight raids border guards had handed out dozens of notices to residents telling them to turn themselves in for questioning. Residents said that soldiers had used tear gas to disperse the crowds. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

10

An Israeli non-commissioned officer was killed when a Palestinian police officer stabbed him as he sat in his jeep at an intersection outside Nablus. The assailant was then run down by a passing Israeli motorist and arrested. The PA Government issued a condemnation of the attack, calling for "peaceful resistance" against Israel. (*Reuters*)

An Israeli air strike in southern Gaza hit an empty building near the disused Yasser Arafat International Airport. No injuries were reported. The Israeli military said that the attack was in response to rocket fire from Palestinian militants. (*BBC*)

The IDF said that Kami, the principal cargo crossing into Gaza, would not resume operations, "at least not as long as Hamas controls the Strip", according to an official. He said that the crossing located near Gaza City's Sajiyeh neighbourhood and that soldiers were exposed to sniper fire, in addition to the risk of militants using the tunnels under the crossing. The crossing would be reopened only in an emergency. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli soldiers cleared land in Beit Sahur for takeover, while residents and journalists were prevented from accessing the area. The site, a former Jordanian army base taken over by Israel in 1967 and abandoned in 2006, had been turned into a family picnic area. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

11

An Israeli military official confirmed that an exchange of fire in Gaza's Johur Ad-Dik area, south of Gaza City, the previous night, had led to the death of 26-year-old Faris Ahmad Jaber and injuries to a second man. He said that the deceased had been affiliated with the "Global Jihad" and that both men had been involved in planning attacks on Israel. The official explained that the Israeli fire was in retaliation for Palestinian militants' fire targeting and Israeli patrol east of the Gaza border near the Kami crossing. Three schoolchildren, aged 13, 11 and 5, on their way to class, had also been injured by shrapnel from the Israeli fire, said Dr. Mu'awiyah Hassanain, head of ambulance and emergency services in Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The military wing of Hamas said that one of its members, Muhammad Said Hassuneh, from Gaza City, had been killed during a "jihad" mission. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

IDF forces operating in the West Bank overnight apprehended 26 Palestinians, including 19 children from the Jalazone refugee camp. (*Ynetnews, www.dci-pal.org*)
Israeli military bulldozers demolished five cisterns and three huts owned by farmers from Ithna village in the southern West Bank. (*IMEMC*)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [said](#), “Consistent with Prime Minister Fayyad’s plan for a future Palestinian State, Tony Blair, as the Quartet Representative, will intensify his partnership with Senator Mitchell in support of the political negotiations. In his role as Quartet Representative, Tony Blair will continue, with full support by and coordination with Senator Mitchell, to mobilize the efforts of the international community: (1) to build support for the institutional capacity and governance of a future Palestinian State, including on the rule of law; (2) to improve freedom of movement and access for Palestinians; (3) to encourage further private sector investment; and (4) to bring change in the living conditions of the people in Gaza”. (*www.state.gov*)

Jerusalem residents, accompanied by Hatem Abdel Qader, PA Minister of Jerusalem Affairs, interfered with settlers from the settlement of “Beit Orot”, located in the Jerusalem hills, as they attempted to work on land owned by Palestinians in the Mount of Olives. The action followed the 4 January decision by the Government to allow the expansion of the settlement. The Al-Aqsa Association condemned the settlement activity, saying that the settlers were moving to create a new Jewish quarter in the heart of Arab East Jerusalem. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

In the early hours of the morning, more than 500 Israeli settlers under military guard entered southern Nablus to visit and pray at the holy site of Joseph’s Tomb, while the IDF raided the city centre. The troops withdrew from the city before sunrise, Palestinian security sources said. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

The Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, an Israeli think tank headed by former ambassador to the UN, Dore Gold, accused retired Irish Army Colonel Desmond Travers, member of the UN Fact-Finding Mission, of bias and possibly anti-Semitic prejudice. Mr. Gold termed Col. Travers “an individual who is not qualified to take part in any serious fact-finding mission” and urged the UN not to seek his services in the future. (*The Irish Times*)

Israel began to re-route a 1.7 kilometre section of the separation wall near Bil’in, two and a half years after the Supreme Court had ordered the State to return land to Palestinian farmers, *Army Radio* reported. The newly routed fence would return some 700,000 sq. metres of arable land back to the village. About 150,000 sq. metres of village land would remain on the Israeli side. Mohammed Khatib, member of the Bil’in Popular Committee Against the Wall, said, “This is a very small and rather insignificant step, because the fence still runs through our land. The struggle will continue”. (*Haaretz, Ynetnews*)

Groups, including Americans for Peace Now, B’Tselem, J Street, Rabbis for Human Rights-North America, the Arab American Institute, Churches for Middle East Peace and the Foundation for Middle East Peace had signed a letter urging US President Obama to press Israel to lift its closure of the Gaza Strip. The letter said: “We believe this [Israeli] policy is strategically unsound, harms Israel’s security, and exacts an unacceptable toll on innocent Palestinians. It offends American humanitarian values, and is collective punishment that violates international law”. (*www.jta.org*)

Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin, Chairman of the Muftis Council of Russia, received Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal. During the meeting, Mr. Gaynutdin said that the Muslims of Russia condemned Israel’s occupation of Palestine, and the construction of Israeli [settlements]. They supported putting an end to the excavation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They also prayed for the reconciliation among Palestinians. (*www.muslim.ru*)

12

IDF soldiers opened artillery and gunfire on a group of four Palestinians rigging explosives near the Israel-Gaza border. Two of the militants were killed in the incident as the others fled the scene, according to Palestinian reports. (*Haaretz*)

In a [message](#) delivered by UN Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco to the International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, organized by the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, “I welcome Israel’s efforts and willingness to resume talks. However, a return to negotiations is being seriously hampered by developments on the ground. Regarding continued settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory, I call on Israel to adhere to international law and its obligations under the Road Map. [...] This is particularly important with respect to East Jerusalem, where settlement infrastructure is being expanded and consolidated while Palestinian residents are being subjected to evictions, demolitions and revocation of residency rights. A way should be found, through negotiations, for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all”. The meeting was also addressed by: Louis Galea, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta; Tonio Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta; Rudy Salles, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean; Pedro Núñez Mosquera, Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Tayseer Quba’a, Deputy Speaker of the Palestinian National Council, on behalf of PA President Abbas; Ahmed Fathi Sorour, President of the Egyptian People’s Assembly; Cemil Çiçek, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State of Turkey, and Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, among others. (*Division for Palestinian Rights, UN News Centre*)

13

Local sources in the Al Zeitoun neighbourhood, south-east of Gaza City, said that Israeli soldiers, stationed near the border fence with Gaza, had fired a shell at a group of fighters who escaped unharmed. (*IMEMC*)

Egyptian security forces had located and detonated a tunnel in Rafah, causing damage to a number of Palestinian homes in the area, local sources reported. (*IMEMC*)

After two days of deliberations, the International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace held its closing session in Malta. The concluding [remarks](#) by the organizers – the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, voiced serious concern about the prolonged stagnation and impasse of the peace process and offered full support for its revival. They reiterated that Israeli settlements and the separation wall had been built on occupied Palestinian land, and that the demolition of houses and evictions of Palestinian residents were illegal under international law. They hoped that the 10-month settlement freeze would be comprehensive, extended to East Jerusalem and retained indefinitely. They expressed alarm at the rising number of violent acts committed against Palestinian civilians and their property by Israeli settlers, and expressed deep concern about the situation in East Jerusalem. Most were gravely concerned over the crisis in Gaza, resulting from the Israeli blockade. The organizers were of the view that national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations had a special role to play in advancing the Israeli-Palestinian political process, and they encouraged their closer cooperation with Israeli and Palestinian lawmakers, the UN, and the Committee. (*UN press release GA/PAL/1150*)

14

British journalist Paul Martin had been arrested in Gaza by Hamas security forces, British and Hamas officials said. (*BBC*)

[Speaking](#) at the US-Islamic World Forum in Doha, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that “we see the human cost of the conflict: the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the daily indignities endured by Palestinians after decades of occupation, the constant threat of violence that Israelis bear, as well as the opprobrium that comes with years of trying to protect her citizens”. She said that neither the US nor any country could force a solution. The US stood ready to support the parties as they worked to resolve all permanent status issues, including security for Israelis and Palestinians, borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. (*www.state.gov*)

15

The IDF arrested two “wanted” Palestinians in the West Bank. The two men were taken for interrogation. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli forces detained Muhammad As-Sayyad, Head of the PA Preventative Security Services, in Jerusalem. An Israeli police spokesperson said that he was not familiar with the report. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

In Riyadh, US Secretary of State Clinton [met](#) with Saudi Arabian King Abdullah and discussed international efforts to revive the peace process. Later in the day, Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal and Ms. Clinton held a joint press conference in which Mr. Al-Faisal said that he appreciated the US

Government's early moves to revive the peace process and at the same time "we agree on the illegitimacy or illegality of Israeli settlements". Ms. Clinton [said](#) the US believed that through negotiations, the parties could agree on an outcome that reconciled the Palestinian goal of an independent State based on the 1967 lines with agreed swaps, and the Israeli goal of a Jewish State that met Israeli security requirements, realized the aspirations of all people for Jerusalem and safeguarded its status for the future. She added that the international community must support the work of the PA to build the Palestinian economy and institutions necessary for an independent Palestinian State. (www.mofa.gov.sa, www.state.gov)

Russian Federation's President, Dmitry Medvedev, [met](#) with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. The two leaders discussed, in particular, bilateral cooperation and the situation in the Middle East. (www.kremlin.ru)

Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar said that a Palestinian reconciliation agreement could be signed within a few days under Egyptian supervision. He told reporters in Gaza that "It is obvious that Egypt understands [...] that the Egyptian reconciliation document needs amendment. I expect the issue to be reconsidered and a signing to be secured". He said that Hamas' delegations had been excluded from meeting Egyptian mediators, but there had been some recent positive moves, including the meeting of 13 factions in Gaza during the visit of Fatah official Nabil Sha'ath two weeks ago. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In Doha, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told *Al-Jazeera*, "Our position is that settlement activity is illegitimate, and that the final resolution of borders has to be worked out that will give both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, the secure borders that they deserve to have", dismissing Palestinian claims that the Obama Administration had dropped its demand for Israel to halt settlement activity. (*Haaretz*)

At least 29 settlements had been violating the construction freeze, the Israeli Defense Ministry told the Knesset. Peace Now group said that it had recorded additional settlement freeze breaches, documenting at least 14 cases where new foundations had been laid after the freeze. Some of the settlements were carrying out construction work on Saturdays; other construction projects were carried out at night. (*BBC*, www.peacenow.org.il)

During a three-hour meeting, Russian Federation President Medvedev offered Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu Moscow's help in the prisoner exchange talks. Mr. Netanyahu, according to a senior source who accompanied the Prime Minister, said: "We are not pleased with your relations with Hamas, but since they exist, we can relay messages on humanitarian issues. Tell Hamas they won't get a better offer from us on the [exchange] deal". (*Haaretz*)

16

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad met with Austria's Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger in Ramallah. Mr. Fayyad reiterated the importance of European action based on the EU Foreign Ministers' [statement](#) of 8 December 2009, which he described as "a clear and balanced international stand, which will enable the international Quartet to effectively intervene and compel Israel to comply with international law and fully halt settlement activities, especially in Jerusalem". He also said that the PA had achieved major progress in governance and security, and indicated that the PA had begun implementing a two-year strategic plan aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian State. Mr. Spindelegger reiterated that the EU and Austria would abide by their commitment to reach a political solution in the Middle East and continue to support the PA two-year plan. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The World Bank issued a [report](#) entitled "Checkpoint and Barriers: Searching for Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza – Gender Dimensions of Economic Collapse". The report examines how Palestinian women have coped with the impact of a dramatic withdrawal of males from the labour market due to the closure regime. (www.worldbank.org)

Israel's High Court of Justice demanded that the Government submit a detailed timetable for the razing of 16 homes built in the unauthorized settlement outposts of "Hayovel" and "Harsha". (*Haaretz*)

PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki met with UNRWA Commissioner-General, Filippo Grandi, in Ramallah, saying UNRWA should be enabled to continue offering its services to refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the diaspora, and efforts should be undertaken to improve these services. For his part, Mr. Grandi asserted that UNRWA abided by its duties towards refugees, despite the financial deficit it faced, and called on donor countries to provide much needed financial support to the organization. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's *Channel 2 TV* reported that German mediator Gerhard Conrad would likely resume his efforts towards a prisoner swap deal with Hamas before the end of February. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli activists advocating for the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit had been attaching stickers to goods bound for Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing, printed in Hebrew and Arabic, which read, "The Hamas Government could have brought about the release of Palestinian prisoners and the lifting of the Gaza blockade with the release of Gilad Shalit". (*Ynetnews*)

A US Congressional mission, sponsored by the J Street group, would be touring Israel, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory this week. According to a J Street [statement](#), Representatives Lois Capps (D-Calif.), Bill Delahunt (D-Mass.), Bob Filner (D-Calif.), Mary Jo Kilroy (D-Ohio), and Donald Payne (D-NJ) would be participating in the mission, which would include meetings with the Israeli Government, Jordan's King Abdullah II and PA Prime Minister Fayyad. (www.jstreet.org)

17

Israeli forces detained 11 Palestinians during night raids in the West Bank. (*IMEMC*, *Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli soldiers invaded the village of Kafr ad-Dik, near Salfit. (*IMEMC*)

Israeli forces seized five Palestinians after a number of raids launched in and around Hebron. (*The Palestine Telegraph*)

Palestinian trade unions staged a demonstration at the "Sha'ar Efraim" crossing, near Tulkarm, protesting what they said were humiliating searches by a private security company there. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas' armed wing vowed to avenge the death of a senior leader it alleged had been assassinated by Israel in Dubai. "The decision has been made. We decided to respond", said Abu Obaida, the Spokesperson for the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, speaking at a mass rally in Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki hinted at the possibility of holding indirect negotiations with Israel, but said it would not be an alternative to the face-to-face talks. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told leaders of US Jewish organizations that he would be "fine" with a third party bringing the sides back to peace talks. But he said that direct talks would eventually be needed to end the conflict. Minister of Intelligence and Atomic Energy Dan Meridor said: "Nothing is finalized, but we are close". (*AP*, *The Jerusalem Post*)

During a meeting with Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, German Secretary of State Wolf-Ruthart Born stressed his country's keenness to realize stability and security in the Middle East based on the two-State solution. (*Petra*)

