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### **AS EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT RESUMPTION OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS INTENSIFY,**

### **SITUATION ON GROUND REMAINS FRAGILE, SECURITY COUNCIL TOLD**

### **Political Affairs Head Describes 'Crisis of Confidence' Between Parties: Council Hears from Palestine, Israel, Some 40 Speakers in Day-Long Open Debate**

While the international community had recently intensified efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the top United Nations political official today warned the Security Council that the situation on the ground "remains fragile and a crisis of confidence between the parties has so far prevented the resumption of talks".

"We cannot afford to lose this opportunity to reach an agreement," said B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, as he briefed the Council. Calling for all parties to take steps to advance the peace process, he said there was no alternative to the urgent resumption of negotiations on all core issues for a two-State solution. "Peace is in the hands of the parties themselves, but the international community must continue to play a crucial role," he added.

While noting that Israel had recently begun to ease its blockade of the Gaza Strip, allowing in some goods it had banned, such as clothes and shoes and, this week, wood and aluminium, he said that move still fell short of what was required to address Gaza's immense reconstruction and development needs following the crisis that broke out there early last year.

Beyond the entry of materials into Gaza, he said other key elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) remained unfulfilled and continued to contribute to instability in the tiny, densely packed territory. In particular, that resolution's calls for the commitment of the parties to a durable ceasefire and intra-Palestinian reconciliation had yet to be implemented. Without renewed and determined efforts to implement that resolution in all of its aspects, the situation in Gaza could not be fully addressed, Mr. Pascoe said, adding: "A more comprehensive and strategic approach to Gaza is urgently required."

In a development he described as "worrisome", he noted an Israeli military order giving the military commander the power to evict a broad category of people deemed not to be residents of the West Bank. "This could have the effect of enabling Israeli authorities to deport these individuals and has provoked strong Palestinian and Arab reaction," he said.

Mr. Pascoe also reiterated the United Nations calls on Israel to freeze its settlement activity in the West Bank, saying that while a partial restraint on construction was welcomed, it was insufficient and fuelled a crisis of confidence that had kept talks between the parties from resuming. "This policy falls short of Israel's Road Map obligation of a full settlement freeze and excludes settlement activity in East Jerusalem."

Despite continued security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, he said there had been almost daily clashes between settlers and Palestinians resulting in injuries to 41 Palestinians and 7 Israelis, and the arrest of 112 Palestinians in the West Bank, where he was concerned the situation had once again become "volatile". Some 16 rockets and mortars -- out of 35 fired -- had reached southern Israel from Gaza. One Palestinian civilian had been killed and 15 others injured in the course of 14 incursions and 6 air strikes by Israeli security forces. "We condemn rocket fire and call for calm to be respected and for international humanitarian law to be upheld," Mr. Pascoe said, noting reports that Hamas was trying to prevent further outbreaks of violence.

Following that briefing, the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations cited a raft of "illegal actions" being perpetrated by Israel, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, continuing demolition of homes and transfer of settlers to East Jerusalem. Those included, among others, the targeting of Palestinian and international non-violent demonstrators by use of excessive and indiscriminate force; the targeting of Palestinian Muslim worshippers and the restriction of access to holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem; and the ongoing traumatic humanitarian impact of the Gaza blockade.

"The pattern is clear: it is one in which Israel continues to act with flagrant impunity, sabotaging peace initiatives and causing further suffering to the Palestinian people under its occupation," he said, adding that Israel's illegal policies called into question its credibility as a peace partner, its commitment to the two-State

solution, as well as its standing as a member of the Organization to which it owed its very existence. He said it was time for the international community to act decisively, in order to finally bring an end to the Israeli occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

Continuing, he said that, despite Israel's flagrant violations, the Palestinian leadership had continuously affirmed its commitment to peace, in word and deed. It could not proceed with negotiations, including proximity talks, however, as long as Israel continued to violate international law, United Nations resolutions and Quartet positions regarding the settlements and all other illegal attempts to alter the character, status and demography of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Israel's representative said, however, that the pursuit of peace in the Middle East required that all parties realize they had not only rights, but obligations, as well. Palestinians, along with Arab nations, must demonstrate their will to not only demand rights, but also to accept responsibilities. "They must take tangible steps to combat terrorism, to put an end to incitement, to engage in direct negotiations and to begin a process of normalization with Israel," she said, adding that her Government was hopeful that the proximity talks would serve as a stepping stone towards the resumption of direct, bilateral peace negotiations.

Only through such talks could the two sides hope to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. Yet, the success of the talks – and their transition into direct negotiations – depended upon all in the region taking confidence-building steps. Israel appreciated the international community's support of the humanitarian work under way in Gaza, and her Government remained in close contact with the Secretary-General and relevant United Nations bodies regarding the supply of relief aid to that area. Here, she noted that, in 2009 alone, some 738,576 tons of humanitarian commodities had been transferred to the Strip, along with more than 100 million litres of diesel fuel that had been delivered to the Gaza power station.

While those numbers reflected only a portion of the humanitarian aid provided to the people of Gaza, Israel remained a convenient scapegoat for the situation there. But, the truth of the matter remained self-evident: the complicated situation in Gaza was a direct result of "the Hamas terrorist occupation". She said the complicated situation was also a direct result of Hamas' continued rejection of the obligations laid out by the international community; namely, the recognition of Israel, renouncing violence and acceptance of previous agreements. Further, Hamas continued to hold captive Corporal Gilad Shalit.

