

Division for Palestinian Rights  
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the  
 Question of Palestine**  
 Monthly media monitoring review  
**December 2008**

*Monthly highlights*

- UN Human Rights Council adopts 99 recommendations to Israel after review of its human rights record. ([9 December](#))
- UN Latin American and Caribbean Meeting, Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace held in Santiago, Chile. ([11](#) & [12 December](#))
- Quartet meets in New York. ([15 December](#))
- Israel detains and deports UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. ([15 December](#))
- Security Council adopts resolution supporting the Annapolis process. ([16 December](#))
- Hamas announces expiration of ceasefire with Israel. ([18 December](#))
- Israel begins bombing of Gaza Strip, killing 364 Palestinians in 3 days. ([27 December](#))
- Israel rejects 48-hour ceasefire proposed by France. ([31 December](#))

**1**

A Qassam rocket exploded in an open area near a kibbutz south of the Israeli city of Ashkelon. There were no reports of injuries or damage. (*Ynetnews*)

*Haaretz* correspondent Amira Hass was arrested by Israeli police at the Erez checkpoint for having entered the Gaza Strip without a permit. (*Haaretz*)

Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riad Malki said Israel had asked the Palestinian Authority (PA) to remove 550 members of its security forces from Hebron who had been deployed for over two months. "The Palestinian Government has expressed deep concern over this Israeli decision. ... We are following this matter at the highest levels to make sure that the security plan for Hebron continues uninterrupted," he told a news conference in Ramallah after a regular cabinet meeting. Mr. Malki said he believed the reason for the Israeli decision was a flare-up in tension between Israeli settlers and Palestinians in Hebron. (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA)*)

An internal European Union (EU) document outlining an EU plan for advancing an Israeli-Palestinian accord in 2009, a copy of which was obtained by *Haaretz*, calls for increased pressure on Israel to re-open Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, including Orient House. The document was written by the Foreign Ministry of France, the holder of the current EU presidency. The document, entitled "The EU Action Strategy for Peace in the Middle East: The Way Forward," is slated to be discussed next week at a meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers. It proposes various steps the EU should take in 2009 on both the Palestinian and Syrian tracks, with emphasis on the former, and states that the EU must encourage the newly-elected US Administration to be actively engaged in Israeli-Palestinian talks. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli warships prevented a cargo vessel from Libya, laden with 3,000 tons of goods, from reaching the Gaza Strip. The ship was stopped several kilometres off Gaza's shores and ordered to return to the Egyptian port of El-Arish, said Jamal Khodary, who heads an international campaign against the Israeli sanctions. Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said: "Navy ships approached the Libyan boat and ordered it on the radio to turn back, and so it did. ... Anyone wishing to transfer humanitarian aid into Gaza is welcome to do it in coordination with Israel and through the regular crossings. They can also contact Egypt." (*AFP*)

A Qatari charity said it planned to ship a ton of medical aid to the Gaza Strip in a bid to defy an Israeli blockade. "We intend to send a boat in a symbolic gesture, carrying a ton of medicine to our brothers in Gaza," said Abdallah al-Nimaa, vice-president of the Qatar Charity Organisation. He said that the ship was set to sail from Doha on 5 December. (*AFP*)

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) warned that its school feeding program for 200,000 Gaza Strip children had been operating on credit with vendors, but would be forced to stop shortly because of the cash shortage in Gaza. (*Wafa*)

**2**

Israeli forces killed two Palestinian youths, aged 15 and 17, in an air strike and wounded two others during an operation near Rafah, after tanks rolled into the area, witnesses and medical sources said. (*Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua*)

Israeli undercover forces killed a Palestinian activist formerly associated with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, Palestinian security sources and witnesses said. Palestinian officials said the militant had been granted amnesty by Israel and accused Israel of violating the agreement. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua*)

Israeli forces seized nine Palestinians during overnight raids in Jenin, Ramallah and Bethlehem. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

An Israeli military court convicted Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker Abdel-Aziz Dweik of membership in Hamas. He had been arrested in August 2006. (*AP*)

The PA security presence in Hebron would continue to expand despite Israel's call for the new forces to be withdrawn, PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas launched a series of talks with other Palestinian factions to discuss the future of the ceasefire. Ayman Taha, a Hamas spokesman, said that

the first session of the talks would comprise Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Meetings with the remaining factions were supposed to be completed by the following week. "Hamas has no vision to try imposing it on the factions and everything relating to the lull would be subject for discussions," Mr. Taha said. (*Xinhua*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad called on the international community to take complete responsibility for the peace process, especially in light of Israel's ongoing violations of signed agreements. He also called on the European Union to "think long and hard" before raising its cooperation level with Israel. Mr. Fayyad urged the international community to exert efforts to lift the Gaza siege. Mr. Fayyad's comments came during a ceremony in Ramallah launching a \$57 million USAID-funded project to develop the city's health sector. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told the European Parliament: "Even if it takes more time, we do not need intervention by the international community [in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations] with bridging proposals... The only way in which we can support the process, and that can be the role of Europe, is not by bridging gaps or relating to your position on core issues, I think that this is destructive ... but to support the process." (*Reuters*)

A public opinion [poll](#) conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, published during the twentieth anniversary of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, concluded that 37.2 per cent of Palestinians had no confidence in the possibility of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, while 34.8 per cent said they were less confident and 25 per cent said they were more confident. Pessimism prevailed among a majority (52.6 per cent) with regard to the success of Egypt's mediation to end the Palestinian internal split. ([www.jmcc.org](http://www.jmcc.org))

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad warned that civil servants in the Gaza Strip would not receive their monthly salaries unless Israel authorized cash transfers to the territory, adding that the issue was all the more pressing as Muslims prepared to celebrate religious holidays next week. (*AFP*)

A shortage of basic medical supplies had left Gaza's Shifa hospital with only 20 per cent of the oxygen supply it needed, Gaza medical officials said.

Fifty per cent of hospital equipment at Shifa had stopped functioning due to the lack of electricity and spare parts and 95 basic medications were out of stock. Asthma patients waiting for inhalers were being turned away. (*IRIN*)

OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) announced that it would donate \$3 million to UNRWA to buy food aid medicines to cope with the emergency situation in Gaza. ([www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org))

UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd accused Israel of extending its collective punishment of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to include humanitarian international staff. She said Israeli authorities had within the past month stopped UN staff based in Gaza from using the diplomatic pouch. They gave no reason for the move, which was a clear breach of international law. (*The Independent*)

Radical Israeli settlers rioted in Hebron, threw stones at Palestinians and at Israeli police and soldiers, spray-painted slogans and damaged graves. Local Palestinians also threw stones at the settlers. Palestinians reported at least 36 wounded, including a photojournalist, and the settlers reported some 18 injured. An Israeli police spokesman said that two settlers had been arrested. The rioting erupted after some 1,500 settlers had arrived in Hebron amid rumours that the Israeli authorities were about to forcibly evacuate a house illegally occupied by settlers. (*DPA, Ma'an News Agency, WAFA*)

Lawmakers at the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee told visiting Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that her country had to do more to stop the expansion of West Bank settlements, which was threatening Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. Ms Livni responded: "We are not trying to use or abuse the period of time in which we negotiate in order to have more land, or to get more land from the Palestinians." She said "minor" efforts by some settler groups in Hebron to expand their settlements would not derail peace talks or efforts to set up a Palestinian State. (*AP*)

The PA and European Commission held the first meeting of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Good Governance and the Rule of Law, a joint body formed to provide a forum to review progress in these three areas. The other joint subcommittees, which will convene in early 2009, are the Economic and Financial Matters, Trade, and Customs Issues Subcommittee, the Social Affairs Subcommittee and the Energy, Environment, Transport, Science and Technology Subcommittee. (*WAFA*)

3

Gaza Strip militants fired three rockets into the western Negev which struck open areas near a kibbutz. Earlier in the day they fired mortar shells into Israel, one of which damaged a power cable transferring electricity to the Gaza Strip, according to *Israeli Army Radio*. In a statement, the armed wing of Hamas said it had fired several mortar shells, targeting Israeli border communities near the Gaza Strip and army posts. (*Haaretz, Xinhua*)

A 31-year-old Palestinian from East Jerusalem was seriously wounded in Jerusalem in a stabbing that he said had been perpetrated by religious Jews near the ultra-Orthodox area of Mea She'arim. (*Haaretz*)

Security forces affiliated with Hamas in the Gaza Strip freed three journalists close to Fatah who had been arrested more than two months ago. (*AFP*)

*Newsweek* reported that US President-elect Barack Obama was considering a deployment of NATO forces to the West Bank as part of a plan for resolving the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Former US-National Security Advisors Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski have reportedly endorsed the strategy in recent days. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Chairman of NATO Military Committee, Admiral Giampaolo di Paola, told *Haaretz* that diplomatic, not military, consideration would determine whether or not NATO would decide to deploy forces along the Israeli-Syrian border or in the Israeli-Palestinian sector. When asked whether NATO was preparing contingency plans, in the event that member States expressed willingness to deploy a peace force to the region, and whether NATO had sufficient forces for such a mission, Admiral Di Paola noted that three conditions laid down by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer were needed to deploy NATO forces: a diplomatic agreement, an invitation from the parties and the agreement of the Security Council. A senior NATO official added that it would be easy to allocate units for such a mission out of NATO's approximately three million uniformed troops. (*Haaretz*)

The Security Council held a meeting at the request of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to discuss what was described as Israel's refusal to allow a Libyan vessel carrying humanitarian supplies to reach the port of Gaza. A letter addressed to the Security Council by the Permanent Mission of Libya to the United Nations stated that the Israeli navy had intercepted the vessel, the Al-Marwa, which was headed to Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid for children and sick people, who were suffering due to the blockade of Gaza. Libya's representative said that the ship should be allowed to deliver its cargo, and that the UN and humanitarian organizations like the International Red Cross and Red Crescent could inspect the ship to verify that it only carried food and medicine. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

The European Union announced a €14.8 million contribution through PEGASE to pay salaries and pensions of 78,000 Palestinian beneficiaries. ([www.delwbg.ec.europa.eu](http://www.delwbg.ec.europa.eu))

Leaders of the Israeli Arab community said they would head to Gaza on a boat laden with humanitarian aid in defiance of their Government's

blockade of the territory. Zahi Nujeidat, a spokesman for Israel's Islamic Movement, said dozens of Arab Israelis would set sail on 7 December from the port of Jaffa. At the same time, the Qatari Charity group said it would send a ship with humanitarian aid to Gaza from Cyprus, despite the Israeli blockade. (*Haaretz*)

Hebron settlers accused Israeli security forces of throwing stun grenades at them during clashes which had erupted earlier in the day. Hebron settler leader Noam Arnon said that border police and Israeli police were to blame for the recent escalation of violence. Public Security Minister Avi Dichter called for a mutual understanding to be reached ahead of the evacuation of the house in which Hebron settlers had barricaded themselves, adding: "However, if need be, the security system will use force". Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak was scheduled to meet with settler leaders the following day. (*Haaretz*)

Under the auspices of the Catholic Relief Services and the Federation of Youth Foundations, a conference entitled "Hand in hand towards unified Palestine" was held in Gaza City. Director of UNRWA Operations in the Gaza Strip John Ging, who attended the conference, said that "the world should be embarrassed of being a passive onlooker to the deterioration of the" living conditions in the Gaza Strip and called on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair, in a meeting at the Council on Foreign Relations said that "slender and real grounds for hope" existed to advance negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians but urged swift and concerted actions by international and local actors to restore credibility to the peace talks. He also said that "the political process and changing the reality on the ground have to march in lockstep." ([www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org))

4

Two Israeli teenagers were arrested for alleged involvement in the stabbing of a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem. (*The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews*)

A mortar shell fired from the Gaza Strip landed in an open field near a kibbutz in Israel's western Negev region. A Qassam rocket landed in an open area near the southern Israeli town of Sderot. No injuries or damage were reported. (*Ynetnews*)

Hamas said that a ceasefire due to expire later this month would not be renewed if Israel continued to violate its terms. "Hamas and the Palestinian factions hold internal consultations to make a decision regarding the lull with the Zionist occupation ... the lull would not be extended under the aggressions and siege against our people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank," said Khalil al-Haya, a Hamas member in the Gaza Strip. (*Xinhua*)

The PA was planning to replace all Hamas-controlled municipal and village councils in the West Bank in the coming weeks, PA officials in Ramallah told *The Jerusalem Post*. They said that the decision was aimed at paving the way for the extension of PA President Abbas' term after it ends on 9 January. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