A pan-Arab parliamentary delegation left the Gaza Strip via Egypt after a three-day visit intended to push forward Palestinian reconciliation efforts. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) [said](#) that while the Palestinian economy had shown signs of growth and certain restrictions on the movement of Palestinians had been lifted, living a normal life was close to impossible for many people in the West Bank. "We reiterate our call on Israel to do more to protect Palestinians in the West Bank against settler violence, to safeguard their land and crops, to allow families to repair their houses and to ensure that all Palestinians can get to hospital or to school without delay", said Béatrice Megevand-Roggo, ICRC head of operations for the Middle East and North Africa. (*BBC*, *Wafa*, www.icrc.org)

Israeli settlers attacked and moderately injured a Palestinian girl in the Old City of Hebron. (*IMEMC*)

The Israeli army handed out demolition orders for two houses in the village of Khadr near Bethlehem. (*IMEMC*)

PA Minister of National Economy Hassan Abu Libdeh brainstormed with a deputy from the Italian Foreign Minister's office about ways to educate the Italian public

about Israeli settlement products and strategies for boycotting them. (Ma'an News Agency)

A senior IDF commander accused settler leaders of losing control in certain West Bank areas after 30 youths had attacked soldiers and border guards in "Yizhar", injuring three. (Haaretz)

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri promised to help raise money for rebuilding the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp by using his connections with wealthy Gulf donors, said UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi, after meeting the Prime Minister. (The Daily Star)

Dozens of wells in West Bank areas under full Israeli military and civilian control could again be dug and rehabilitated following the lifting of a suspension order, which had stalled the projects for years. (Ma'an News Agency)

UNRWA Spokesperson Chris Gunness told The Jordan Times that Canada had indicated that it wished to cut its funding to UNRWA's General Fund, and to support emergency programmes. "This is a shame as our General Fund supports our mainstream human development works – educating people, young people and we hope, making them believe in a prosperous, dignified, stable and peaceful future. So we hope that Canada will see the sense in supporting not just our emergency work, but beyond that", he stated. (The Jordan Times)

18

A senior Egyptian security source said that Egyptian Border Police had located and confiscated 3.5 tons of explosives near the border area in Rafah, ready to be smuggled into Gaza. (IMEMC, AFP)

Israeli military vehicles breached the Gaza border near Deir el-Balah. Witnesses said that the vehicles had bulldozed private lands. The incursion followed local reports of an explosion, allegedly of an anti-tank shell launched at an Israeli jeep. (Ma'an News Agency)

An Israeli soldier was lightly wounded when an explosive device detonated near the fence around the Gaza Strip, near Kibbutz Kissufim. Soldiers found another device that had not exploded. (The Jerusalem Post)

A 16-year-old Palestinian from the Jenin area was detained at a checkpoint by IDF troops while trying to smuggle two bombs into Israel. (The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

The son of prominent Palestinian peace activist, Khaled Abu-Awwad, General Manager of the Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families Forum, confessed that he had participated in an attempted attack against IDF troops last month. (Haaretz)

UN Special Coordinator Robert H. Serry told Ma'an News Agency that the Quartet would support PA demands on the Israeli Government to transfer lands from "Area B" of the West Bank to "Area A", under full Palestinian control, on the road to establishing statehood. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel and the Palestinians were looking to create conditions for a process that would end the conflict, PA Prime Minister Fayyad told prominent US Jewish leaders as they paid a visit to Jenin. He stressed that the IDF must stop its military incursions into the West Bank. (The Jerusalem Post)

The PA planned to include "Area C" of the West Bank in its strategic planning in an effort to lay the groundwork for a future State, PA Tourism Minister Khouloud Daibes said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon boycotted a US Congressional delegation led by Rep. William Delahunt (D-Mass.), due to the trip's sponsorship by the J Street Education Fund and Churches for Middle East Peace. The Israeli army also blocked the delegation from a planned tour of the Gaza Strip. The five-day trip included meetings with top Palestinian officials, the King and Prime Minister of Jordan, and members of the Knesset. (Jewish Telegraphic Agency)

Egyptian media sources reported that Cairo had informed the authorities in Libya that it objected to the participation of Hamas in the upcoming Arab Summit in Tripoli. (IMEMC)

PA Health Ministry sources reported that nine German physicians, including a professor in medicine, had arrived in Ramallah to perform delicate surgeries. (IMEMC)

The ability to bring essential commodities into Gaza, already under an Israeli blockade that was undermining health care, the economy and rehabilitation after last year's devastating Israeli offensive, was further cut in January by more crossing closures, according to the latest OCHA update. (UN News Centre)

Two Gaza crossings were expected to partially open today for the transport of limited aid, fuel and exports, a crossings liaison officer said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian sources say there had recently been a significant decline in the amount of activity in the tunnels burrowed between Gaza and Egypt. They attributed it to an influx of goods from the tunnels. The subsequent drop in prices had made the prospect of smuggling goods and digging more tunnels less attractive. (Haaretz)

The Jerusalem municipality would appropriate a plot of land in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood to build a public parking lot, despite arguments that the move was intended to benefit Jewish pilgrims and expand the Jewish presence in East Jerusalem. (Haaretz)