She went on to briefly touch on concerns that would be expressed by many during the ensuing debate regarding recent measures put in place concerning the prevention of illegal infiltration into the West Bank. That concern reflected a misunderstanding of the effect and purpose of those measures. As a matter of fact, the measures provided significant safeguards and due process protection to existing legislation. "They do not extend beyond it," she declared, stressing that the measures applied only to persons who unlawfully infiltrated into the West Bank and did not apply beyond that area.

Among the nearly 40 speakers taking the floor, Lebanon's representative said Israel was more than ever intentionally taking unilateral illegal actions towards predetermining the outcome of negotiations, changing the reality on the ground and rendering the two-State solution impossible. Israel's current plan of action "did not target only the Palestinian occupied land in the West Bank, but also the Palestinians themselves". Describing the situation, he said expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem, as well as ongoing settlement activity in the West Bank, continued to disrupt the peace efforts of the United States Administration. Such activities had been condemned by the United Nations Secretary-General, the United States Government, the Quartet and many others.

For his part, the representative of the United States said: "All concerned must confront a basic reality, and that is that the status quo of the last decade has neither produced long-term security nor served the interests of the parties," and added that such a path meant more instability and more unrealized aspirations for Israelis, Palestinians and others throughout the region. He called on international partners "both inside and outside this Council" to support the resumption of proximity talks leading as soon as possible to direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Also participating in the debate were the representatives of Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria, Mexico, France, Gabon, United Kingdom, China, Nigeria, Brazil, Uganda, Russian Federation, Japan, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Syria (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Kuwait (on behalf of the Arab Group), Jordan, Norway, Morocco, South Africa, Pakistan, Cuba, Malaysia, Iran, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Botswana and Venezuela.

The Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union addressed the Council, as did the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting began at 10:07 a.m. and suspended at 1:25 p.m. It resumed at 3:07 p.m. and ended at 4:55 p.m.

## Background

The Security Council met today to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, in an open meeting.

## Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said that the situation on the ground and a crisis of confidence between the parties had so far prevented the resumption of talks. The United Nations would continue to engage with Quartet partners to ensure that the circumstances which made it possible to agree to launch the proximity talks be respected.

He said United Nations Ban Ki-moon had attended the League of Arab States Summit on 26 and 27 March, where he had briefed Arab leaders on the meeting of the Quartet in Moscow and his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He had encouraged Arab leaders to continue to support Palestinian participation in talks for the goal of the creation of an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel. That goal could only be brought about, he had said, through a return of the parties to the negotiating table. The Summit had condemned Israeli actions on the ground and conditioned Arab support for Palestinian participation in proximity talks on the outcome of the United States efforts to create conditions conducive to the success of negotiations.

Turning to the situation on the ground, he said the Israeli Government's partial restraint on settlement construction in the West Bank remained in effect. That policy, however, fell short of Israel's Road Map obligation of a full settlement freeze and excluded settlement activity in East Jerusalem. As a result of a transfer of Israeli settlers into East Jerusalem, there were incidents of violence between settlers and Palestinian residents. No demolitions had been carried out in East Jerusalem.

There were almost daily clashes between settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank, causing death and injuries, and resulting in Israeli incursions and numerous arrests. On 7 April, Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons held the first in a planned series of one-day hunger strikes, in protest of the conditions of detention. Describing other protests, he noted with concern that a street in Ramallah had been named after a Palestinian militant responsible for the murder of a number of Israeli civilians. He also noted that, under the Road Map, the Palestinian Authority had the obligation to end incitement.

He said the Palestinian Authority continued to exert efforts to maintain law and order and combat terrorism in areas under Palestinian control in the West Bank. There had been continued security cooperation with Israel. The Israeli military order that gave the military commander the power to evict a broad category of individuals from the West Bank was a worrisome development.

Calling the Palestinian municipal elections planned for 17 July “an important democratic element of the state-building agenda”, he noted that Hamas had not allowed voter registration in Gaza and had called for a boycott. He, therefore, called on Hamas to allow Gazans to exercise their right to participate in elections.

Turning to the Palestinian state-building agenda, he said the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee had met in Madrid on 13 April and had discussed measures to support the Palestinian Authority's budget and institution building as part of the state-building agenda, aiming at Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's goal of readiness for statehood in 2011. During the meeting, Mr. Fayyad had said that the Palestinian Authority was approaching “the home stretch” in the implementation of its programme. The United Nations had aligned its programming in support of the state-building agenda and intended to focus its efforts in critical areas, including Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Turning to the progress now being made on the entry of materials for a number of approved United Nations projects since the Secretary-General's visit last month, he said that, as a result of Israel's approval of the entry of aggregate cement, work had now begun on the sewage pumping station project at Tel el Sultan. Meanwhile, work on the other approved projects, including the 151-unit Khan Younis housing project, was expected to begin shortly. Further, the commercial import of wood and aluminium had been approved and would be allowed entry this week. While there had also been several other positive measures carried out by Israel, such as the continued export of fresh cut flowers and an increase in the quantity and type of goods such as clothing, shoes and glass entering the Gaza Strip, entry of materials still fell short of what was required to address Gaza's immense reconstruction and development needs.

He went on to say that the United Nations housing, water and sanitation projects were a modest start to what needed to be done in Gaza. “More than half of the population is under the age of 18, and it is their future that should concern us most,” he said, calling for the building of more schools to ensure that children received an education that broadened their horizons and prepared them for a better future. At the same time, he said, the quality of health care was declining, due in part to the lack of building materials, equipment and supplies necessary for health facilities. In all those critical areas the United Nations would continue to exert its utmost efforts to expedite the entry of materials and to expand the scope of its activities in Gaza to address those needs.