The European Parliament suspended its vote on whether or not to upgrade EU-Israel relations in the wake of increasing unrest around Israeli settlement building policies and the continued Gaza siege. Vice-President of the European Parliament Luisa Morgantini issued a statement about the decision saying, "It's time for the Israeli Government to stop considering itself above the law and start respecting it." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel decided to open a cargo crossing into Gaza Strip to allow delivery of limited amounts of vital aid. "The Israeli side told us that Kerem Shalom would open for 40 trucks with food, aid and medical supplies," said Nasser al-Sarraj, an official at the PA Ministry of Economy. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak authorized 70 trucks carrying food and basic supplies to enter the Strip, his office said in a statement. The Defence Minister's office said that the decision to allow some aid into Gaza was a goodwill gesture ahead of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. Israeli military spokesman Peter Lerner said an entry ban on international aid workers had also been lifted. Israel also lifted the four-week ban on international journalists entering the Gaza Strip. (*AP, BBC, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua*)

Jordanian Foreign Minister Salah Bashir conferred with United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry and urged the world community to put pressure on Israel to end the blockade of the Gaza Strip, according to a Foreign Ministry statement. "The Minister underscored the importance of prompt action by the world community to end the sufferings of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip by ending the Israeli siege of the territory and re-opening crossing points to humanitarian and food aid," the statement said. Mr. Bashir also stressed the UN role in pushing forward the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians "with a view to reaching a settlement based on the two-State solution," according to the statement. For his part, Mr. Serry "renewed UN commitment to boost the process of peace and stability in the Middle East and commended Jordan's role" in this respect, the statement added. (*DPA*)

Bank branches across the Gaza Strip stopped operations. Signs posted at several branches read: "The Bank is closed because of the occupation's ban on cash entry". (*Reuters, Xinhua*)

Two ships from Qatar would attempt to enter Gaza waters during the Eid holiday with \$2 million in medical supplies and a delegation of Qatari dignitaries, said Jamal al-Khudari, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Some of the delegates set to be on board the ship would include members of the Qatar Charitable Organization, including its General Director. The Governor of Qatar, Nasser Al-Qa'bi, would sail on the ship, as well as member of the charitable organization Hassan Abdel Rahim. Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor said that the Israeli Government would respond to each case on an individual basis. He also said that there was a difference between a boat coming from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and one coming from Qatar, a country with whom Israel has diplomatic relations, and in whose capital it had a trade representation.

(*The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli security forces stormed the Palestinian house occupied by settlers in Hebron and removed some 250 settlers barricaded inside. Around 20 people were injured in clashes, and a police officer was hurt when settlers threw acid in his eyes. After security forces cleared the house, right-wing activists damaged Palestinian property in the village of Burin. Jewish youths from the "Kiryat Arba" settlement started lighting fires, throwing stones at Palestinian homes, knocking down satellite dishes and torching olive trees. A settler from "Kiryat Arba" opened fire on a Palestinian crowd, wounding two people — a man in his late sixties suffered an arm injury and another man in his fifties sustained a chest injury. (*AFP, AP, Haaretz, The Guardian, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews*)

5

Israel arrested in Ramallah a Palestinian affiliated with Hamas. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A Qassam rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in an open area near a kibbutz in Israel's Negev region. There were no injuries or damage. (*Ynetnews*)

Settlers from the "Avne Hefez" settlement destroyed 80 olive trees only recently planted by a Palestinian farmer near Tulkarm in the northern West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Palestinian Authority said that it would ask the UN Security Council for an urgent meeting to discuss attacks by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank. "We will ask the Security Council to send an armed force to protect our Palestinian people, particularly in Hebron," PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki told reporters in Ramallah after meeting with foreign diplomats. He said the PA would ask the Council to demand the removal of all settlers from the city, and that those responsible for going on a rampage against Palestinians in Hebron be brought to justice. Settlers, reacting to the forced evacuation of a disputed house by Israeli authorities, had been attacking Palestinian civilians and property in Hebron, throwing stones, lighting fires, desecrating graves and even firing live ammunition. (*DPA*)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry condemned settler violence against Palestinians, calling for an immediate end to such attacks. “As the Occupying Power, the Government of Israel is under obligation to protect Palestinian civilians, property and holy sites,” he said. He denounced the destruction of Palestinian property and the desecration of mosques and graves, as well as settler attacks on Israeli security forces. He added that extremists’ actions continued to pose a threat to the peace process. (DPA, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

The Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review Working Group [reviewed](#) the fulfilment of human rights obligations by Israel. During the review, 54 Council members and observers raised a number of issues pertaining to the human rights situation in the country. A number of delegations posed specific recommendations, among others, end the occupation of all Palestinian and Arab Territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan; to respect the rights of the Palestinian to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital; to fully implement the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and to dismantle the separation wall; to end all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular in and around Jerusalem; to immediately cease Israeli military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to lift the closure imposed on the Gaza Strip; to reopen the passage to and from the Gaza Strip; to fully respect its human rights obligations, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; to halt house demolitions in East Jerusalem; and for the international community to do its utmost to resolve the crisis in the Middle East. ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org))

6

Israeli tanks, warplanes and helicopters entered the Gaza Strip in pursuit of Palestinian militants preparing to launch projectiles at Israeli targets. One militant was killed and another seriously injured. (Ma’an News Agency)

Israeli Defence Minister Barak rejected an agreement reached between Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani allowing a Qatari ship to dock at Ashdod to unload humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip. Qatari officials expressed disappointment over the decision, and some Israeli officials said it could damage ties with Qatar. (Haaretz)

7

Two Palestinian militants were injured by an Israeli artillery shell in the Al-Faraheen neighbourhood of Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. According to the Popular Resistance Committees, Israeli forces had fired from close range from the Kissufim military base east of Khan Yunis. (Ma’an News Agency)

Palestinians fired six Qassam rockets and five mortar shells at southern Israel. One of the rockets landed near Sderot and others fell on open areas.

No injuries or damage were reported. The Israeli Air Force attacked a rocket launcher in Gaza. There was no report of casualties. (Haaretz)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad met Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak and asked him to allow Israeli banks to transfer cash to the Gaza Strip where the shortage of bank notes had forced banks to shut down. The meeting also addressed the easing of Israeli access restrictions for the Eid al-Adha holiday. (Ma’an News Agency)

The Gaza Strip power plant ran out of fuel and ceased operating completely, plunging half of the Gaza Strip into darkness. Israel had last allowed 400,000 litres of fuel into Gaza on 3 December. (Ma’an News Agency)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert compared the violence used by settlers against Palestinians in Hebron to a “pogrom.” He said he was ashamed of recent scenes in Hebron. (BBC)

The Israeli ministerial committee overseeing the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails approved the release of 230 prisoners as a gesture of goodwill toward the PA ahead of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. The Cabinet had earlier approved a list of 250 prisoners, but some 20 names were removed from the original list following objections of several ministers, who were opposed to releasing prisoners into the Gaza Strip.

(Haaretz)

A ship that had been slated to sail from Jaffa to the Gaza Strip was halted before ever leaving port, after Israeli police warned the ship’s owner that he could be charged with a crime. The ship was to have carried a cargo of medicines and other supplies, along with several Arab Knesset members. (Haaretz, Reuters)

8

Israel reinstated a ban on international journalists entering the Gaza Strip, despite protests from the heads of major news organizations and an appeal to the Israeli High Court. The ban had been lifted on 3 December. Israeli military spokesperson Peter Lerner said that the closure, including the press ban, would be reviewed daily. The High Court had given the Government until 10 December to respond to the legal challenge, and had set a date for a hearing on the issue later this month. (AP)

Dozens of settlers from the nearly “Migdalim” settlement stormed the Duma Mosque near Nablus, opening fire on the building and attacking the Imam. (Ma’an News Agency)

It was announced that the Palestinian prisoner release would be postponed to 15 December. (BBC, Haaretz, Ma’an News Agency)

9

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni warned that the consequences of renewed Palestinian rockets into Israeli territory might be much tougher than yet another closure. She said: “A (military) response is important; even if it doesn’t automatically end the Palestinian rocket fire, there is something important in the impression, and Israel’s deterrence ability.” She also said she was “ashamed to call what is currently happening [in Gaza] a ceasefire.” (The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Israel temporarily reopened some border crossings with the Gaza Strip to allow in minimum shipments of humanitarian aid. The shipments included diesel fuel for Gaza’s only power plant. The military said cargo and passenger crossings were reopened because of a lull in attacks by Gaza militants the day earlier. (AP, BBC, Ma’an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Israel released a 47-year-old member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) Nizar Abdel Aziz Ramadan who had been held in prison for three years, following a court ruling which acquitted him of all charges. Forty other members of the PLC remained in Israeli prisons. (Ma’an News Agency)

The UN Human Rights Council adopted by consensus a list of 99 recommendations to Israel, at the end of a two-day review of Israel’s human rights records from lifting its blockade on Gaza to releasing Palestinian prisoners. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

In a [statement](#), UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory Richard Falk called on the United Nations to make an “urgent effort to implement the agreed norms of responsibility to protect a civilian populations being collectively punished by the policies that amount to a Crime Against Humanity ... In a similar vein, it would be mandatory for the International Criminal Court to investigate the situation, and determine whether the Israeli civilian leaders and military commanders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and prosecuted for violations of international criminal law.” He also said that “such a flurry of denunciations by normally cautious UN officials has not occurred on a global level since on the heyday of South African apartheid ... and still Israel maintains its Gaza siege in its full fury, allowing only barely enough food and fuel to



enter to stave off mass famine and disease.” (AFP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, [www.unog.ch](http://www.unog.ch))

## 10

A Qassam rocket fired from the Gaza Strip exploded in Israel. No injuries or damage were reported in the attack. (Haaretz, Ynetnews)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met with Defence Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to discuss the future of Israel's policy in the Gaza Strip. The Prime Minister would not allow any details of the meeting to be released to the public. The Defence Minister, in a visit to northern Israel, said, “We will take action in the right place and time, with consideration and responsibility.” (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

Nobel Peace Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari said: “The most challenging peace-building project ahead of us is finding a solution to the conflicts in the Middle East.” He hoped “that the new President of the United States ... will give high priority to the Middle East conflict during his first year in office. The European Union, Russia and the United Nations must also be seriously committed so that a solution can be found to the crises stretching from Israel and Palestine to Iraq and Iran. If we want to achieve lasting results, we must look at the whole region.” (BBC, Haaretz)

The Jerusalem Magistrates Court indicted Ze'ev Braude, the settler who was caught on film shooting at Palestinians last week, following the evacuation of a Palestinian house in Hebron. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

French co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 91-year-old Stephane Hessel, was awarded a UNESCO prize on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the document. Mr. Hessel said: “No one dares to criticize Israel out of the fear of being branded anti-Semitic. One must overcome this reticence and support those in Israel who want peace.” (DPA)

Israel allowed the fourth boat sent by the Free Gaza Movement, named “Dignity,” to sail from Cyprus into the Gaza Strip. On board were medical volunteers, activists and academics. “We came here to help some students to get out so they can continue their studying. We will bring some back with us,” said Mike Cushman, a Professor at the London School of Economics. The boat also brought a ton of medical supplies, including baby formula. (AFP, BBC, Xinhua)

The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme issued a plea on behalf of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, on the occasion of the International Day of Declaration of Human Rights. “The Palestinian people are witnessing tremendous violations of their rights. Moreover, Israel has continued tightening its strict political and economical siege, as well as partitioning the whole Occupied Palestinian Territory and restricting freedom of movement, controlling the Palestinian civil life, and converting the Gaza Strip into a huge prison,” the group said. The group also called the anniversary “a coincidence” as it was also “the anniversary of the Palestinian uprooting in 1948, still experienced by Palestinians up until today.” (Ma'an News Agency)

Iran's Red Crescent announced that it would send a relief ship to the Gaza Strip. “We are sending a consignment of 1,000 tonnes on a ship to Gaza beginning of next week ... There is a possibility of our ship being blocked just as the Libyan ship was blocked,” said Red Crescent Secretary-General Ahmad Moussavi. (Ynetnews)

Sixteen donors pledged contributions to UNRWA's 2009 budget, with several Governments expressing their intention to announce their pledges at a later date. From a peak of just over \$60 million in early 2006, UNRWA's cash reserves would be down to \$1 million by the end of December, enough for less than a day's average expenditure. Pledges amounting to 64 per cent of the \$237 million requested had been received so far. ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org), Press release PAL/2109)