The Al-Aqsa Foundation for Waqf and Heritage reported that the Israeli authorities had started new excavations under the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. (IMEMC)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a five-year plan to construct "heritage trails" that would criss-cross the West Bank. (IMEMC)

Israeli forces had invaded the West Bank village of Barta'a Ash-Sharqiya to deliver eight more demolition orders, making a total of 26, residents said. (Ma'an News Agency)

UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi said in an interview: "UNRWA has no political role, but it does have the moral role of reminding all parties involved and all Governments with a say in the peace process that there will be no peace without a fair solution for refugees in line with UN resolutions". (AFP)

The UN remained deeply concerned at the current stalemate in the Middle East peace process, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe said today, voicing the hope that both the Israelis and the Palestinians would accept a proposal put forward by US Special Envoy Mitchell to begin indirect talks. "The Secretary-General hopes that President Abbas will move forward on the basis of this practical proposal so that serious talks can begin", Mr. Pascoe said in his briefing to the Security Council. "We continue to stress the importance of doing everything possible to ensure that negotiations lead in a clear time frame to an agreement resolving all final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, refugees, security, settlements and water", he stated. (UN News Centre)

19

PA President Abbas was considering his options on resuming indirect peace talks with Israel after meeting US and European diplomats this week, Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, said. "We have asked for an official meeting of Arab Ministers of the Follow-up Committee and have told them that our consultations, coordination and inquiries are still ongoing with the Americans, Europeans, Russians and the United Nations", he told Reuters. Mr. Erakat dismissed a Haaretz report that Mr. Abbas had told Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger at a meeting in Ramallah that US-mediated peace talks could resume in the coming days. An Israeli diplomatic source said: "There is no official word from the Americans or the Palestinians but there have been all kinds of messages from Western diplomats that talks could restart". There was no comment from Vienna. (Reuters)

A poll conducted by the Ramallah-based Near East Consulting group in both the West Bank and Gaza found that 48 per cent of voters would support Fatah were presidential elections to be held next week, while only 11 per cent would vote for Hamas. Ten per cent of respondents would vote for other Palestinian political parties and 31 per cent were undecided or would not vote. (The Jerusalem Post)

Israeli lawmakers are seeking a law that will make compensation for post-1948 Jewish refugees from Arab countries an integral part of any future peace negotiations.

Various interest groups are pushing the bill which will be subjected to two more rounds of Knesset hearings next week. (The Jerusalem Post)

Demonstrators protesting against the separation wall dismantled a section of the barrier during a rally marking five years since the beginning of the Bil'in protests.

About a thousand people took part in the rally, which was also attended by PA Prime Minister Fayyad. (Haaretz)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak was scheduled to visit New York next week, where he would meet UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The focus of this meeting was expected to be the Goldstone report. (Ynetnews)

20

Israeli forces wounded at least four Palestinians in a firefight in the southern Gaza Strip and two more in the West Bank as they tried to cross into Israel, Palestinian medics said. The Israeli military said that it had opened fire on Palestinian gunmen in a speeding car who attacked a military patrol west of Bethlehem. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency)

Quartet envoy Tony Blair said that he hoped Israelis and Palestinians would resume peace negotiations within weeks. "The Israelis want to get into negotiation, the Palestinians want to get into negotiation, the question is the terms", Blair told Reuters during a visit to Nigeria. (Reuters)

PA President Abbas arrived in the Libyan capital of Tripoli for a meeting with Libyan President Mu'ammarr al Qaddafi. (Palestine Press Agency)

Hundreds of Israeli demonstrators gathered in front of the Tel Aviv Cinemateque to protest what they claimed was the lack of enforcement of the settlement

construction freeze. (*Ynetnews*)

Arab States had asked the UN General Assembly to convene as soon as possible to discuss the Goldstone report. The request was formally submitted by Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa during a meeting held in Cairo with General Assembly President Ali Abdussalam Treki. (*Ynet*)

21

Israeli tanks fired several shells at Palestinians in the northwest of the Gaza Strip. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli forces stormed offices belonging to Fatah in the northern West Bank village of Beit Inrin, west of Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad called on the US to oblige Israel to take steps to pave the way for resuming stalled peace talks. Fayyad made his remarks at the reception of US Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew at his office in Ramallah. (*Xinhua*)

France had suggested that the international community might recognize a Palestinian State before its borders had been fixed in order to break a stalemate in Middle East peacemaking. Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner floated the idea in a newspaper interview, published hours before PA President Abbas arrived in Paris for talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy. (*Reuters, Journal du Dimanche*)

Israel said that it wanted to include two shrines in the occupied West Bank in a national plan to rehabilitate some 150 Jewish and Zionist heritage sites, drawing condemnation from Palestinians. (*Reuters*)

Israeli authorities opened the Kerem Shalom crossing into the southern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