To enable those goals and United Nations projects in Gaza and the West Bank, the United Nations and the Palestinian Authority had agreed that a trust fund would be established at an appropriate time, and he encouraged all donors to consider supporting the Organization's work through that mechanism. He said that, beyond the entry of materials into Gaza, other key elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) remained unfulfilled and continued to contribute to instability in the Strip. In particular, that resolution's calls for the commitment of the parties to a durable ceasefire and intra-Palestinian reconciliation had yet to be implemented. Without renewed and determined efforts to implement that resolution in all of its aspects, the situation in Gaza could not be fully addressed, he said, adding: “A more comprehensive and strategic approach to Gaza is urgently required.”

Continuing, he expressed serious concern that the situation in Gaza was again volatile. In late March, a clash near Khan Younis had led to the deaths of two Israeli soldiers and three Palestinian militants. The military wing of Hamas, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and a group called “Palestinian Taliban” had claimed responsibility for that action. In another incident, on 13 April, two Palestinian militants belonging to Islamic Jihad had been killed by Israeli security forces, reportedly while trying to place improvised explosive devices near the Gaza-Israel border. He went on to say that, during the reporting period, a total of 35 rockets and mortars had been fired from Gaza, 16 of which had reached southern Israel. No damages had been reported. One Palestinian civilian had been killed and 15 others had been injured in the course of 14 incursions and 6 air strikes by Israeli security forces.

Further, there had been reports that Hamas was trying to prevent further outbreaks of violence, and the major factions in Gaza had agreed with Hamas that they would maintain calm, yet rockets continued to be fired from the Strip. He condemned the rocket fire and called for calm to be respected and for international humanitarian law to be upheld. He also said that Egypt was continuing its efforts to combat smuggling, and to that end, on 31 March, had uncovered a significant cache of missiles and shells in northern Sinai, which reportedly had been destined for the Gaza Strip. Smuggling of all goods, including arms, continued through tunnels into Gaza, and one Palestinian had died and six had been injured in tunnel collapses during the reporting period. It was vital that all legitimate crossings for imports and exports be opened as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, he said, adding that there had been no progress in efforts to secure the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

He noted that the Arab League Summit had stressed the importance of Palestinian unity. However there had been no further progress in finalizing an agreement based on Egypt's proposal. He reiterated the Quartet's call for the promotion of Palestinian unity based on Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commitments and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority. He said that, on 29 March, Hamas had taken over the bank assets of a benevolent society in Gaza, jeopardizing the entire banking sector and aggravating the humanitarian situation. There were also reports of increasing human rights abuses, and the Secretariat was concerned by public statements by Hamas authority figures indicating the intention to carry out executions of prisoners.

Turning to other situations in the region, he said that the United Nations continued to support all efforts to revive the Israeli-Syrian track and a broader resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as envisaged in Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. In the occupied Syrian Golan, settlement activity had continued, including the approval of 100 new housing units in the settlement of Nimrod. At the same time, the situation had remained calm. In Lebanon, he said that, on 9 March, President Michel Sleiman had reconvened the Committee of National Dialogue for the first time since the parliamentary elections of last June. In its new configuration, that Dialogue had had a total of 20 participants. They had agreed to hold their next meeting tomorrow.

He went on to say that a few unrelated incidents had taken place in various parts of Lebanon during the reporting period, most significantly an exchange of fire amongst the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command military personnel near the Syrian border, resulting in one death and at least two injuries. He added that the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had remained generally quiet. Violations of Lebanese airspace had continued on an almost daily basis, mainly using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), but also, occasionally, fighter planes.

Finally, he said the Secretary-General had made clear the United Nations commitment to the goal of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. As he had outlined for the Council last month, there was no alternative to the urgent resumption of negotiations on all core issues for a two-State solution. That must be enabled for positive developments on the ground. “Peace is in the hands of the parties themselves, but the international community must continue to play a crucial role,” he said, adding: “The situation is critical. We cannot afford to lose this opportunity to reach an agreement that will end the occupation that began in 1967.”

#### Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, said that, since the Council's last open debate in January, the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had deteriorated, due to continued Israeli acts of aggression and colonization. Israel had responded to international efforts to revive the peace process with “intransigence and defiance”. To the present moment, Israel persisted with illegal policies and undermined the peace efforts.

Illegal actions perpetrated by the occupying Power included the continuing Israeli colonization of the Territory, particularly in and around East Jerusalem; continuing demolition of homes and transfer of settlers to East Jerusalem; targeting of Palestinian and international non-violent demonstrators by use of excessive and indiscriminate force; the targeting of Palestinian Muslim worshippers and the restriction of access to holy sites in the Old City; the ongoing traumatic impact of the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza on the humanitarian situation; and the closure of the West Bank and continued obstructions of freedom of movement. “The pattern is clear: it is one in which Israel continues to act with the flagrant impunity, sabotaging peace initiatives and causing further suffering to the Palestinian people under its occupation,” he said.

He said that the illegal policies of the occupying Power called into question its credibility as a peace partner, its commitment to the two-State solution, as well as

its standing as a member of the Organization to which it owed its very existence.

Although the PLO Executive Committee had agreed to United States-mediated proximity talks, the Israeli Government had announced approval for construction of yet another 1,600 new settlements units in occupation East Jerusalem. "Such flouting of the law and the international demands for a settlement freeze can only lead to the conclusion that the current Israeli Government has no interest in defusing rising tensions and is, in fact, set on derailing peace efforts." Describing several other Israeli actions in the West Bank, he said that the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip continued, as well. The magnitude of the humanitarian and psychological suffering and despair, deliberately inflicted by the criminal Israeli collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza could not be overemphasized, he said. "Upholding the rule of law, including respect for resolution 1860 (2009), and our collective conscience demands immediate redress of this unjust, inhumane situation."