## 11

PA President Abbas pledged to carry on peace negotiations with Israel regardless of who was elected Prime Minister in the upcoming Israeli elections. He also said that the domestic crisis in Israel had hampered progress in the current talks. He added: “We received a promise from [US President-elect] Barack Obama twice – once during the campaign and once when he visited me – that the peace process would be a top priority.” (Haaretz, Ynetnews)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad expressed deep disappointment with the EU decision of 8 December to upgrade relations with Israel. He described it as the wrong message and said that the EU “had wasted a great chance to positively impact Israel to comply with the provisions of international law and also comply with the spirit of the agreement between the EU and Israel and respect human rights.” PA President Abbas' Advisor for Political Affairs, Nimr Hammad, said that “this, coming at the time when escalation and attacks in Hebron are taking place, conveys a negative message from the EU, taking the position that Israel wants.” He added that such a decision should be related to the progress of the peace process in the Middle East as a whole. He also urged the EU to boycott Israeli settlements' products. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency, Wafa)

Fatah representative in Cairo Barakat al-Farra called on Palestinian factions to help make the Egyptian intra-Palestinian mediation efforts a success and urged the Palestinians groups to return to the national unity dialogue. (Xinhua)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said: “When the Palestinian State is created, I will be able to go to Palestinian citizens – who we call Israeli Arabs – and say to them: ‘You are residents with equal rights, but your national solution is in another place. The principle is the creation of two States for two peoples. This is my path to a democratic State.’” Israel's Culture, Sports and Science Minister Ghaleb Majadele said: “Anyone who raises the idea of transferring the Arab population in Israel to the territories of the State of Palestine is anti-democratic.” (Haaretz)

Israel's Likud Party chairman Benjamin Netanyahu's aide said that Mr. Netanyahu wanted to continue talks with the Palestinians on tangible issues that could be carried out on the ground, such as the economy and living conditions, while leaving aside the core issues for now. His aide, Dina Libster, said, “Netanyahu does not oppose the continuation of talks but he believes that the current negotiations are leading nowhere and their goal is not clear.” (AFP)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair told a press conference at Yale University that US President-elect Barack Obama's goals in the Middle East were on the right track. “I believe he will make it a key priority. I think he understands it very well, and the team he has chosen, Hillary Clinton and Jim Jones, are both people who are really up to speed on the issues.” He called for a better policy for the Gaza Strip, saying the international community needed to be helping the 1.4 million Gaza residents, not harming them. (AP, The New Haven Register)

Israeli officials informed Gaza residents that the Kerem Shalom crossing in the south of the Gaza Strip would be open for the transfer of humanitarian aid for the third day. PA Ministry of National Economy assistant Nasser As-Saraj said that his office had been informed that 55 trucks of humanitarian aid, 25 trucks from relief agencies and 30 trucks from the private sector, would be allowed into Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

An armoured truck carrying NIS 100 million (\$25 million) arrived in the Gaza Strip, a day after Defence Minister Ehud Barak approved the transfer to ease the cash shortage. It was the first time Israel had allowed the entry of money into Gaza since October. The money came from Palestinian banks in the West Bank. Due to the cash shortage, PA salaries were not paid in full and aid groups were not able to hand out money to Gaza's needy. Palestinian monetary officials said they needed an immediate infusion of 250 million shekels to cover salaries. (AP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

The PA Ministry for Prisoner Affairs accused Israel of carrying out multiple arrest operations in West Bank towns and cities. The Ministry documented more than 300 incursions and invasions carried out by Israeli forces arresting Palestinians, including 87 in Hebron and 700 in the Gaza Strip, bringing the total arrests to 5,000 since the beginning of 2008. In November, there was an increase in the detention of children under 18 as Israeli forces arrested 65 children. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened a two-day United Nations Latin American and

Caribbean Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace in Santiago, Chile. The objective of the meeting was to encourage broad international action, including by Latin American and Caribbean States, in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace and for achieving a solution to the conflict based on a shared vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), read out a message from United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Statements were also made by Alejandro Foxley Rioseco, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the PA, and Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, among others. (UN press release GA/PAL/1104)

## 12

A 13-year-old Palestinian boy suffered serious head wounds after being shot by Israeli troops in Hebron, witnesses said. The Israeli army confirmed that a young Palestinian had been injured, adding that the soldiers had fired rubber bullets after a group of youths threw stones at them. (AFP)

Gaza militants fired two Qassam rockets into the Western Negev which struck empty areas. (Haaretz)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni clarified her recent remarks that it was not always possible to bring every soldier home, which drew protests, saying she meant that freeing IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit who had been captured by Palestinian militants was not a question of political will. (Haaretz)

The Israeli military raided the northern West Bank city of Salfit, clashing with residents and firing percussion grenades and rubber-coated bullets, according to witnesses. No injuries or arrests were immediately reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces breached Gaza borders and seized three Palestinians in the vicinity of Khan Yunis. (Ma'an News Agency)

The European Council adopted a declaration on the Middle East, in which it stated that "the Middle East Peace Process will remain a top priority for the European Union in 2009. A just, lasting and comprehensive peace is urgently needed. The EU will do all it can both practically and politically to drive the peace process forward next year, working closely with our international partners, and in particular in the Quartet, to promote a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict on the basis of two States living in peace and security. The EU will also support talks between Israel and Syria, and if possible Lebanon. The European Council welcomes efforts to reinvigorate the Arab Peace Initiative (including the Arab Foreign Ministers' letter to President-elect Barack Obama) as part of a comprehensive approach for a peace between Israel and the whole region. We urge the United States under its new Administration to join us in making the Middle East Peace Process an immediate and central priority." ([www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu))

PA President Abbas would travel to Washington on 19 December to discuss the status of Middle East peace efforts with President Bush and would fly to Moscow a few days later, his spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said. (AFP)

A poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research showed that if parliamentary elections were held today, 42 per cent of Palestinians would vote for Fatah compared with 28 per cent for Hamas. If presidential elections were held today, 48 per cent would vote for PA President Abbas compared with 38 per cent for Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas. The survey found that 73 per cent support new elections if the national dialogue fails, but just 40 per cent support holding the elections in the West Bank only. Sixty-four per cent of Palestinians believe PA President Abbas' term should end in January, while 24 per cent believe he has another year. Seventy-four per cent supports continuing the Gaza ceasefire. (AFP, AP)

The Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing point was suddenly closed by Israel for "security reasons," after only 8 of the 110 trucks of goods slated for entry into the Gaza Strip were permitted to unload their cargo. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli State petitioned the Supreme Court to rescind the release to house arrest of a settler caught on film shooting two Palestinians in Hebron last week. (Haaretz)

In Geneva, during the observance of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said "2009 is a year which I hope will bear fruit in the Middle East". Progress toward Middle East peace was being made "somewhat below the radar" by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators, he said. "They are setting the stage for peace." (AP)

The United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace concluded its two-day meeting in Santiago, with participants calling on Israel to cease settlement expansion in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem, dismantle the separation wall, in keeping with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and lift the siege of the Gaza Strip. (GA/PAL/1108)

## 13

Israeli defence officials reported two mortar rounds and a homemade Qassam rocket fired toward towns in southern Israeli, causing no casualties. (AP)

Egypt did not invite Hamas to discuss the future of the ceasefire which expires on 19 December, Hamas spokesman Ayman Taha said. (Xinhua) Chief Palestinian negotiator Ahmad Qureia said in a special interview with three Palestinian newspapers that talks with Israel had been suspended ahead of the Israeli elections. He said his Israeli counterpart, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, had refused to discuss the issue of East Jerusalem even though the Palestinians had brought it up in the negotiations. Mr. Qureia said Israel had offered to take in 5,000 refugees over five years, which he described as "a joke and not a solution." He said outgoing Israeli Premier Olmert first suggested annexing 7.3 per cent of the West Bank, then dropped this figure to 6.8 per cent, suggesting also swapping territories in return. "We have rejected this offer outright," he said, explaining that some of the settlements Israel wants to annex, such as "Ariel", go as deep as 22 kilometres into the West Bank and others, such as "Ma'ale Adumim", "Givat Ze'ev" and "Gush Etzion", divide the West Bank into enclaves and separate them from occupied East Jerusalem. (DPA)

Jamal al-Khodary, a lawmaker heading the Popular Committee against the Siege, said that Lebanon had decided to send a ship laden with aid to the Gaza Strip. He did not disclose the date of the voyage. (Xinhua)

The Security Council considered a new resolution introduced by the United States and Russia. After a private meeting of the Council, Zalmay Khalilzad, US Permanent Representative, said that the Council should "recognize the progress that has been made towards the goal of achieving a two-State solution." He emphasized that "the focus has to be on the principles, not on details" of the peace process. Russian Permanent Representative Vitaly Churkin said: "Of course, we all cannot be satisfied with where the peace process is at now. But considerable effort has been made over the past 12 months or so. And we believe that the effort has to be pinned down, and it has to continue without a pause, which may be there because of some political circumstances: change of administration in the United States, elections in Israel, possible elections in the Palestinian autonomy." (AFP, AP, DPA)

## 14

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal told *Al-Quds Television*: "I think, for the majority of forces, the truce ends after 19 December and will not be renewed... We are studying the issue of the calm with our allies ... and, God willing, we will reach a vision within the coming days...

But I believe the general mood, among the people and among the factions is against extending the calm because the enemy did not abide by its obligations." Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh told a mass rally in Gaza City that the factions "reached a negative result on the deal because the siege remained in place, the aggression continued and the lull did not shift to the West Bank." (Reuters, Xinhua)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that a truce constantly disturbed by rocket attacks was meaningless. "As long as Hamas continues to operate with terror from Gaza, Israel will operate with its own means," she was quoted as saying at a meeting with her visiting Austrian counterpart Michael Spindelegger. "It needs and must respond to terror through military means." (Haaretz)

Amos Gilad, head of the Israeli Defense Ministry's Security-Diplomatic Bureau, met in Cairo with Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman for talks about a possible extension of Israel's six-month-old ceasefire with Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, Israeli media reported. (DPA)

Jordan and Lebanon called for "a just and comprehensive peace" between Israel and Arab States in line with the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, in a statement by the Royal Hashemite Court. The statement came following a summit between Jordan's King Abdullah II and visiting Lebanese President Michel Suleiman. The two leaders also called for tackling the refugee issue in accordance with UN resolutions and stressed the importance of ending the inter-Palestinian rift, it was added in the statement. (Xinhua)

"President [Abbas] will shortly announce the date of presidential and parliamentary elections," his spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh told AFP. (AFP)

The Arab Peace Initiative Committee and the Quartet will meet in New York on 15 December in a bid to activate the Middle East peace process, Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said. (Xinhua)

Several current and former lawmakers from Hamas and Fatah said that they wanted to collect 100,000 signatures on a petition urging the two factions to reconcile. The petition was to be launched on 15 December in Nablus. The document asks Hamas and Fatah to stop media attacks on each other, release political prisoners and organize a new round of reconciliation talks. Organizers hoped they would eventually gather 1 million signatures to present to PA President Abbas and to Hamas leaders. (AP)

Former US President Carter met with leaders of Hamas for the second time this year in Damascus to discuss the fate of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, a Hamas official said. Hamas officials kept reporters away from the venue and no news conference was scheduled. (AP, UPI)

Israel closed its passenger crossing with Gaza to journalists. (AP)

The Gaza power station ran out of fuel and shut down operations, said Kanan Ubeid, deputy chief of the Palestinian Energy Authority. He noted that the plant's closure would mean power cuts to 50 per cent of Gaza City as well as most homes in the north and central districts. (Ma'an News Agency)

15

Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip fired a rocket at the Ashkelon region. No casualties or damage were reported in the attack. (The Jerusalem Post)

The IDF arrested 17 Palestinians in Bethlehem, Nablus and other cities in the West Bank. (Wafa)

"When we accepted a lull six months ago, it was clearly understood that there was no end date," Amos Gilad, Chief of the Israeli Defence Ministry's Security-Diplomatic Bureau, told Israel Public Radio. "For Israel, the date 19 December has no significance," he added. "If the lull continues, Israel will respect it. If the opposite occurs, we will react ... with the appropriate military means," he added. (AFP)

After meeting in New York, the Quartet on the Middle East peace issued a [statement](#) reaffirming support for the bilateral, comprehensive, direct, uninterrupted, confidential and ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and commended Israel and the Palestinians for their continuous efforts to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues without exception. The Quartet also expressed its view that the bilateral negotiations process launched at Annapolis was irreversible and that these negotiations should be intensified in order to put an end to the conflict and to establish as soon as possible the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel. The Quartet affirmed that a final treaty and a lasting peace would be reached through simultaneous and mutually reinforcing efforts on three tracks: negotiations; building the institutions of a Palestinian State — including facilitating economic development through an improvement of conditions on the ground; and implementation of the parties' obligations under the Road Map, as stated in the Annapolis Joint Understanding. (UN press release SG/2147)