During a meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, King Abdullah II of Jordan said that intensive efforts were needed to stop unilateral Israeli measures in Jerusalem, which threatened the city's holy sites and sought to evict its Christian and Muslim inhabitants. (*Petra*)

A street had collapsed near the entrance of the Bab Khan Az-Zeit market, in the Old City of Jerusalem, as a result of Israeli excavations in the area, witnesses reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli army evacuated 35 Israeli right-wing activists who had holed up in an ancient synagogue in Jericho. (*Ynetnews*)

Dozens of Israeli settlers had smashed windshields of cars passing along the Nablus-Jenin road, in the northern West Bank, and assaulted a Palestinian doctor, a PA official said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

22

A crowd of Palestinian youths pelted Israeli soldiers with stones and empty bottles, drawing tear gas and stun grenades in the most serious violence to rock Hebron in months. The clashes erupted a day after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had enraged Palestinian residents by adding a disputed Hebron shrine [Cave of the Patriarchs/ Ibrahim Mosque] to Israel's list of national heritage sites. (*AP*)

The UN Cabinet welcomed the Arab League's plan to appoint a permanent observer for Jerusalem affairs. It considered it an important step in resisting ongoing Israeli attacks on Palestinian land, including the illegal excavations in Jerusalem, land confiscation in Silwan and house demolitions in the Al-Bustan and Beit Hanina neighbourhoods. (*PA Press Statement*)

Residents of Az-Zun Atma, a village in the West Bank surrounded by the separation wall on two sides, settlements on three sides and a road barrier to the south, said that Israeli forces had recently tightened security procedures in the area. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, expressed concern over Israel's inclusion of Hebron's Cave of the Patriarchs and Bethlehem's Rachel's Tomb in the list of national heritage sites, and the "heightened tensions" that had resulted. (*AP, The Jerusalem Post*)

Authorities would open the Rafah border crossing next Monday to allow for humanitarian cases to enter or leave the Gaza Strip. It would remain open through next Wednesday. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In its weekly session held in Ramallah, the PA Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Fayyad, strongly condemned the Israeli decision considering Jerusalem's Old City walls, the Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem as Israeli heritage sites. The Cabinet called on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to condemn and to take immediate measures to force Israel to [reverse] its decision. (*PA press statement*)

In Hebron, sporadic stone throwing by Palestinian youths erupted near the Ibrahim Mosque above the Tomb of the Patriarchs, but no injuries were reported.

Meanwhile, in Bethlehem, shops and schools were closed in a day-long general strike and youth set tyres on fire in some areas. (*AFP*)

Ahmad Laban, an official with the Israeli group Ir Amin, said that the Israeli authorities had approved a plan to build 549 new homes for settlers in East Jerusalem. The new settlement is planned on Palestinian land in the neighbourhood of Beit Safafa. If built, it would interconnect the existing settlements in south Jerusalem, including "Har Homa" and "Gilo". (*Ma'an News Agency*)

23

Eight Palestinian men were detained by Israeli troops during raids in Nablus, Jenin and Tubas. (*IMEMC*)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called PA President Abbas confirming the commitment of the US Administration to finding a fair solution to the Palestinian cause through negotiations that would lead to the establishment of two States. (*Palestine Press Agency*)

In Brussels, PA President Abbas said that the creation of an independent Palestinian State was a "vital interest" of Israel. He reiterated the PA's refusal to negotiate without a total halt in settlement construction. "We all aspire to a just and lasting peace in a State that will live in peace with Israel", he said. (*AFP*)

Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak left Israel for the United States to discuss, inter alia, the possible reviving of talks with the Palestinians. Mr. Barak was to speak with US Defence Secretary Robert Gates and senior Pentagon officials, followed by a meeting in New York with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that was expected to include discussions of the Goldstone report. (*Haaretz*)

Under the name of "The waves of Israel", Israel's Communications Minister Moshe Kahlon launched a new radio station for settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. "It's a great day for pluralism in the Israeli media and for the religious-nationalist audience, which has the right to be heard", Mr. Kahlon said at a ceremony. (*AFP*)

Settlers from "Yizhar" cut down 45 olive trees in Burin, a Palestinian village near Nablus, said Ghassan Daghlis, a PA official. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas said that the Israeli decision on two sites, located in Hebron and Bethlehem, was "a serious provocation which may lead to a religious war".

The plan also drew condemnations by Egypt, Jordan and Syria. (*AFP, Ynetnews*)

Israel's Interior Ministry announced that four activists from the International Solidarity Movement, who had been expelled from Israel in the past, would be allowed entry into the country to testify during the civil suit brought against Israel's Defence Ministry by the family of Rachel Corrie, an activist killed by an IDF bulldozer in the Gaza Strip in March 2003. (*Haaretz*)

24

Witnesses said that Israeli tanks and bulldozers had invaded farmlands located near Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza, uprooted trees and opened fire at nearby homes.