He said that, despite Israel's flagrant violations, the Palestinian leadership had continuously affirmed its commitment to peace, in word and deed. It could not proceed with negotiations, including proximity talks, however, as long as Israel continued to violate international law, United Nations resolutions and Quartet positions regarding the settlements and all other illegal attempts to alter the character, status and demography of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

He said it was time for the international community to act decisively in order to finally bring an end to the Israeli occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, and to achieve a just resolution of the plight of the Palestine refugees. The Security Council must take practical measures to compel Israel to cease all of its illegal settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. It was essential that the Council adopt a resolution framing the parameters of the solution to that conflict. "We cannot allow Israel to continue acting above the law, defying the calls to end its violations from all corners of the world, including by its closest allies, and making a mockery of the urgency of achieving peace and security for our region and the international community as a whole," he said.

GABRIELA SHALEV (Israel) said the current debate occurred between two important days in her country. This past Monday, Israel had commemorated the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and next Monday, it would commemorate its soldiers that had fallen in war, as well as all Israelis murdered by terrorists. Those two days shed light on the Israeli people's unending struggle to build a free, independent and democratic State. They also signalled the desire of all Israelis to live in peace, prosperity and cooperation with their neighbours. "Yet, in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East, all parties must realize that they have not only rights, but obligations as well," she said, stressing that the Palestinians and the wider Arab world must show, in both word and deed, that they were committed to the peace process.

She said the Palestinians, along with Arab nations, must demonstrate their will to not only demand rights, but also to accept responsibilities. "They must take tangible steps to combat terrorism, to put an end to incitement, to engage in direct negotiations and to begin a process of normalization with Israel," she said, adding that her Government was hopeful that the proximity talks would serve as a stepping stone towards the resumption of direct, bilateral peace negotiations. Only through such talks could the two sides hope to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. Yet, the success of the talks – and their transition into direct negotiations – depended upon all in the region to take confidence-building steps.

"The Hamas terrorist rulers of the Gaza Strip maintain Gaza as an epicentre of terrorism. With support, financing and arms from Iran, Hamas brutalizes its own people while launching deadly attacks against Israeli civilians," she continued, recalling that, at the beginning of the month, a massive quantity of weapons destined for Gaza had been uncovered in Sinai at the Egypt-Gaza border. Moreover, throughout February and March, a wave of Qassam rockets and other terrorist attacks had exposed the civilian population of southern Israel to serious threat and imminent danger. As a result of those attacks, one Israeli agricultural worker had been killed and dozens of civilians had been injured, she said, adding that just yesterday the Israel Defense Forces had discovered terrorists planting explosive devices along the Israel-Gaza border.

Given that reality, Israel would exercise its right to self-defence, pursuant to international law, she continued, stressing that her Government would never fail to fulfil its obligation to protect its citizens. She went on to say that Israel appreciated the international community's efforts in support of humanitarian work under way in Gaza, and her Government remained in close contact with the Secretary-General and relevant United Nations bodies regarding the supply of relief aid to that area. On that point, she noted that, in 2009 alone, some 738,576 tons of humanitarian commodities had been transferred to the Strip, along with more than 100 million litres of diesel fuel that had been delivered to the Gaza power station.

While those numbers reflected only a portion of the humanitarian aid provided to the people of Gaza, Israel remained a convenient scapegoat for the situation there. But, the truth of the matter remained self-evident: the complicated situation there was a direct result of "the Hamas terrorist occupation". She said the complicated situation was also a direct result of Hamas' continued rejection of the obligations laid out by the international community, namely, the recognition of Israel, renouncing violence and acceptance of previous agreements. Further, Hamas continued to hold captive Corporal Gilad Shalit.

Beyond Gaza, however, the West Bank offered an alternative future. She said that, as a direct result of Israeli-Palestinian economic and security cooperation, life for both Palestinians and Israelis continued to improve. Still, the situation there was not without problems. Violence and terrorism were ever-present challenges, and Israel was deeply dismayed to see a street in Ramallah named in honour of Yehiye Ayash, "a Hamas terrorist mastermind responsible for the murder of hundreds of innocent Israeli civilians". She asked: Given that the Road Map explicitly states that all official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel, what message was the Palestinian authority sending by publicly honouring terrorists?

She went on to briefly respond to concerns expressed regarding recent measures put in place related to the prevention of illegal infiltration into the West Bank. That concern reflected a misunderstanding of the effect and purpose of those measures. As a matter of fact, the measures provided significant safeguards and due process protection to existing legislation. "They do not extend beyond it," she declared, stressing that the measures applied only to persons who unlawfully infiltrated into the West Bank and did not apply beyond that area.