The outgoing head of the EU mission to support PA police (EU-COPPS), Colin Smith, said his office had facilitated projects totalling \$55 million since August 2007, but much work remained. The support mission had trained more than 1,000 police officers in law enforcement techniques and refurbished 32 West Bank police stations. Mr. Smith said the police force's effectiveness remained limited by the complexity of the Palestinian legal system, the inability of officers to move freely around the West Bank and the splits among rival Palestinian factions. (AP)

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown met with PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad ahead of a Palestinian investment forum in London. Mr Brown highlighted the importance of building a stable economy in Palestine as part of the drive towards a peace settlement. Speaking at a press conference with Mr. Fayyad, Mr. Brown said: "I think everybody now sees the contours of what a two-State solution would look like: A Palestinian State that was secure and viable economically, an Israeli State that is secure within its own borders and where its worries about peace and stability were answered." He added: "One of the blockages to (peace) is clearly the settlement issue." Mr. Fayyad said: "I've said this to successive Israeli Prime Ministers and Presidents when I've met them — we've consistently seen [settlements] as a barrier to reaching the agreement that everybody thinks is possible. ([www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk), [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com))

A letter to the Israeli Government, obtained by AP, which was signed by World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick, IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Quartet Representative Tony Blair expressed concern about the growing cash shortage in Gaza and the decision by two Israeli banks to sever correspondent relationships with Palestinian counterparts. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had held consultations with senior advisers and asked for an action plan on the two issues. (AP)

Israeli officials announced Gaza crossings would open, and Palestinian sources expected 90 truckloads of goods and large amounts of industrial fuel to pass into the Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

An indictment was filed with the Jerusalem District Court against a settler from "Shiloh," charging him with the abuse of a number of Palestinian youths and the kidnapping of one of them. (Ynetnews)

The population in the settlements is expanding at a rate three times higher than that of Israel's population, said an Israeli survey, and has more than doubled in the last 12 years. (Ynetnews)

Israel's separation wall cannot run in wide loops around Israeli settlements to allow room for their expansion, the country's Supreme Court ruled in an order hailed by a lawyer for Bil'in villagers as a precedent-setting victory. The Court rejected the Government's latest route proposal and told it to come up with a more appropriate path so that the buffer zone, defined in previous court rulings as about 200 meters, "will be measured from existing buildings [of settlements] and not from houses that are planned and were not constructed yet." (AP)

Israel released 227 Palestinian prisoners. PA President Abbas, who welcomed the former inmates in Ramallah, said the "joy won't be complete until Israel frees all Palestinian prisoners." (AP, The Jerusalem Post, Wafa)

Israel detained and deported Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, upon his arrival at Ben Gurion airport, authorities said. Mr. Falk was coming to investigate Israel's violations of humanitarian and human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (AFP, Wafa)

16

Palestinian witnesses and security forces said Israeli undercover troops shot a 20-year-old Islamic Jihad militant in Jenin, who died on the way to a hospital. An Israeli military spokeswoman said troops had gone to arrest the militant. Israeli troops also arrested 22 Palestinians across the West Bank. (Reuters)



Saraya Al-Quds (the armed wing of Islamic Jihad) in the Gaza Strip fired rockets at southern Israel. Three rockets hit open ground in southern Israel without causing any casualties or damage, an army spokeswoman said. The IDF launched at least one air strike against rocket-launching crews in the Gaza Strip. (AFP, Reuters)

Militants fired 11 rockets and a mortar shell at the western Negev. One of the rockets exploded in a soccer field next to the Sapir College in Sderot. There were no injuries, but several people were treated for shock. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility, in retaliation for the killing the day before of Jihad Nawahda, one of its commanders in the West Bank. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown held talks with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Olmert on the Middle East peace process. Mr Brown raised the issue of Israeli settlements and also stressed the importance of reducing constraints on the Palestinian economy. Both leaders reiterated their commitment to making progress on a Middle East peace deal. ([www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk))

White House Press Secretary Dana Perino said that President Bush wanted to discuss shared efforts with PA President Abbas during his visit to Washington on 19 December, "including progress in building capable Palestinian institutions, fostering economic development, and training and deploying Palestinian security forces in the West Bank." (AP)

The Egyptian Parliament called for the establishment of an official mechanism to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, MENA news agency reported. The Arab Affairs Committee of the People's Assembly, the lower house of the Parliament, made the call during its meeting on the current situation on the Gaza Strip. Egyptian Minister of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Moufed Mahmoud Shehab said that Egypt allowed humanitarian aid worth about \$25 million into Gaza this year, and some 20,000 Palestinian had been allowed to cross the Egyptian-Gaza border for medical and humanitarian reasons in the past 10 months. (Xinhua)

An Israeli military court sentenced Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker Abdel Aziz Dweik to three years in prison for belonging to a banned organization. The sentence was delivered at the Ofer military camp near the city of Ramallah. Mr. Dweik, a Hamas member, had already spent 28 months behind bars since his arrest in 2006. (AFP)

The Security Council adopted resolution 1850 (2008) which reaffirmed that "lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement, and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations." The joint Russian-United States resolution, adopted by 14 of the Council's members, with Libya abstaining, called on all States and international organizations to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to negotiations and "to support the Palestinian Government that is committed to the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, and respects the commitments of the Palestinian Liberation Organization." (UN News Centre)

Speaking about resolution 1850 (2008), UN Secretary-General said that "a serious process is under way." Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that the resolution gave an important "international endorsement" for the peace efforts. She also said that negotiations would continue, though talks should be accompanied by the Palestinian Government's efforts to crack down on militants and end the Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the significance of the text was that it "confirms the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations" under the US-sponsored process that begun in Annapolis 13 months ago. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed that the issues at the heart of the conflict were complex and would require "political will and also courage" to resolve and "the adoption of the resolution is not absolute guarantee ... Much will depend on the ability of Israel and the Palestinian to honour their obligations, notably in the area of security." PA spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that the resolution was "encouraging ... especially because it calls for the total support of the international community for the peace process and allows us to keep up hope for peace." Diplomats said that the resolution was the US administration's attempt to carry over any momentum to the incoming administration. (AP, BBC, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said that Israel's refusal to allow Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Richard Falk to carry out his officially mandated functions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory at the invitation of the Palestinian Authority, his detention and subsequent expulsion were "unprecedented and deeply regrettable." She said she was taking the matter up directly with the Israeli authorities, including possible breaches of UN privileges and immunities. (UN News Centre)

17

The Israeli army said that 10 rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip at southern Israel. Two of the rockets exploded near Sderot, near a commercial centre. Three people were lightly wounded and cars were damaged. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for five rockets. In response to incident, Israel closed commercial crossings into Gaza. Hamas had in recent days arrested several members of the smaller Palestinian factions responsible for the rocket fire. While the group's leaders announced the previous day that they would not renew the ceasefire, they also said that they would not fire at Israel unless provoked. Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahhar said that the truce would not be renewed unless Israel let more food, fuel and other goods into the Gaza Strip. "The general mood of all the Palestinian factions is negative," he said. Israeli Defense Forces said they believed that Hamas was still internally divided over whether to extend the truce, but in any case, the army would heighten its alert along the Gaza border lest Hamas opt for escalation. On the surge of rockets attacks from the Gaza Strip, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said: "This demands a response, and there will be a response". (AP, AFP, DPA, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews) Israeli artillery killed a 53-old Palestinian identified as Salah Abu Oqal and injured three others when a shell hit a house in the northern Gaza Strip. Israeli Air Force helicopters reportedly launched at least two missiles near Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip. The helicopters apparently fired on agricultural lands east of the town. An Israeli military spokesperson confirmed that there had been an air strike in Gaza. No injuries were immediately reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

"We are not trotting towards the lull, taking in consideration that the occupation did not commit itself to its obligations since it took effect on 19 June ... the lull in its current shape, is unsuitable for extension," said Abu Obaida, a Hamas spokesman, who also accused Egypt of failing to put pressure on Israel to force it to respect the deal. An Islamic Jihad leader said the ceasefire "served the Israeli occupation rather than the Palestinian people."

Saraya Al-Quds, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, said that it made no more sense to talk about a truce in the face of Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip. Abu Hamzeh, the official spokesperson for the group, said that his group's rocket attacks on Israeli towns near Gaza were a response to Israel's killing of an Islamic Jihad fighter near Jenin on 15 December. "Friday will be the final end of the lull which already expired... due to Israel which increased its attacks and tightened its siege on the Palestinian people," said Kayed al-Ghoul, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. (Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

Israel should not use artillery fire to target rocket-launching militants in the Gaza Strip if the fire was aimed at populated areas, Defense Ministry's legal adviser Ahaz Benari wrote in a legal opinion after cabinet members called for a re-examination of the steps Israel was using to counter Qassam fire. The opinion reviewed international law on the matter and found that while there was no wholesale ban on artillery fire at sites from which the rockets were launched, the fire should be aimed at military targets and be able to distinguish between the target and civilians or civilian property. "Artillery fire at urban centres is problematic, if the assessment is that the chance that the shell will hit the launchers is relatively low, while the risk that many civilians will be hurt is substantial," he said. (Haaretz)

Austria's President Heinz Fisher, at a press conference in Ramallah with PA President Mahmoud Abbas, said: "We demand that the settlement expansion stop ... settlements distance the opportunities for a just and comprehensive peace." Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak told the



Austrian President: "I am not afraid of launching an offensive in Gaza, but I am not running to Gaza ... as long as Gaza is calm, it will be met with calm; but if the calm is violated and the situation requires it, we will act accordingly, in the appropriate manner at the appropriate time." (*AP, Haaretz*)

Canada welcomed the Security Council's first resolution on the Middle East in five years, calling it a "positive step" toward a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon said, "Canada commends Council members for their steadfastness in adopting this resolution ... it reflects the international community's commitment to do all that is necessary for peace in the Middle East .... Canada supports all efforts, including the Arab Peace Initiative, to enhance peace in the region and sees this resolution as a positive step toward that goal." (*AFP*)

The Mayor of Bethlehem, Victor Batarseh, said Vatican officials informed him that Pope Benedict XVI would visit the Holy Land in May 2009. (*AP*)

British Minister of Trade and Investment Gareth Thomas, in an exclusive interview with *Ma'an News Agency*, said that Israeli restrictions were the largest obstacle for Palestinian economy. The Minister responded to questions about a conference in London aimed at boosting investment in the Palestinian private sector. A high-level delegation of over 60 Palestinian business representatives from East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would be attending the meeting. The Minister said that "numerous important projects would be announced at the Forum, including: the establishment of the Palestine-Britain Business Council, a private sector led group of senior UK and Palestinian business representatives to work with Government on follow-up to the Forum; and confirmation that Palestinian olive oil producers would achieve fair trade status in 2009 for the first time ever." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas would open its first bank in the Gaza Strip with \$20 million in capital by the end of December, said Alaa Rafati, the future head of the bank's board of directors. The bank was being established to deal with the severe international crisis, the bankruptcy of major international banks and a shortage of cash resulting from the Israel's ban on the deliveries of banknotes. Mr. Rafati said that the PA would not to issue a license to the new bank and would take all legal measures to block the bank's operations. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

## 18

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired seven Qassam rockets at the western Negev while the Israeli Air Force attacked multiple targets in Gaza.

The first air strike targeted what was said to be a weapons factory operated by Islamic Jihad in the Jabalya refugee camp in northern Gaza and caused severe damage. The second hit an alleged arms factory in Khan Yunis in south Gaza. Seven Palestinians were injured in the attacks.