Earlier in the day, it was reported that Israeli forces had opened fire near Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza, and that the Israeli navy had opened fire at fishermen, also in Beit Lahia. No injuries were reported. (*IMEMC*)

Medical sources in Jerusalem reported that several Palestinian residents had been wounded during clashes with Israeli settlers and soldiers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem. (*IMEMC*)

Gazans collecting small stones and concrete rubble in the As-Saifa area for construction projects were targeted by Israeli fire from a military patrol and navy ships.

The workers escaped unharmed, residents said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli troops detained 14 Palestinian civilians during predawn raids in Bethlehem, Hebron, Tulkarm, Jenin, Nablus and Ramallah. (*IMEMC*)

At a joint press conference, the President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, and PA President Abbas agreed that the peace process should start on a solid basis, which should include the two-State solution; Jerusalem as the capital of two States; an urgent resumption of negotiations on security, refugees, water and borders; an end to the blockade on Gaza; and state building efforts. (*Wafa*)

Speaking at a demonstration in Gaza, Hamas Spokesperson Yousef Farahat threatened to strike Israel in response to its decision to place West Bank holy sites on its national heritage list. At the same time, *Ma'an News Agency* reported that, according to the Hebrew-language daily *Ma'ariv*, settlers called on Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to add two additional Hebron sites to the list. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Yasser Abed Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the PLO, said that, in light of the Israeli decision to declare sites in Palestinian areas "Israeli heritage sites", the PLO would reject any kind of negotiations, even indirect talks, with the Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Dozens of Palestinians hurled rocks at Israeli security forces and set tires on fire near the Cave of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) in Hebron. Two Palestinians were injured and four were arrested. The clash began during a demonstration against the decision to add the site to the Israeli National Heritage Programme. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

In a meeting with the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, Israeli President Shimon Peres said that Israel respected every holy

place and was not interested in “monopolizing” the sites of the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel’s Tomb, and that it did not need “artificial conflicts” sparked by a “misunderstanding”. The statement came a day after President Abbas’ warning of “religious war” over Israel’s decision to place the sites on its heritage sites list.

(*The Jerusalem Post*)

At a news conference with High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, Catherine Ashton, Russian Federation Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that a ministerial-level meeting of the Quartet would take place in Moscow on 19 March. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Jerusalem municipal inspectors, accompanied by security forces, distributed demolition notices to owners of buildings constructed without permits in Silwan, in East Jerusalem. (*Ynetnews*)

It was reported that right-wing settler activists had begun organizing a campaign against the new Palestinian city of Rawabi, which recently began taking shape in the West Bank. The activists claimed that the new city would cause traffic jams, pollution, security issues and that it would only benefit Palestinian elites. (*Haaretz*)

The Israeli construction company, Neot Hapisga Modi’in Ilit, had filed a lawsuit against the Israeli Defense Ministry, demanding NIS 171 million in compensation for losses it had sustained due to the temporary construction freeze. (*Haaretz*)

Israel Army Radio reported that military police had ended two investigations into the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields during Operation Cast Lead after concluding that there had been no basis for the claims. The army had been probing allegations in the Goldstone report that IDF troops had intentionally hid behind non-combatants during the offensive. The military advocate general, Major General Avichai Mandelblit, had ordered the files to be closed after investigators interviewed Gaza residents involved in the fighting. (*Haaretz*)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, defended the Goldstone report, saying both its methods and conclusions were sound. (*Reuters*)

In a meeting with Israel’s Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed concern at the situation in Gaza, as well as with recent developments on the ground, including new demolition orders in East Jerusalem and the inclusion of holy sites in the occupied West Bank on an Israeli heritage list.

(*UN News Centre*)

The Bureau of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued a statement, calling on the Government of Israel to retract the announcement that it would include West Bank sites on its national heritage list and refrain completely from any other actions that might undermine the chances of restarting the Israeli-Palestinian permanent status negotiations. (*UN News Centre*)

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Twenty wanted Palestinians were arrested by the IDF overnight in the West Bank. (www.idf.il)

A Palestinian had been injured by Israeli shelling south-east of Gaza City. (*Petra*)

During a protest in Hebron commemorating the killing of dozens of Muslims by Jewish radical Baruch Goldstein at the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) 16 years ago, 300 Palestinian clashed with Israeli security forces. Among the protesters were some 30 Israelis. Two Palestinians were reported to have been hurt.

(*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

According to medics, Israeli forces shot and wounded a Palestinian man in Gaza City. While acknowledging that warning shots were fired as a Palestinian had approached the border area near Ash-Shujaiya, an Israeli military spokesperson said that they “did not recognize a hit”. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

The Tulkarem Agricultural Union reported that one of its members had been beaten by Israeli security forces at the Jubara checkpoint while on his way to agricultural land near Tulkarem. The union said that this was the fourth such incident this year. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, had denied reports that indirect talks between Israel and the PA were going to start next week.

He said that PA President Abbas was still on an Arab and European tour to discuss the US offer. (*Xinhua*)

PA National Economy Minister Hassan Abu Libdeh held talks with Quartet officials in Ramallah in preparation for a second Bethlehem investment conference.