Turning to Iran, which she called the "greatest danger facing the Middle East and the world," she said that country continued to threaten Israel with destruction, while denying the Holocaust. Iran also supported terrorism and violence against Israel and Jews far beyond the Gaza Strip. In Lebanon, for example, the Hizbullah terrorist organization continued to amass arms from Syria and from its Iranian patrons, with the active consent and support of Syrian authorities. Most alarming however was that Iran continued to pursue nuclear weapon capabilities, mocking the international community's diplomatic overtures. Such behaviour not only endangered the Middle East, but the entire world. Therefore, the Security Council had an obligation to take timely and effective action to counter that threat.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said Israel was more than ever intentionally taking unilateral illegal actions towards predetermining the outcome of negotiations, changing the reality on the ground and rendering the two-State solution impossible. Describing the situation, he said expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem, as well as ongoing settlement activity in the West Bank, despite Israel's claim to have discontinued such activities, continued to disrupt the peace efforts of the United States Administration. Such activities had been condemned by the United Nations Secretary-General, the United States Government, the Quartet and many others. Yet, the Israeli Government cracked down on peaceful Palestinian civilian demonstrations and allowed the criminal behaviour of its settlers to continue.

It had been reported that some 50,000 new settlement housing units in Jerusalem beyond the Green Line were being developed, and future construction plans were expected to focus on East Jerusalem, he said. Israel's current plan of action "did not target only the Palestinian occupied land in the West Bank, but also the Palestinians themselves". A new Israeli military order in which several thousands Palestinian residents of both the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem would be deemed

infiltrators liable to expulsion could be a new form of "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians from their homelands. Palestinian children were also suffering from Israeli practices.

Calling to attention the plight of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention centres, he mentioned the name of Nafez Haraz, a 54-year-old Palestinian from Gaza who, like many others, has been in captivity for 24 years and denied visitation with his children for the past 5 years. Hunger strikes protesting bad treatment had been carried out by prisoners, and more were being planned. In addition, he stressed that the Israeli blockade on Gaza was "illegal, immoral, and unethical", and the effects on the civilians in Gaza were "reprehensible". The blockade must end now, as must the indiscriminate aerial bombing of the area.

He said that the Security Council should closely monitor developments pertaining to the fact finding mission into the war in Gaza, known as the Goldstone Report, and welcomed the Human Rights Council's 25 March decision to call for investigations into the violations of international humanitarian and human rights law present in that Report.

As for any future negotiations, those must concentrate on the final status issues, not only confidence-building measures, he said. Further, any solution to the Middle East conflict should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. He affirmed Lebanon's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety, and renewed its pledge to work closely with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) said he looked forward to the start of the proximity talks as soon as possible and supported United States efforts towards that end. Negotiations should lead to a comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution and a just settlement for refugees. He hoped that this time peace could be given a chance. The climate in the region would have an impact on the success of the talks. Trying to change the facts on the grounds, therefore, would only undermine trust. Israel must stop its illegal settlement activities fully and permanently, and refrain from unilateral and provocative actions.

He said that Jerusalem was an important issue, for Muslims, Jews and Christians alike. Any attempt to change the fabric of Jerusalem posed a serious threat to stability and peace. The military escalation in the West Bank was cause for serious concern. The focus should be on the empowerment of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians should be able to enjoy the fruits of the land. The new military order that would allow the deportation of Palestinians in the West Bank could not contribute to Palestinian State-building and mutual trust. The disunity on the Palestinian side was also a matter of concern, as it impeded the resumption of the peace process.

The situation in Gaza was unchanged, with a continued siege, he said. That was neither acceptable, nor sustainable. The full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) held the key to stability and normalcy in the region.

IVAN BARBALIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina), aligning himself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union, said that to achieve the two-State solution to the Middle East conflict, the parties had to meet their agreed commitments. In that light, he condemned the decision by Israel to approve the building of 1,600 new housing units in East Jerusalem, called upon Israel to immediately end all settlement activity and stressed that the status of Jerusalem must be resolved through negotiations. He supported Quartet encouragement of proximity talks in order to restart direct negotiations that resolved all such final status issues, which was necessary for a just and lasting peace.

Supporting the efforts of the United States Special Envoy, he said that the entire international community must help the parties to transform the unsustainable status quo into a politically sustainable negotiating process without delay. Deeply regretting the lack of any meaningful steps towards reconstruction and rehabilitation in Gaza, he reiterated the call for full implementation of Council resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings in accordance with the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. He strongly condemned all attacks on civilians, calling for restraint and an end to all violence and condemning the 18 March rocket fire from Gaza. In that vein, he urged Palestinians to continue implementation of their obligations to end violence.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING (Austria) said the renewal of direct negotiations between the parties on all status issues was urgent and immensely important to ensuring peace in the wider Middle East. Both sides needed to engage in good faith and come to a comprehensive settlement that led to the creation of two States living side by side in peace. Each day without a solution undercut the efforts of those calling for peaceful dialogue and promoted the position of those advocating extremism and violence. Both parties must abide by the agreements under the Quartet-backed Road Map peace plan, and refrain from all activities that would exacerbate the situation.

For Israel, that meant ending all settlement activity, home demolitions and expulsions. He urged Israel to end such practices, as "illegal and illegitimate policies" undercut the viability of a two-State solution. In turn, he called on the Palestinian Authority to step up its activities to maintain law and order in the territories and to discourage any attempts to exacerbate tensions in East Jerusalem. Austria would continue support all such activities undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, but would stress that they could only succeed when backed by sound policies and efforts to restart normal economic activity, rather than a dependence on donor interventions.

He encouraged Israel to decisively remove the remaining obstacles and consider giving the Palestinian Authority access to land and resources in "area C". Austria noted Israel's decision to allow entry of a wider array of goods into the Gaza Strip and hoped that that "welcome and overdue step" would lead to the removal of all obstacles. Finally, he stressed the ongoing need for investigations into violations of international law during the 2009 Gaza conflict, stressing that there must be accountability and effective remedy for such violations.