(*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli troops entered the town of Beit Sahur near Bethlehem where they seized 22 year-old Sa'id Awad Sh'ebat. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

"The calm, which was reached with Egyptian sponsorship on 19 June and expires on 19 December, is finished because the enemy did not abide by his obligations," said Hamas official Ayman Taha, who represented the group in talks with other Palestinian factions. "The calm is over." (*Reuters*)

Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak told *Haaretz* he remained optimistic that a deal could be reached for calm with Hamas. "If the quiet continues, there will be quiet. If the calm breaks, we will operate." (*Haaretz*)

In a [statement](#), the Presidency of the Council of the European Union expressed deep concern at the resumption of violence in the Gaza Strip and called for the immediate cessation of rocket fire. (*Haaretz, Reuters, [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr)*)

The remainder of operating flour mills in Gaza City closed after running out of wheat, according to the Head of the Society of Mill Owners in Gaza, Abd An-Naser al-A'jrami. He noted that those bakeries still open in the south of Gaza would also shut down because of fuel shortage. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a [statement](#) published by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Agency said that due to the ongoing crisis with irregular border access and the lack of wheat flour in Gaza, UNRWA had suspended all food distribution in the Gaza Strip. ([www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org))

Asma Jahangir, Chairperson of the Special Procedures, a coordinating body for independent UN human rights experts, issued [a statement](#) deeply regretting the obstruction by the Government of Israel of a planned mission and the denial of entry to Israel by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk. ([www.unhchr.ch](http://www.unhchr.ch))

The Security Council [met](#) to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, briefed the Council. (*Press release SC/9544*)

## 19

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor said Hamas had chosen "violence over truth and rocket-shooting over ceasefire." Hours later, the military reported a minor shooting incident in the fields of a kibbutz near the Gaza border and two rockets exploding in southern Israel. A total of seven Qassam rockets exploding in the western Negev were later reported. There were no injuries or damage. (*BBC, Haaretz*)

Israeli National Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said, "Israel won't accept a half-truce. There is a limit to what Israel can absorb, and ... the IDF has never been in a greater state of readiness, and in the case of an attack, it will know how to operate in the best way." (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli soldiers entered Jenin and a nearby village where, according to PA security forces, soldiers seized 22-year-old Farouq Muhammad Mousa after breaking into his home. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The US State Department issued a statement saying the ceasefire should be "respected and extended." "Violence will not advance, but retard, the hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which currently is being pursued by the legitimate Palestinian Government of President Abbas," reported the statement. (*BBC*)

PA President Abbas would hold a meeting with US President Bush in Washington following talks with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice a day earlier. Mr. Abbas would proceed to Moscow from 20 to 22 December, at the invitation of Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev. Earlier, Mr. Abbas had called for the continuation of the six-month ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. (*AFP, [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru)*)

In an interview published in *Le Figaro*, former Israeli Prime Minister and Chairman of the Likud Party Benjamin Netanyahu said that the best strategy to make peace in the Middle East was to encourage the rapid economic development of the Palestinian people. Asked if he agreed with the withdrawal of Israel from most of the West Bank, he said: "The method that consists in withdrawing from territories without concessions has only led to bringing Islamist movements linked to Iran ... into Gaza." He said his party's plan for peace was "to support the emergence of a credible partner and reinforce the moderate Palestinians. For that, conditions must be created for rapid economic development." (*DPA*)

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 49 per cent of all Gazans were unemployed, up from 32 per cent a year ago, and was calling Israel's stringent closure of the Palestinian territory a "profound human dignity crisis." It further said that Gaza's 1.4 million people were increasingly preoccupied with obtaining basic supplies such as water and food. Residents of Gaza City had been without power for up to 16 hours. Half of the city's residents received water only once a week for a few hours. (AP)

An OCHA [report](#) entitled "Unprotected: Israeli settler violence against Palestinian civilians and their property," stated that in the first 10 months of 2008, there were 290 settler-related incidents targeting Palestinians and their property, reflecting a worrying trend. The number surpassed the total recorded by OCHA in each of the previous years (182 and 243 in 2006 and 2007, respectively). Since 2006, a significant majority of attacks were carried out by groups of Israeli settlers, rather than by lone individuals. Nablus and Hebron suffered far higher levels of settler violence than other parts of the West Bank. ([www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org))

The British Foreign Office warned its citizens of the risks of buying property situated in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. "We've always been clear that we oppose settlements and they are illegal," a Foreign Office spokesperson said. "Potential purchasers should be aware that a future peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, or between Israel and Syria, could have consequences for property they purchase in these settlements," the spokesperson said. Meanwhile, Bill Rammell, Foreign Office Minister who has responsibility for the Middle East, would be visiting Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory from 21 to 23 December. His visit will include a tour of the Gaza Strip with UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd. (AFP, [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk))

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was "extremely concerned" at statements calling into question the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, according to his spokesperson. Mr. Ban reiterated his appeal that "the calm should be respected and extended, rocket attacks against Israel must be immediately halted and all acts of violence must cease." (AFP, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

20

Palestinian militants fired 10 rockets and at least 23 mortar shells from the Gaza Strip into Israel, causing some property damage but no casualties.

An Israeli air strike killed a Palestinian militant. (AP)

The boat carrying a ton of Qatari medical aid along with representatives of Qatari charitable organizations, Lebanese activists and journalists docked at the Gaza City harbour. It was the fifth such boat since the summer. (AP, BBC)

21

Some 27 rockets and mortars were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel. One rocket hit a house in Sderot, scattering rubble and furniture inside. (DPA, Haaretz)

An Israeli helicopter hit eastern Gaza City with two air-to-ground missiles, wounding three Palestinian militants and one child, Palestinian security sources said. (AP, Xinhua)

The top candidates to become Israel's next prime minister, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Likud Party chief Benjamin Netanyahu, vowed to topple Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The statements followed a cabinet meeting in which outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert cautioned against rushing into a large-scale ground operation in Gaza in response to escalating rocket fire by militants. The Israeli military still carried out air strikes against rocket launchers but military sources said the air force now had a green light to go after other Hamas targets as well. (Reuters)

The head of the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency Yuval Diskin warned Israel's Cabinet that Hamas now had rockets that could reach the larger city of Ashdod farther north on the Mediterranean coast and even the outskirts of Beersheba, 30 miles (50 km) to the east. (AP, Reuters)

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Two Palestinians were slightly injured when an Israeli fighter jet fired a missile at a barracks belonging to the police in the east of Gaza City. Mu'awiyah Hassanain, Director of Ambulance and Emergency Services, confirmed the report. An Israeli military spokesperson had no information about the strike. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces detained three Palestinians in Jenin and seven in Nablus. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian armed factions in the Gaza Strip were observing a 24-hour halt to rocket fire against Israel at the request of Egyptian mediators, according to a Hamas official. The official said Hamas might consider a longer truce if Israel were to reciprocate by ceasing all military attacks in Gaza and lifting an embargo on the territory. The announcement was released just as a Qassam rocket exploded in the western Negev. There were no reports of injuries. (Haaretz)

On ceasefire negotiations, Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hassam Zaki said: "The ability to destroy is greater than the ability to construct; when one party wants positive reconciliation, its ability is much weaker compared to the party that wants to disrupt these efforts." He further said that Egypt could do little without a commitment from the parties themselves. (DPA)

The armed wings of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad said they would resume bombing attacks inside Israel in the event of a major Israeli invasion in Gaza or assassination of Palestinian leaders. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli troops detained three men from Ni'lin, west of Ramallah, and broke into several homes, destroying property in the area. (Ma'an News Agency)

In Moscow, PA President Abbas met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who said: "I am sure that we will work together in a fruitful manner, above all as the problems against which the region is confronted are growing at the moment." Mr. Abbas was also scheduled to meet Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Discussions would include plans for a Middle East peace conference scheduled in Moscow in 2009. A day earlier, Mr. Abbas visited Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, and met with Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. (AFP)

PA President Abbas was expected to visit Egypt on 23 December for a series of meetings with senior officials on issues including the ceasefire agreement and internal Palestinian dialogue. Mr. Abbas would try to secure the renewal of the ceasefire between the Gaza factions and Israel, according to his spokesperson, Nabil Abu Rudeineh. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said he was "disappointed but certainly not discouraged" about the European Union's decision to strengthen ties with Israel, without linking such an upgrade to a settlement freeze that he had requested. But he added, "there is much better awareness in Europe now of the issue, something which did not exist before." (AP)

Pope Benedict XVI was scheduled to visit the Holy Land in May 2009. He would visit Bethlehem on 12 May, and possibly also Ramallah. (Reuters)

The World Bank said that a new network of crossing points for Palestinian goods, built into Israel's separation wall in the West Bank, might hurt exports, not facilitate them. Mr. David Craig, the World Bank's Director in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, said Palestinian economic growth hinged on the private sector being able to boost exports and that the new restrictions undermined this goal. The Bank issued two reports on "The

[Economic Effects of Restricted Access to Land in the West Bank](#)" and the "[West Bank and Gaza Financial Sector Review](#)." (*Haaretz*, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org), *Reuters*)

A convoy carrying a million dollars worth of Egyptian food and medical aid was expected to enter the Gaza Strip after Hamas agreed to a 24-hour unilateral truce with Israel. Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hassam Zaki said, "We asked both parties to create a suitable atmosphere to allow an Egyptian humanitarian convoy from the Egyptian Red Crescent to enter Gaza in security." (*AFP*)

The Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) reported that no humanitarian aid, fuel or other commodities had been able to get into Gaza during the day, as the border crossings into the area had remained closed. UNSCO also reported that Gaza's power plant was still not operating owing to a lack of fuel. In addition, due to the shortage of wheat grain, all Gaza mills had been shut down, and more than half of Gaza's 47 bread bakeries had had to close. At the same time, UNRWA reported that shortages of drugs and pharmaceuticals in Gaza were continuing to rise, with some 105 essential drugs now out of stock. Israel had kept the border crossings into Gaza closed for almost two months now, citing rocket and other attacks by militants as the reason. (*UN News Centre*)

Palestinians waited in queues outside bakeries in the Gaza Strip which were running out of flour due to the Israeli blockade. To overcome the crisis, Israel should provide Gaza with 5,000 tons of wheat everyday to enable most of the bakeries and the mills to run, according to Abdel Dayem Awad, an owner of the Al-Salam mill. (*Xinhua*)

Impoverished Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were being forced to scavenge for food on rubbish dumps to survive as Israel's economic blockade risked causing irreversible damage, according to international observers. Figures released a week earlier by UNRWA showed that 51.8 per cent, an "unprecedentedly high" number of Gaza's 1.5 million population, were living below the poverty line. (*The Guardian*)

The human rights organization B'Tselem reported that it had obtained records showing that more than half the built-up areas of the "Ofra" settlement, established in 1975 in the West Bank, sat on Palestinian land registered as belonging to Palestinians. "Ofra" was now home to some 3,000 Israeli settlers. An "Ofra" spokesperson said the settlers purchased the land from Palestinians but could not make transactions public because that would endanger the Palestinian sellers. However, the Israeli human rights attorney representing Palestinian landowners in the case said the "Ofra" settlement had been unable to provide documents proving such sales. (*AP*)

An Israeli military court sentenced 6 West Bank-based members of the PLC to imprisonment from 36 to 40 months. Israel had arrested some 40 Palestinian lawmakers from the West Bank in 2006. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said a planned \$4.5 billion "Peace Canal" to bring water from the Red Sea to the fast evaporating Dead Sea could benefit the entire Middle East. The World Bank was carrying out a feasibility study, but many technical and political hurdles remained. The project had to be approved by Israel and the Palestinians as well as by Jordan. (*AFP*)

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Five Qassam rockets struck Israel's western Negev, without causing casualties or property damage. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces killed three Palestinian militants on the Gaza border in the deadliest clash since the truce expired on 19 December. The three were spotted planting explosives in the northern Gaza Strip along the border fence. (*AP*)

PA President Abbas said, after a meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, that Egypt would push for a new truce between Hamas and Israel. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

The head of the Palestinian Water Authority, Shaddad al-Attili, said at a water conference in Jordan that seawater and sewage were polluting Gaza's drinking water and putting the coastal strip at risk of water shortages and waterborne diseases such as cholera. (*AP*)

The Italian Government said it had made available, through EU's PEGASE mechanism, €9.36 million to the Palestinian Authority for the payment of social allowances. The fund is part of a recent contribution of €20 million by Italy to help the PA to meet its recurrent expenditures. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and the representative of Japan to the Palestinian Authority signed an agreement in Ramallah to support the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. An estimated \$8.5 million would be paid by Japan to the PA for improving infrastructure in Jericho, particularly its streets, pavements and lights. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The European Commission allocated €12.4 million (\$17.36 million) in food aid to vulnerable people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Iraq, of which €7.4 million would go to the Palestinians. The money, which came in response to an urgent UN appeal, would help offset rising food prices.

(*AFP*)

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Hamas confirmed that its militants fired Grads (military-grade rockets) from the northern Gaza Strip, in response to the killing of five of its members.

The two Grads landed near a factory and a parking lot in Ashkelon, causing damage to several cars, according to Israeli sources. Israeli radio reported that 60 rockets and mortar shells hit Israel by mid-afternoon. Some of the explosives misfired, wounding three Palestinian civilians, including Iyad Dremly, a Palestinian lawyer who worked for the Palestinian Centre for Conflict Resolution, and killing two militants, whom Hamas identified as Al-Qassam activists, performing a "mission" in the southern Gaza Strip. A total of some 57 persons in southern Israel were treated for shock after the strikes. (*AP*, *Haaretz*, *Xinhua*)

Palestinian medical workers said one Hamas militant had been killed in an Israeli air strike and two other Palestinians wounded. An Israeli military spokesman said the air strike had hit a group of militants who had just fired mortars at Israel. (*Reuters*)

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union issued the following statement:

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union expresses its deep concern over the continuation of rocket attacks on Israeli territory from Gaza.