(*Ma’an News Agency*)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak decided to impose a full closure of the West Bank for the duration of Purim. (*Ynetnews*)

A Spokesperson for the US State Department, Mark Toner, characterized the Israeli decision to include West Bank sites on its national heritage list as “provocative” and unhelpful to the goal of getting the two sides back to the negotiating table. (*AP*)

British Legislator, George Galloway, said that the NGO Viva Palestina was preparing to send another humanitarian aid convoy to Gaza in June. (*IMEMC*)

An Arab League Council meeting, chaired by the Syrian Arab Republic, focused on ways to counter Israeli plans to expand the control of Jerusalem to Judaize the city and end the Arab presence there. (*SANA*)

More than 500 settlers entered Nablus under heavy military guard to perform their religious rites at Prophet Joseph’s Tomb. (*Petra*)

An Irish delegation, headed by the Foreign Minister of Ireland, Michael Martin, arrived in the Gaza Strip via the Rafah Border Terminal, and was received by representatives of the United Nations office in Gaza. (*IMEMC*)

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk, told *Ma’an News Agency* that a vote expected in the General Assembly on Friday, to give the Israeli and Palestinian authorities five more months to investigate the war crimes charges contained in the Goldstone report, was part of a wider effort to bury the report’s recommendations. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

“[Settlement] products originating in the West Bank do not fall within the territorial scope of the [EU]-Israel agreement and do not therefore qualify for preferential treatment under that agreement”, the European Court of Justice ruled after German manufacturer Brita had applied to import products made in the settlement of “Mishor Adumin” duty-free. (*Deutsche Welle*)

Israel would build another 600 settler homes in East Jerusalem, near the “Pisgat Ze’ev” settlement and in Shu’fat, according to a plan approved by a district planning committee. The record of the committee’s meeting stated that the project had been scaled down from 1,100 to 600 housing units because of land ownership issues.

Palestinian official Ghassan Khatib denounced the decision as “another Israeli violation of international law”, according to *Reuters*. (*BBC, Haaretz, Reuters*)

According to Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, medical supplies, including a CT scanner, had been transferred to Gaza Strip hospitals. (*IMEMC*)

Mahmoud Al-Habbash, PA Minister of Waqf and Religious Affairs, led prayers at Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi in Hebron, which was under PA control, he said. The prayer was attended by Prime Minister Fayyad, who defined the Israeli heritage sites decision as “a political move strengthening the Palestinians’ devotion to their land and holy places”, which would not drag the Palestinians into violence. Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces resumed after the prayers. (*The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews*)

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova [expressed](http://www.unesco.org) her concern at the inclusion of Hebron and Bethlehem sites in Israel’s list of national heritage sites. In her statement, she also expressed concern at the resulting escalation of tension in the area. (www.unesco.org)

The General Assembly adopted by 98 votes in favour and 7 against, with 31 abstentions, a resolution calling on Israel and the Palestinian side to conduct investigations [of Goldstone report allegations] that were “independent, credible and in conformity with international standards”, and requesting the Secretary-General to report in five months on its implementation. (*AFP*)

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Two Palestinians were detained in Ramallah and Nablus. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

The Spokesperson for the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, issued the following statement: “The High Representative regards the recent decision by the Government of Israel to add sites in Hebron and Bethlehem to the list of Israeli national heritage sites as detrimental to attempts to relaunch peace negotiations. The European Union calls on Israel to refrain from provocative acts. The European Union recognizes the importance of these religious sites to all three Abrahamic faiths and supports the principle of access for all”. (www.consilium.europa.eu)

The second round of the joint PA-EU Human Rights, Good Governance and Rule of Law Sub-Committee [took place](#) in Brussels. Christian Berger, the Representative of the EU, said, “Prime Minister Fayyad has made enormous progress in preparing the Palestinian Authority for statehood based on the rule of law and in the spirit of good governance, even under the current difficult political environment. The EU is working in close partnership with the Palestinian Authority

to assist its efforts in the field of human rights, good governance and the rule of law on the basis of jointly agreed objectives". (www.delwbg.ec.europa.eu)

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Israeli soldiers opened fire on a Palestinian car travelling near the village of Husan near Bethlehem. Four members of the same family sustained light to moderate injuries in the shooting. (Ynetnews)

The IDF arrested three Palestinians. (Ynetnews)

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Israeli police entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem and fired tear gas and rubber bullets after Palestinians had thrown stones at visitors to the site, according to witnesses. Palestinian officials said that word had spread that religious Jews planned to enter the compound. Israeli police had arrested seven Palestinians, and four policemen had been injured by rocks, Israeli police Spokesperson Micky Rosenfeld said. Palestinian medical sources said that three Palestinians had been taken to hospital with injuries caused by rubber bullets. Others were being treated for tear gas inhalation. (Reuters)

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes, [arrived](#) in Jerusalem to review the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory more than a year after the end of Operation Cast Lead. Mr. Holmes would travel to Gaza, Tel Aviv, parts of "Area C" in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. (www.ochaopt.org)