CLAUDE HELLER (Mexico) said that, since the Council's last briefing on the subject, the situation in the Middle East had deteriorated, as violence and tension had increased between the parties. That situation was very worrying. As such, the Council and the wider international community should continue to press both sides to reopen direct negotiations. "We know this is the only way to ensure a comprehensive peace in the Middle East," he said, adding that such negotiations would lead to the establishment of Israel's safety and security, and to the creation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State.

To establish conditions for such dialogue, he said both Israel and the Palestinian Authority must comply with the Road Map, the basis for dealing with all pending questions regarding the conflict. Both sides must respect international humanitarian law and must refrain from any provocative or violent acts that would exacerbate tensions. He urged Israel to immediately cease its settlement activity, evictions and other unilateral actions that were undermining efforts to restart talks. He urged the Palestinian Authority to abide by its commitments to jumpstart economic activity in the West Bank, which had begun to bear fruit. Mexico was convinced that the improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian population and further security initiatives undertaken by the Authority, were fundamental elements towards lasting peace.

To that end, he said that Mexico supported Prime Minister Fayyad's plan to ensure the future economic development of a Palestinian State. He also called for the opening of all borders and crossing points into Gaza, especially since the current blockade had led to an increase in the smuggling of goods into the area, including illegal weapons. Such illegal activity could not but lead to actions that would further undermine the peace process. He also stressed the importance of completing, as soon as possible, the Egyptian-backed Palestinian reconciliation process. Finally, he was convinced that the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East would be part of a wider political understanding of peaceful coexistence of all States in that region, including a future Palestinian State.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France) said the main objective now was the urgent re-launch of the peace process, in order to create a viable Palestinian State on the basis of the two-State solution. On 17 March, the Quartet had set out a two-year schedule for the conclusion of the negotiations. If that failed, the international community would have to commit itself to assist negotiations. In parallel to efforts for negotiations, developments in the field were also necessary. Settlement activities

remained a major obstacle to peace.

He said the Israeli Government's decision to impose a 10-month moratorium on settlement construction in the West Bank was a positive step. Settlement activities, however, made the prospect of the Palestinian State more difficult and created dangers, particularly in Jerusalem. The developments in the Holy City were alarming. Every provocative action should be avoided. Demolition of houses in East Jerusalem was morally unacceptable. There could be no peace without Jerusalem as the capital of two States. The Palestinian Authority must continue its efforts for security sector reform and establishing the rule of law.

To forget about the situation in Gaza would be a political mistake, he said. He called for the unconditional lifting of the blockade and an end to weapons smuggling. The immediate cessation of all violence against Israel was also necessary. He also called for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit. The Palestinian Authority must be supported in establishing its State institutions. He supported the Fayyad plan that would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian State. Other regional issues should also not be forgotten, and resolution 1701 (2006) should be fully implemented. In order to back United States efforts working towards resumption of the peace talks, French President Nicolas Sarkozy had proposed a "peace summit".

EMMANUEL ISSOZE-NGONDET ([Gabon](#)) said the problems of the Israeli Palestinian conflict had been the subject of intense political activities. The Quartet had called for a freeze on settlements and established a two-year timeline for a peace agreement. At the highest level, the United States had made efforts to help the two parties to start negotiations. Gabon welcomed all diplomatic efforts that gave some room for hope, but was concerned that both parties were making things difficult. He called on the parties to follow the Road Map and the Arab League Initiative and refrain from actions that could compromise talks. Lifting the blockade on Gaza could facilitate negotiations.

MARK LYALL GRANT ([United Kingdom](#)) said his delegation supported all efforts to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable two-State solution to the situation in the Middle East. However, as long as a sustainable solution eluded the international community, the situation would remain a catalyst for violence and extremism. It was up to the Council and the wider international community to encourage negotiations that would lead to a viable and sustainable peace. Indeed, he said, the principle of a two-State solution, and the parameters to achieve it – including regarding refugees and the status of Jerusalem – was shared by almost all parts of the international community. But, whatever the international community's will or understanding, there could be no progress unless the parties demonstrated the will to move the process forward.

Setting out his delegation's vision of what steps should be taken to that end, he said the aim must be for proximity talks that rapidly led to face-to-face negotiations. The United Kingdom also supported the 24-month time frame put forward by the diplomatic Quartet. Further, both parties must work for peace on the ground. That meant, among other things, that Israel must stop settlement construction activities. It must also respect the freedom of Palestinians to live in the West Bank and Jerusalem. For its part, the Palestinian Authority must ensure an end to all violent attacks. It must also avoid any actions that made restarting the negotiations more difficult, he said, adding that the United Kingdom found the celebration or acknowledgment of individuals responsible for the deaths of civilians to be quite disturbing.

He said that the United Kingdom supported the comprehensive Palestinian state-building plan, but would stress that it needed to be supported by unified leadership. Israel's de facto blockade of Gaza only served to ostracize and radicalize Gaza's population. Further, the blockade was a "failed policy", especially as the tunnels were becoming more sophisticated. Moreover, it was clear that Hamas was profiting from the tunnel economy. He urged Israel to open the crossings so that Gazans could access their needs. The region, the Council, the Quartet and the broader international community must send a clear and unambiguous message about the shared vision for a solution to the conflict and parameters to carry out a comprehensive settlement. At the same time, the parties must also press ahead with efforts to launch negotiations.

LONG ZHOU ([China](#)) began by thanking those that had expressed sympathy with his Government following the massive earthquake that struck his country earlier in the morning. Turning to the issue under consideration, he said China was seriously concerned and worried about the situation in the Middle East. The international community should press for an early solution to the issue, and he hoped today's meeting would add impetus to international efforts to promote the resumption of talks. China was opposed to all actions that undermined such talks or prejudged their outcome, and he called on Israel to consider its own actions in the region and to create conditions so the talks could resume.