It condemns the attacks and calls for a return to the truce as swiftly as possible.

It recalls that the re-opening of crossings is a matter of urgency for humanitarian aid to reach the Palestinian people. Civilians must not be held hostage to the violence. ([www.ue2008.fr](http://www.ue2008.fr))

Israeli forces arrested five Palestinian youths from Qalqilya and Beit Ummar, north of Hebron, after ransacking their homes. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Political-Security Cabinet met for an urgent session to discuss Israel's response to the barrage of rockets and mortar shells launched at southern Israel over the course of the morning. (*Haaretz*)

The following statement was issued by the spokesperson for the Secretary-General:

The Secretary-General is gravely concerned about the situation in Gaza and southern Israel and the potential for further violence and civilian suffering if calm is not restored. He condemns today's rocket attacks on southern Israel and calls on Hamas to ensure that rocket attacks from Gaza cease immediately. He urges all parties to work to secure the immediate restoration of the calm and an urgent easing of humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip, including the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies. He calls for respect by all parties of international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General reiterates, as the Quartet stated when it met on 15 December, that a lasting solution to the situation in Gaza can only be attained by peaceful means. (*UN News Centre*)

A Palestinian civilian was seriously injured when an Israeli missile hit the front of his house in Gaza City, medical sources said. (*Xinhua*)

Gaza City's Catholic Holy Family Church cancelled its annual Midnight Mass service for Christmas Eve in protest of the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip and most recent "Israeli threats and escalations" there, according to Father Manuel Musallam, the Church's priest. The mass would be replaced with a silent gathering at the Holy Family School. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu said: "We must move from a defensive to an offensive policy and restore our national honour. The situation as it stands is unbearable and we will change that." He also said the ceasefire with Gaza had strengthened Hamas. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

Israel decided to cancel its decision a day earlier to open the Gaza Strip border crossings of Kerem Shalom and Karni for the transfer of humanitarian aid. Some 20 truckloads of flour, sugar, rice and cooking oil were supposed to enter Gaza in addition to 39 truckloads of wheat and 25 truckloads of food products for UNRWA. (*DPA, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel must complete the construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank that surrounded Jerusalem by 2010. (*Reuters*)

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Israel's outgoing Prime Minister Olmert, in an interview, called for residents of the Gaza Strip to stop Hamas from firing rockets into Israel. "Don't let Hamas, which is acting against the values of Islam, put you in danger. ... Stop your enemies and ours. Tell them to stop firing on innocent civilians," Mr. Olmert said. ([www.alarabiya.net](http://www.alarabiya.net))

Pope Benedict XVI said in a midnight mass at Saint Peter's Basilica: "Let us think also of the place named Bethlehem, of the land in which Jesus lived, and which he loved so deeply. And let us pray that peace will be established there, that hatred and violence will cease." He also said in his annual Urbi et Orbi message: "May the divine Light of Bethlehem radiate throughout the Holy Land, where the horizon seems once again bleak for Israelis and Palestinians. May it spread throughout Lebanon, Iraq and the whole Middle East." ([www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va))

PA President Abbas called on Hamas to resume reconciliation talks with Fatah. "We want them to return to reason... We do not want to get rid of them. They are a part of the Palestinian people, whatever their ideas and vision may be, and however they may differ from us," Mr. Abbas said during a visit to Hebron. ([www.alarabiya.net](http://www.alarabiya.net))

The Saudi news agency SPA said PA President Abbas was scheduled to arrive in Riyadh on 27 December for talks with King Abdullah. During the visit, bilateral relations in addition to regional and international issues of mutual concern would be discussed, the agency said. (*SPA*)

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Palestinian militants fired 22 mortar shells from the Gaza Strip overnight, damaging one building and causing no injuries. Reportedly, the IDF "limited operation" would begin within days that would combine an air attack with some ground operations against Hamas and other groups. The Cabinet had approved an operation of a few days' duration with clearly defined goals. (*Haaretz*)

Egypt boosted security along its border with the Gaza Strip in anticipation of an imminent IDF operation, fearing an Israeli incursion would result in a breach of the border. Egyptian officials said that representatives of Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman had approached senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and expressed Egypt's concerns. (*Haaretz*)

A Palestinian affiliated with the Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, died of wounds he had sustained in an Israeli strike in the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. He was apparently firing a home-made projectile towards the southern Israeli town of Sderot when an Israeli helicopter fired at him and others. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel opened its border with the Gaza Strip to allow deliveries of humanitarian aid. The military said approximately 90 trucks would deliver medicine, fuel, cooking gas and other vital goods into Gaza. The shipment would include a large donation of goods from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's wife, as well as more than 400,000 litres of fuel and 180 metric tons of natural gas, the military said. (*AP*)

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Palestinian health officials said at least 195 people were killed and more than 250 wounded in one of the bloodiest days for decades in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after the Israeli Air Force launched dozens of air raids on the Gaza Strip. Many were members of Hamas' security forces, but civilians were also killed. (*The Guardian*)

In a [statement](#), the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union expressed "its most serious concern at the escalating violence in the Gaza Strip" and deplored "the very great number of civilian casualties". In the statement,

"The Presidency condemns Israeli air raids and rocket strikes from Gaza. It calls for their immediate end. It condemns the disproportionate use of force. The Presidency of the Council of the European Union recalls that no military solution can prevail in Gaza and calls for the establishment of a lasting truce. It encourages the efforts of neighbouring countries, particularly those of Egypt, which could help reach this goal. The Presidency of the Council of the European Union, who reaffirms its commitment to the full respect of international humanitarian law under all circumstances, urges the reopening of all border crossing points, immediate resumption of deliveries of humanitarian aid and fuel, and unrestricted access for international and humanitarian organizations, diplomats and journalists." ([www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr))

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said: "I call for an immediate cessation of military actions on both sides. The EU has repeatedly condemned rocket attacks against Israel. The current Israeli strikes are inflicting an unacceptable toll on Palestinian civilians and will only worsen the humanitarian crisis as well as complicate the search for a peaceful solution. There is no military solution to the situation in Gaza. I therefore urge the parties to return to the calm as brokered by Egypt and call on everybody in the region to use their influence to encourage restraint and prevent recourse to violence. Passages in and out of Gaza should be reopened to allow humanitarian and regular commercial flows. As we have already said, the EU is ready to resume its Monitoring Mission at Rafah." ([www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu))

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice issued the following statement: "The United States is deeply concerned about the escalating violence in Gaza. We strongly condemn the repeated rocket and mortar attacks against Israel and hold Hamas responsible for breaking the ceasefire and for the renewal of violence there. The ceasefire must be restored immediately and fully respected. The United States calls on all concerned to protect innocent lives and to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza." ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov))



Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Andrei Nesterenko made the following statement: "Moscow considers it necessary to immediately stop the large-scale military actions against the Gaza Strip that have already led to significant casualties and suffering among the Palestinian civilian population.

At the same time, we call on the Hamas leadership to end rocket attacks on Israeli territory. We are convinced that the most urgent thing now is to stop the armed confrontation, restore the lull and release civilians on both sides from horror and pain. Russia will in different formats continue its persistent efforts to break the vicious circle of violence as an indispensable condition for solving the existing problems by negotiation." ([www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru))

General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto said in [a statement](#): "The behaviour by Israel in bombarding Gaza is simply the commission of wanton aggression by a very powerful State against a territory that [it] illegally occupies. Time has come to take firm action if the UN does not want to be rightly accused of complicity by omission." (*UN News Centre*)

The following statement was issued by the spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General is deeply alarmed by today's heavy violence and bloodshed in Gaza, and the continuation of violence in southern Israel. He appeals for an immediate halt to all violence. While recognizing Israel's security concerns regarding the continued firing of rockets from Gaza, he firmly reiterates Israel's obligation to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law and condemns excessive use of force leading to the killing and injuring of civilians. He condemns the ongoing rocket attacks by Palestinian militants and is deeply distressed that repeated calls on Hamas for these attacks to end have gone unheeded. The Secretary-General reiterates his previous calls for humanitarian supplies to be allowed into Gaza to aid the distressed civilian population. He is making immediate contact with regional and international leaders, including Quartet principals, in an effort to bring a swift end to the violence. (*UN News Centre*)

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Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli troops in the West Bank while demonstrating against the violence in Gaza. Muhammad Hamid, 17, died of three gunshot wounds in the abdomen and chest he had sustained in the town of Silwad, east of Ramallah. In a separate incident, Arafat Al-Khawaja, 20, died after being hit in the head with a live bullet. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The spokesman for the Egyptian Foreign Ministry stated that Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit continued to hold consultations with international and regional parties. During his consultations, Mr. Aboul Gheit called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and an end to aggression on both sides, in order to enable Egyptian efforts to restore calm and return to the situation that had existed before 19 December. Mr. Aboul Gheit instructed the Egyptian Ambassador in Tel Aviv to hold all necessary contacts with the Israeli side to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to the Gaza Strip, according to the Spokesman. ([www.mfa.gov.eg](http://www.mfa.gov.eg))

The Organization of the Islamic Conference issued the following statement:

The OIC Secretary General Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu urged the international community to take all the necessary actions urgently to comply with the call of the UN Security Council for an immediate halt of violence in Gaza and restoration of the ceasefire. He invited the Security Council to remain seized of the matter in order to put an end to Israel's inhuman air attacks which have caused unprecedented human losses in Gaza.

In the face of increasing violations of the basic human rights of the Palestinians as a result of ongoing Israeli operations in Gaza, the OIC Secretary General has initiated consultations with the OIC Group at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to call for convening of an emergency session of the Human Rights Council as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the OIC General Secretariat is also in the process of convening a meeting of the OIC Executive Committee at the Ambassadorial level in Jeddah in the coming few days for the preparations of the ensuing Ministerial level meeting of the Executive Committee, also to be held in Jeddah.

Secretary General Ihsanoglu, who is in constant contact with the OIC Summit and Ministerial Council Chairmanships and other relevant parties to coordinate the OIC efforts, reiterated his ardent appeal to the Palestinian factions to close their ranks and engage immediately in a serious national dialogue in order to restore national unity as the only way forward. ([www.oic-oci.org](http://www.oic-oci.org))

The Security Council issued the following press statement after emergency closed-door talks late last night:

The members of the Security Council expressed serious concern at the escalation of the situation in Gaza and called for an immediate halt to all violence. The members called on the parties to stop immediately all military activities.

The members of the Council called for all parties to address the serious humanitarian and economic needs in Gaza and to take necessary measures, including opening of border crossings, to ensure the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies, including supplies of food, fuel and provision of medical treatment.

The members of the Council stressed the need for the restoration of calm in full, which will open the way for finding a political solution to the problems existing in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. (*UN press release SC/9559*)

The following statement was issued by the spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General joins the Security Council's call for an immediate stop to all violence and all military activities. He deplores that violence is continuing today, and he strongly urges once again an immediate stop to all acts of violence. He is saddened by Palestinian casualties, among them eight UNRWA trainees and one UNRWA staff member, and one Israeli casualty. The Secretary-General also expects the Security Council's call for all parties to address the humanitarian and economic needs in Gaza to be fully heeded, in particular, for border crossings to be open by Israel for the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies. The UN has repeatedly brought to the attention of the Government of Israel shortages of humanitarian supplies in Gaza in recent weeks and months. The Humanitarian Coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory met with Israeli officials today and received a guarantee that all required humanitarian supplies and personnel would be allowed entry into Gaza, further to assurances given personally to the Secretary-General by Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni. The Secretary-General fully expects this cooperation to continue on a rolling basis in the coming days. The Secretary-General has spoken to the other members of the Quartet and regional leaders including Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Livni, President Abbas, President Mubarak, President Assad, and Secretary-General Moussa, to underscore the urgent need to restore calm in full, and is in close touch with his envoy, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry, and UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd, who is in Gaza. The UN is working actively to promote urgent implementation of the Security Council's calls to end the violence, reopen the crossings, and restore calm in full. (*UN News Centre*)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called on Israel to lift the air, sea and ground blockade imposed on Gaza, while voicing her grave concern about the escalating violence there and the enormous loss of life. While condemning the rocket attacks by Hamas that led to the death of one Israeli civilian, she also strongly condemned Israel's disproportionate use of force resulting in the reported death of more than 270, a large number of which were civilians, and the wounding of over 600 persons, according to a [news release](#) issued today by her Office. Ms. Pillay called on Israel's leaders to uphold the principles of international humanitarian law, especially those relating to proportionality in the use of military force and the prevention of collective punishment and the targeting of civilians. (UN News Centre, [www.unhchr.ch](http://www.unhchr.ch))

UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories Richard Falk [said](#) the Israeli air strikes on Gaza represented "severe and massive violations" of international humanitarian law as defined in the Geneva Conventions. "Certainly the rocket attacks against civilian targets in Israel are unlawful. But that illegality does not give rise to any Israeli right, neither as the Occupying Power nor as a sovereign State, to violate international humanitarian law and commit war crimes or crimes against humanity in its response," he said. (UN News Centre, [www.unhchr.ch](http://www.unhchr.ch))

Malaysia issued a statement that strongly condemned the series of Israeli air attacks against a Palestinian neighbourhood of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza on 27 December. The statement said "Malaysia stands firm that there is no excuse for the disproportionate, indiscriminate and excessive use of force in Gaza and totally rejects the collective punishment imposed by the Occupying Power on the Palestinian people." ([www.kln.gov.my](http://www.kln.gov.my))

In a statement, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari "condemned the Israeli attacks in Gaza and appealed for cessation of hostilities and violence, which has caused immense loss of precious lives." It further said, "Pakistan urges the international community to promote a peaceful, just and durable settlement of the issue of Palestine." ([www.mofa.gov.pk](http://www.mofa.gov.pk))

King Abdullah II of Jordan discussed the situation in Gaza and ways to end the Israeli aggression on the Strip during a phone call with Saudi King Abdullah. The Jordanian Foreign Ministry also summoned the Chargé d'affaires at the Israeli embassy in Amman and conveyed its condemnation of the "unjustified aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza." Today, King Abdullah II called US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and urged Washington to take "immediate steps" to stop the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip. (DPA, [www.kingabdullah.jo](http://www.kingabdullah.jo))

In a statement, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan said the Government of Japan "is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in and around the Gaza Strip caused by rocket attacks against Israel from the Gaza Strip and the subsequent Israeli counter-air-strike. Japan deplores the fact that the air strike by Israel Defence Forces on December 27 has resulted in a large number of casualties and that the rocket attacks launched from the Gaza Strip have caused casualties on the Israeli side as well." Japan also "urges both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to continue their efforts to improve the current situation and to advance the peace process." ([www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp))

South African Nobel laureate and Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu said in a statement on Israel's air attacks on the Gaza Strip: "In the context of total aerial supremacy, in which one side in the conflict deploys lethal aircraft against opponents with no means of defending themselves, the bombardment bears all the hallmarks of war crimes." "It is a blight not only on the Middle East, but on the entire world - and particularly world leaders who have consistently failed the people of Palestine and Israel over the past 60 years," he added. (DPA)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said that the humanitarian situation remained alarming, and the situation in hospitals was chaotic. "We are completely overwhelmed by the number of people coming in with very serious injuries. I have never seen anything like this," said the head of the surgical ward of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. In addition, further medical supplies were urgently needed. "The ICRC reminds the parties to the hostilities that international humanitarian law requires that a clear distinction be drawn between military objectives and the civilian population and civilian objects. In particular, the ICRC underlines the obligation of the parties to take all feasible precautions to spare the civilian population the effects of hostilities. Medical facilities and personnel must also be protected," the ICRC stated. ([www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org))

Libya's Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation said it was planning an airlift to Egypt aimed at evacuating Palestinians wounded in Israel's aerial onslaught on the Gaza Strip. A spokesman for the charity said two aircraft had been chartered to fly to El-Arish in Egypt, 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Egypt's Rafah crossing with the Gaza Strip, to evacuate wounded to Benghazi in Libya. (AFP)

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On the third day of its overwhelming assault on the Gaza Strip, the death toll rose to 364, including 8 children under the age of 17, who were killed in two separate strikes overnight, medics said. A Hamas police spokesman, Ehab Ghussen, said 180 members of the Hamas security forces were among the dead, and UNRWA said at least 62 of the dead were civilians. Israel's intense bombings, more than 300 air strikes since midday on 27 December, reduced dozens of buildings to rubble. The military said Navy vessels had also bombarded targets from the sea. One strike destroyed a five-storey building in the women's wing at Islamic University, one of the most prominent Hamas symbols in Gaza. Other attacks ravaged a compound controlled by Preventive Security, one of the group's chief security arms, and destroyed a house next to the residence of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Late on 28 December, Israeli aircraft attacked a building in the Jabalya refugee camp next to Gaza City, killing five children and teenagers under age 17 from the same family, Gaza Health Ministry official Dr. Mu'awiyah Hassanain said. In the southern town of Rafah, a toddler and his two teenage brothers were killed in an air strike aimed at a Hamas commander, Mr. Hassanain said. In Gaza City, another attack killed two women. Mr. Hassanain, who was keeping a record for the Gaza Health Ministry, said that some of the over 1,400 wounded were now being taken to private clinics and even homes. Israel's Cabinet approved a call-up of 6,500 reserve soldiers on 28 December in apparent preparation for a ground offensive. Israel doubled the number of troops around Gaza and also deployed an artillery battery. (AP)

A medium-range rocket fired at the Israeli city of Ashkelon killed an Arab construction worker there and wounded several others. He was the second Israeli killed since the beginning of the offensive, and the first person ever to be killed by a rocket in Ashkelon. The previous day, Hamas missiles had struck for the first time near the city of Ashdod, twice as far from Gaza as Ashkelon and only 25 miles (40 kilometres) from Tel Aviv. Hamas leaders also threatened to renew suicide attacks inside Israel. (AP)

Speaking at the end of the third day of deadly aerial assaults on the Gaza Strip, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said, "If the criminal rocket fire aimed at Israeli civilians does not stop immediately, Israel will use all its resources and all the legal tools it possesses to force the enemy to stop this aggressive, illegal behaviour." Earlier in the day, Mr. Barak told a Knesset session that the operation in Gaza would be "widened and deepened as necessary." (Haaretz)

Senegal's Foreign Ministry said that Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal had indicated he was ready to sign a ceasefire agreement for Gaza. It said the proposal for a truce in Gaza had been made in a telephone call to Mr. Mashaal late on 28 December by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, the

current president of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. “The Hamas leader said he was ready to sign such an accord in a place to be chosen by common consent between the two sides,” the Ministry said in a statement. It said President Wade was proposing “a definitive truce between Israel and Hamas through the signing of an agreement” that engaged “Hamas in the immediate observation of a ceasefire in exchange for an immediate ceasefire by Israel accompanied by a total lifting of the blockade on Gaza.” (*Reuters*)

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said: “I am deeply concerned by continuing missile strikes from Gaza on Israel and by Israel’s response. As the Quartet stated on 15 December, peaceful means are the only way of reaching a lasting solution to the situation in Gaza. I call on Gazan militants to cease all rocket attacks on Israel immediately. These attacks are designed to cause random destruction and to undermine the prospects of peace talks led by President Abbas. I understand the Israeli Government’s sense of obligation to its population. Israel needs to meet its humanitarian obligations, act in a way to further the long-term vision of a two-State solution, and do everything in its power to avoid civilian casualties.” ([www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk))

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a [statement](#) he read out to the news media:

“I am deeply alarmed by the current escalation of violence in and around Gaza. This is unacceptable. I have been repeatedly condemning the rocket attacks by Hamas militants against Israel. While recognizing Israel’s right to defend itself, I have also condemned the excessive use of force by Israel in Gaza. The suffering caused to civilian populations as a result of the large-scale violence and destruction that have taken place over the past few days has saddened me profoundly. The frightening nature of what is happening on the ground, in particular its effects on children — who are more than half of the population — troubles me greatly. I have continuously stressed the need for strict observance of international humanitarian law. I am also pained at the death, injury and damage to United Nations personnel and premises as well as to others associated with our programmes. All this must stop. Both Israel and Hamas must halt their acts of violence and take all necessary measures to avoid civilian casualties. A ceasefire must be declared immediately. They must also curb their inflammatory rhetoric. Only then can dialogue start. ... I reiterate my call that unhindered access should be ensured for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. ... I expect all parties to fully heed my call. In particular, Israel must keep opening all border crossings necessary for the continued provision of humanitarian supplies. Israeli Government leaders have given me a guarantee that such supplies and personnel would be allowed entry into Gaza. This cooperation must continue on a rolling basis in the coming days.” (*UN News Centre*)

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Qin Gang said: “China expresses serious concern over Israel launching military actions in Gaza which leads to the escalation of tension in Gaza, and condemns actions that have caused civilian casualties. China opposes the use of military force in resolving disputes, appeals to related parties to exercise maximum restraint and to settle differences through dialogue.” ([www.fmprc.gov.cn](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn))

Indonesia condemned the massive Israeli air strikes in the Gaza Strip and said it would send medical aid to Palestinian victims. The Indonesian Foreign Ministry said the raids were “an overly violent use of force and disproportionate” to the rocket fire by militant groups. Meanwhile, the head of the Health Ministry’s crisis centre, Rustam Pakaya, said that Indonesia would send medical aid and cash of more than two billion rupiah (\$184,000). ([www.antara.co.id](http://www.antara.co.id))

The Government of India issued a statement saying it “had hoped that military action by Israel against targets in the Gaza Strip would abate. It was disappointing to note that the use of disproportionate force is resulting in a large number of civilian casualties on the one hand and the escalating violence on the other.” (<http://medindia.nic.in>)

In a statement, Cuba strongly condemned Israel’s massive air strikes on the Gaza Strip, calling it the “bloodiest attack Israel has ever launched against the Palestinian people.” The Cuban Government urged the international community to “condemn the massacre and to request an immediate end for the attacks against the Palestinian civil population.” ([www.cubaminrex.cu](http://www.cubaminrex.cu))

Malta’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tonio Borg called on Palestinian militants to halt all rocket attacks on Israel and said Israel must “do everything in its power to avoid civilian casualties.” He also said he “understands the Israeli Government’s sense of obligation to its population ... but violence would not lead to a resolution.” ([www.foreign.gov.mt](http://www.foreign.gov.mt))

Ukraine expressed deep concern over the escalation of the situation in the Gaza Strip and joined the appeal of the world community to Israel and the leadership of the Gaza Strip to immediate cease military action and violence, according to Mr. Vasyl Kyrlych, spokesman of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. ([www.ukrinform.ua](http://www.ukrinform.ua))

The World Health Organization [called](#) for an immediate end to hostilities in the Gaza Strip and urged Israel to ensure immediate provision of fuel and critical life-saving/trauma care supplies. In its statement, the Agency also said negotiations with the Israelis were ongoing to guarantee passage of urgent medical supplies. ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int))

A Jordanian convoy of relief aid, including 16 trucks carrying food and medical supplies, including one carrying blood for transfusions, was dispatched on directives by King Abdullah to send immediate relief aids to Gaza. King Abdullah had instructed the Government to take the necessary steps and provide every possible support to Palestinians in Gaza to ease their humanitarian suffering from Israel’s massive attack. (*Petra*)

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Romain Nadal said, “France and the European Union, who are already the major humanitarian and economic donors to the population of Gaza, are ready to increase their aid in response to the emergency. ... We are, in particular, ready to send additional food and medical aid.” (*AFP*)

Israeli forces arrested four Palestinian youths in the village of Madama, south of Nablus. (*Ma’an News Agency*)

A Palestinian infiltrated the “Kiryat Sefer” settlement near Ramallah and stabbed three Israelis before being shot by an armed settler, according to an Israeli military spokesperson. (*DPA*)

Day's death toll included two sisters, aged 4 and 11. With the Israeli troops massed along the Gaza border, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that air attacks were just the "first of several" phases of attack that had been approved, according to a spokesperson. Israeli warplanes smashed a Gaza government complex, security installation and the home of a top militant commander. Palestinian sources said a family dairy shop and lathe workshop had been latest targets of the strike and that a total of 1,700 were injured. Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip continued to launch projectiles. Israel military officials said rocket attacks landing more than 25 miles (40 km) from Gaza put nearly 10 per cent of Israel's population of seven million within range. (AFP, AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Wafa)

The Israeli Defence Ministry said it would recommend that Prime Minister Olmert seek out a diplomatic initiative to abate the war against Hamas and embark on a 48-hour truce before it became necessary to begin a significant ground invasion in the Gaza Strip. The goal of the temporary calm would be to see if Hamas could abide by the truce and cease firing rockets at Israel. Mr. Olmert reportedly opposed suspending the operation while Defence Minister Ehud Barak was reportedly weighing the idea. The IDF issued a statement that it was not recommending a ceasefire. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

US President George W. Bush spoke on the phone with PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad from his office to discuss ways to stop the violence in the Gaza Strip. ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov))

The Israeli military opened the Kerem Shalom crossing to allow more than 100 trucks with humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. Some 80 trucks had been allowed to pass through the previous day. The aid included five ambulances and was provided by Turkey, Jordan, UNRWA and others. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said his Government would not fully open its crossing into the Gaza Strip unless PA President Abbas was in control of the border post. (AFP, Haaretz)