He also called on Israel to end its settlement construction. Further, he called on the Palestinian Authority to continue its practical measures to ensure unity. He said that everything woke up in the spring, and China awaited such a re-awakening of the peace process in the Middle East, leading to a long hoped for comprehensive and sustainable solution.

RAFF BUKUN-OLU WOLE ONEMOLA ([Nigeria](#)) said the debate was taking place against a backdrop of escalating tensions. Diplomatic efforts had been futile, because of actions by both sides. Israelis and Palestinians continued to undermine the path to peace. Neither party could escape blame for actions that harmed the peace process. He reiterated his Government's call on Israel and the Palestinians to exercise the utmost restraint.

He said the two parties should head the call from the Quartet to embrace peace and return to negotiations. Construction of settlements in East Jerusalem, firing of rockets into Israel and blockades would not solve the problem. The relevance of a two-State solution needed no reiteration. Progress would depend on the resumption of direct negotiations.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VIOTTI ([Brazil](#)) said that the deteriorating security situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was likely to be aggravated further, if no serious negotiations were initiated soon. The only solution would be an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, within internationally recognized borders. Given that, Brazil welcomed efforts to restart the peace process through proximity talks by the United States and others, and the timeline set by the Palestinian Authority, which was endorsed by the Quartet.

Negotiations would be difficult to resume if Israel continued its policies that prejudged negotiation and changed the demographics of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, she said. New Israeli regulations that gave the military power to detain, imprison and deport Palestinians in the West Bank could become a major source of instability and violence. At the same time, the Palestinians should also do their part, as overcoming divisions, keeping extremists in check, including in Gaza, and enhancing democratic governance were also essential.

While peace was in the hands of the parties, she said, the need for the international community to sustain its involvement throughout such a peace process was one of the main reasons for President Lula's recent visit to the region, during which he pressed for serious, action-oriented negotiations. Quoting the Secretary-General's statement that "Palestinian statehood must become an emerging reality", she called for continued support of the Palestinian Authority's state-building agenda. She said that, while the Israeli decision to allow entry of building materials and approval of some United Nations reconstruction projects should be welcomed, it was only a first step. Israel should act swiftly to reconcile security concerns regarding movement of persons, goods and services in and out of Gaza, and the international community should help address the issue.

Other issues such as accountability in relation to the war in Gaza needed to be addressed. Credible, independent investigations were needed on the disturbing findings in the Goldstone Report. She also noted that the return of the conflict between Lebanon and Israel should be avoided, which could be achieved if all parties faithfully implemented their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) and if the international community assisted Lebanon in building its State capacity and facilitated the central Government to exercise its authority throughout the country.

RUHAKANA RUGUNDA ([Uganda](#)) said the peace process in the Middle East was at a "critical and delicate stage", and the situation on the ground remained tense. Uganda supported all efforts to restart the peace process, including recent initiatives launched by the United States, including calls for proximity talks. Still,

he was concerned that there had been very little progress, and called for an immediate resumption of direct negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement. He was also concerned by Israel's continued construction of settlements.

Such actions undermined the trust that was so much needed, and were also not in line with Israel's commitments under the Quartet-backed Road Map. He was also concerned by further rocket attacks into Israel. All such activities undermined trust between the parties, and he called on both sides to refrain from actions that exacerbated the situation. He went on to express concern about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and urged Israel to lift its ongoing blockade of border crossings and transfer points. He was also concerned about the lack of intra-Palestinian unity, and called on all factions to follow the parameters of the negotiations being shepherded by Egypt.

VITALY CHURKIN ([Russian Federation](#)) said the priority remained the launch of proximity talks, which should ultimately lead to face-to-face talks. While that might be difficult, there was no alternative for getting such talks under way, as required by the Road Map. Unfortunately, some of the actions by Israeli authorities in and around the West Bank, including building of settlements and expulsion of citizens, only served to undermine efforts to promote and ensure peace. He was also concerned about lack of unity among all Palestinian factions.

He said that the Russian Federation was working with Hamas leadership and had their confirmation that calm would be ensured in Gaza and that no further rockets would be launched. Russia also backed Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in his efforts to ensure political solutions to difficult issues involving Palestinians. Russia had convened the recent ministerial-level Quartet meeting precisely to bring all the parties together to help press for a restart of peace talks.

On regional matters, he said he was alarmed by the growing instability along the Blue Line and believed it was important to prevent the escalation of tensions that might spark direct confrontation in southern Lebanon. He called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and stressed that at this time, when the situation in the region remained fragile and the Palestinian and Israeli sides were moving haltingly towards negotiations, the international community could not allow the situation in Lebanon to spark a wider Middle East conflict.

ALEJANDRO D. WOLFF ([United States](#)) said advancing the cause of comprehensive peace in the Middle East was one of the United States highest foreign policy priorities. Resumption of negotiations leading to the two-State solution was the best way. The status quo of the last decade had not served the interest of any of the parties, but had led to more instability in the region. Today, there was a struggle between those who accepted coexistence with Israel and those who sought violence and rejected peace. The status quo strengthened the rejectionists and weakened those who wanted coexistence. Those who preached violence must be proven wrong. The current path was not sustainable, for Israelis and Palestinians both.