A statement by the Press Secretary of the Belarus Foreign Ministry said the Republic of Belarus "condemns the use of force causing the loss of life among the peaceful population of Palestine and Israel." ([www.mfa.gov.by](http://www.mfa.gov.by))

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany would do all it could to promote peace in the Middle East. She also said, "We should also not forget there is no rational alternative to the peaceful co-existence of Palestinians and Israelis in two States. This is in the interest of people on both sides." (DPA)

Wrapping up a two-day summit at Muscat, leaders of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council strongly condemned Israel's attacks on Gaza. The leaders condemned "Israel's unjustified aggression and its inhumane practices against the Palestinians in Gaza and held Israel responsible for the escalation." (AP, Arab News)

In phone calls with Israeli and Arab leaders as well as with international officials, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice pressed for a "durable and sustainable" ceasefire that would produce "lasting peace." Spokesman Gordon Duguid said, "She is working extremely hard to try and get both sides to agree that a ceasefire can be re-established and that the ceasefire can be fully respected." (AP)

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad urged Israel to halt bombings and lift the "outrageous blockade." He spoke during a meeting with visiting US Senator Arlen Specter. (AP)

The Quartet was to discuss the Israeli-Gaza crisis in a conference call today. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would talk with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, and Quartet Representative Tony Blair. (AFP)

A damaged international aid ship named "Dignity," operated by the Free Gaza Movement, was headed for Lebanese waters, following a collision with an Israeli naval vessel as it was bound for the Gaza Strip. The ship was carrying aid and activists from the Free Gaza Movement, and had sailed from Cyprus a day earlier. A statement released by the Movement said the ship had been attacked by the Israeli navy, and had been rammed by a gunboat, causing heavy damage. (CNN, DPA)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus issued a statement saying it "regrets that the boat "Dignity" carrying a team of volunteers, has not been permitted to approach Gaza in order to deliver urgent humanitarian and medical aid to the Palestinian population. The Ministry ... is closely monitoring the situation and is taking all necessary steps to ensure the safety of those on board." ([www.mfa.gov.cy](http://www.mfa.gov.cy))

An Egyptian medical official said that 11 Palestinians had been ferried from the border with Gaza to a hospital in Cairo because they were in critical condition and would require surgery. Palestinian health officials said there were at least 150 serious cases in the overburdened Palestinian hospitals.

Most of those accepted were being treated in the 250-bed El-Arish hospital near the Gaza border, which lacked sophisticated medical equipment. (Haaretz)

The US State Department announced it was providing Palestine refugees with \$85 million, including a portion to help ease the plight of Palestinians under siege in the Gaza Strip. The funds would be channelled through UNRWA whose role it commended in "meeting the emergency needs of civilians in Gaza at this very difficult time." (AFP)

Norway said it would give 30 million kroner (\$4.3 million) in humanitarian aid to international agencies assisting people in Gaza. Foreign Minister Johan Gahr Støre said, "We assume Israel will allow necessary access for the transport of humanitarian aid." The funds were to be channelled via the World Health Organization, UNRWA, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Norwegian Aid Committee. (DPA)

The Foreign Ministry of China said it would offer \$1 million in cash to the Palestinians for emergency humanitarian aid. Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang said China urged all sides to "immediately halt armed conflict" and adopt measures to relieve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. (AP)

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The Israel Air Force (IAF) bombed a mosque in the southern Gaza Strip, which Hamas had been using to store part of its rocket arsenal. Shin Bet officials said that over the last few days Palestinian militants had been seen carrying Katyusha and Qassam rockets, as well as a large supply of other weapons, around the vicinity of the mosque. The Shin Bet said that these weapons were destroyed in the IAF strike. Earlier Israeli aircraft pounded smuggling tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border, setting off a huge explosion in a fuel tunnel, witnesses said, as other aircraft hit Hamas positions in Gaza City. No casualties were reported. The military said Government buildings were hit, including an office of former PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. (Haaretz)

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired more than 60 rockets at the western Negev, a number of which exploding in the cities of Ashkelon and Beersheba, previously thought to be beyond rocket reach. A Grad rocket fired by the militants struck directly into an empty schoolhouse in Beersheba, 37 km from the Gaza Strip. Earlier, two rockets exploded in open fields near the city. No injuries or damage were reported. Two people, however, were lightly wounded when a rocket slammed into the northern Negev city of Ashkelon. (Haaretz)

The IDF continued its military operations in the Gaza Strip for the fifth day with more than 390 Palestinians killed and 1884 wounded as a result of consecutive air raids as well as artillery and naval attacks on the Gaza Port. Gaza hospitals had been flooded with a large number of casualties that could not receive proper care nor find rooms. (Wafa)

Israel decided to continue its offensive on the Hamas infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, according to the original plan of the Defence Ministry. Prime



Minister Ehud Olmert told Cabinet Ministers Israel would not conclude its operation until all of its goals had been reached. He said "We did not begin the Gaza operation in order to finish it with rocket fire continuing like it did before," adding, "Israel has restrained for years and given plenty of chances for a calm." (*Haaretz*)

In Jerusalem, the Israeli Cabinet rejected a French proposal for a 48-hour ceasefire in the Gaza Strip that would have allowed a freer flow of humanitarian aid. It described the proposal as "unrealistic". The decision was reached by the members of the "kitchen cabinet," which included Prime Minister Olmert, Defence Minister Ehud Barak, and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Hamas said it was prepared to study proposals for a ceasefire, as long as Israel lifted the economic blockade on the Gaza Strip. "We are for any initiative that will bring an immediate cessation to the aggression and lift the siege entirely," Hamas official Ayman Taha said. The Israeli Cabinet also discussed the expansion of the IDF operation in the Gaza Strip. During the meeting, Ministers approved the mobilization of 2,500 army reservists, expanding on an earlier call-up of 6,500 soldiers for the garrison on the Gaza border, officials said. (*Haaretz*)

During the 6060th emergency [meeting](#) of the UN Security Council on escalating situation in the Gaza Strip, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said "the conflict must end once and for all." He said he was profoundly troubled that the Security Council's call for an end to the violence had gone unheeded, highlighting that Gaza's civilian population, its fabric, the Middle East peace process and the stability of the region and the world were all trapped by the indiscriminate rocket attacks carried out by Hamas militants and the disproportionate military operations by Israel. The New Year's Eve meeting was requested by the Permanent Representative of Egypt to consider "the continued Israeli military aggression on the occupied Palestinian territory in the Gaza Strip", and to adopt an enforceable and binding resolution that would ensure an immediate ceasefire, a cessation of the Israeli military aggression, the lifting of the blockade, the opening of border-crossing points, an end to the Israeli policy of collective punishment, international protection for the Palestinian people and the assurance of calm. The Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, said the attacks must be condemned and stopped immediately by all means. That would require immediate measures by the international community, including the Council. The Permanent Representative of Israel Gabriela Shalev said that Israel demonstrated utmost restraint before launching the operation, but there came a time when a sovereign, responsible Government had to take decisive action to protect its citizens and send a clear message to the Hamas "terrorists". League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa said, "We urge the Security Council not to fall under any pressure and take an immediate decision to stop the Israeli attacks on Gaza". Regretting the rising number of Palestinian casualties, Mr. Moussa called upon PA President Abbas to appeal to the Security Council, and on the Palestinian factions to put their disputes aside and unite. (*DPA, SC press release SC/9560*)

Israel's Supreme Court had given the Israeli Government until 10 am (Israel's time) of the following day to allow limited access to the Gaza Strip for the international foreign press, which had been denied since the beginning of the military operation there, reported a statement by the Foreign Press Association (FPA). The ruling came in response to a petition filed by the FPA. (*AFP*)

US President Bush called Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to discuss ways to end the violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, the White House said. Mr. Bush raised his concern about civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip. Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe said that Mr. Olmert gave the President assurances that Israel was focusing its attack on the Hamas leadership and that it was trying to limit civilian casualties. Mr. Johndroe said President Bush was disappointed that Hamas continued to fire rockets on the innocent people of Israel. (*AP*)

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said he and President Nicolas Sarkozy were considering extending their Middle East trip on 5 January 2009 to visit Israel amid European efforts to end the violence in the Gaza Strip. The previous day, Mr. Kouchner had chaired an emergency meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Paris on the Gaza fighting. The 27 EU nations urged Israel and Hamas to accept an immediate and permanent ceasefire. France was holding the EU presidency until midnight. Speaking on RTL radio, Mr. Kouchner said he hoped Israel would not launch a ground operation in the Gaza Strip. (*Haaretz*)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon intensified diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip fighting, spokesperson Marie Okabe said in a news conference. Mr. Ban was "continuing to work the phones" speaking with Foreign Ministers of Brazil and Canada after having spoken to the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice the previous day, as the surge of Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip and Hamas rocket attacks into Israel entered its fifth day. UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes told the same news conference, "We're obviously very disappointed that the proposal for a 48-hour lull or ceasefire, whatever you want to call it, has been rejected but we hope that diplomatic efforts to achieve a ceasefire will bear some fruit in the coming days." Speaking by video link from the Gaza Strip, UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd portrayed the deep disappointment felt by ordinary Gazans. (*UN News Centre*)

Senegal, on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, issued a statement suggesting that a date be set for a definitive halt to the fighting in the Gaza Strip. That idea could overcome the problem of getting both sides to stop hostilities simultaneously, it said, adding that there was a real danger of an "irreparable" escalation of the conflict. (*AFP*)

In New York, the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued [statement](#) on the situation in the Gaza Strip condemning in the strongest possible terms the deadly military assaults and destruction perpetrated by Israel in the Gaza Strip that had reportedly killed more than 390 Palestinians. The Bureau of the Committee demanded that Israel end, immediately and unconditionally, its brutal military campaign against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. (*GA press release GA/PAL/1109*)

In a statement, the Carter Centre said that the violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel threatened peace talks and Israel's long-term security. The Centre said Israel must cease attacks endangering civilians in the densely populated Strip and Hamas leaders must halt rocket attacks against Israel. The statement also said Israel had a right to protect its citizens but "those operations are disproportionate and detrimental to the ongoing peace efforts." ([www.cartercentre.org](http://www.cartercentre.org))

Hundreds of Palestinian supporters marched to the US and Israeli embassies in The Hague, demanding an end to Israeli strikes against Gaza. Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen had expressed concern over the latest violence, urging Israel to exercise restraint to minimize civilian casualties and condemning the Hamas "provocation". (*AFP*)

A group of Arab youths opened fire on a number of Israelis working at a mall in the Danish city of Odense, 140 km west of Copenhagen, wounding two Israelis. The Foreign Ministry believed that the attack was related to anger over Israel's offensive on the Gaza Strip. (*Haaretz*)

Israel decided to open the Kerem Shalom crossing to the Gaza Strip to allow 106 trucks filled with humanitarian aid supplied by foreign aid groups to enter the coastal territory. Some 100 trucks carrying basic food and medical supplies entered Gaza the previous day through the same crossing. The supplies were donated by Jordan, Turkey and international organizations. Five ambulances were also permitted to enter. Israel had promised the Red Cross and United Nations relief organizations that it would assist the transfer of humanitarian aid as necessary. (*Haaretz*)

UNRWA launched a [flash appeal](#) for \$34 million as the needs of the population of Gaza continued to mount in the face of the ongoing military

operation. This appeal was in addition to UNRWA's \$275 million 2009 emergency appeal issued earlier this month for the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Speaking from the Agency's Headquarters in Gaza, UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd said: "In my eight years in UNRWA, the urgency of an appeal for the people here has never been so acute. I am appalled and saddened when I see the suffering around me...", adding, "Tomorrow, we will resume our food distributions which were suspended on 18th December". She said if UNRWA were to meet the needs of its beneficiaries the crossings must be open on a permanent basis, including the Karni Crossing which was the only access point through which UNRWA could bring in the adequate amount needed of wheat supplies. ([www.un.org/unrwa](http://www.un.org/unrwa)) A Jordanian security official said a Jordanian plane would fly to the Egyptian city of El-Arish near the Gaza Strip the following day to evacuate 40 Palestinians wounded during the ongoing Israeli attacks on Gaza. (AFP)

British Secretary of State Douglas Alexander announced that the Department for International Development was immediately making available \$10 million to help address humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip. The aid was intended to help meet urgent needs, such as food and fuel, as well as other humanitarian requirements as detailed assessments become available. Mr. Alexander said: "The Government remains gravely concerned by the conflict and we renew our appeal to all parties to end the violence immediately." ([www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk))

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