He called on all to support the resumption of proximity talks leading to direct negotiations. He called on Arab States to establish talks with Israel concurrent with the direct negotiations. The Palestinian goal of an independent and viable State based on 1967 lines and the Israeli goal for secure borders should be reconciled. The parties should agree on an outcome for Jerusalem and safeguard its status for the people around the world. The Quartet had stated that the talks should lead to a settlement negotiated between the two parties within 24 months.

It was important that the parties fulfil their Road Map obligations, he said. Unilateral actions could not be recognized by the international community. He did not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement activities and Israel should halt demolitions and evictions. The Palestinian Authority should ensure security, reform its institutions and take strong action against all forms of violence. He condemned the glorification of terrorists through the dedication of official places. He emphasized that improvements in the West Bank should not be ignored. The Palestinian Authority had demonstrated its commitment to institution-building and was laying the foundation for a Palestinian State. Its commitment to improve security and the rule of law had generated economic growth. There were positive signs of private sector growth in the West Bank, as well. He strongly endorsed the Palestinian Authority's two-year programme to build the institutions for a Palestinian State. Israel had also taken steps to improve Palestinian access to national and international markets. That proved that Israelis and Palestinians could work together towards a brighter future.

The situation for civilians in Gaza remained extremely difficult, he continued. He urged all parties, including Israel, to focus on the humanitarian needs. Hamas' interference complicated efforts in Gaza, however, as it continued with arms smuggling, among other things. Hamas had yet to accept the Quartet principles of renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and accepting established agreements. Recently, there had been an increase of rocket attacks on Israel. Groups other than Hamas had claimed responsibility, but Hamas had exerted control and was accountable for ensuring that the attacks cease. He also called for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit.

Reiterating support for the sovereign Government of Lebanon, he said that a special tribunal for Lebanon remained a key tool for ending political assassinations there. The transfer of weapons to Hizbullah undermined Lebanon's efforts to establish sovereignty in all of its country. The United States had continued to emphasize the importance of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), which called for, among other things, the disarmament of Hizbullah.

YUKIO TAKASU ([Japan](#)) said the only way to achieve durable peace was through sincere negotiations between the parties concerned. With that, he supported efforts by the United States to hold proximity talks, and encouraged the parties to take the initiative on restarting direct negotiations. Negotiations should result in a two-State solution that would end the occupation of territories, including East Jerusalem, that had begun in 1967. Japan supported the Palestinian Authority's plan for rebuilding a Palestinian State within 24 months by extending assistance for institution- and capacity-building. It also believed that "Palestinian unity is essential for realizing Middle East peace".

He urged that both parties carry out their obligations and commitments under the Road Map, and called on the Israeli Government to cease all settlement activities in the West Bank, and to not implement plans to develop new housing units in East Jerusalem or any measures that would cause undue burden on Palestinians in the West Bank. He called upon the Palestinian Authority to continue efforts to improve the security situation and carry out their commitment to cease violence and acts of terrorism. More than a year after the end of the Israeli military operations in Gaza, the Israeli blockade continued to create a serious humanitarian situation. That was "unacceptable". He hoped that the recent modest, yet positive, step taken by Israel would be followed by freer movement of goods and materials for reconstruction. He also called for the cessation of rockets fired into Israel.

MAGED ABDELAZIZ ([Egypt](#)), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the advancement of peace by ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories remained one of the most important priorities and goals of the Non-Aligned Movement. While the Non-Aligned Movement was committed to the goal of peace, current Israeli practices and policies regarding the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, raised concerns and doubt about Israel's intentions to achieve peace and the viability of the two-State solution.

Israel's positions and continued non-compliance with international law and Security Council resolutions had proved a hindrance to the long term goal of a just and lasting settlement of the Palestine issue, even despite the international consensus on the two-State solution and serious efforts to re-launch negotiations to that end, he said. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterated its demand to Israel to adhere to international law, to fulfil its Road Map obligations and to promote an environment conducive for negotiations and for achieving peace. He said the international community should be resolute in confronting Israel on settlement activities and demand that Israel negotiate and resolve all core issues in a comprehensive manner and in a fixed time frame.

In addition, the Non-Aligned Movement condemned the decision by the Government of Israel to advance planning for new housing units in and around East Jerusalem, which was viewed to be the capital of the future State of Palestine, he said. In light of that, the Movement welcomed intentions of the Quartet to closely monitor such developments. On Gaza, she noted the Movement's demand that Israel immediately lift its illegal blockade and condemned Israel's continued obstruction of urgently needed reconstruction in Gaza. It also stressed the importance of independent, credible investigations in accordance with international

standards, into the serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws reported by the Goldstone Report.

In addressing other issues, he expressed the Movement's concern over Israel's ongoing systematic violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, which were in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), and he called for a full implementation of the resolution, including Israel's withdrawal from all Lebanese territories. The Movement also demanded that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and implement resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) by completing a full withdrawal from the Occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967. The settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict required action by all involved parties, including the international community, which should not allow Israeli intransigence and illegal measures to obstruct steps taken towards achieving the two-State vision.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), said that, once again, Israel had turned its back on efforts by the international community at resuming the peace talks and continued to perpetrate illegal actions aimed at forcibly and aggressively imposing a fait accompli on the Palestinian people. Illegal Israeli measures included the unlawful escalation of settlement activities; the blockade on the Gaza Strip; the continued construction of the separation wall; and restrictions on movement in the West Bank. Those violations were evidence of the policy of "ethnic cleansing". OIC strongly condemned those Israeli violations and called for their immediate cessation.

He said that Israel continued its illegal campaign geared to changing the Palestinian and Arab identity of Al-Quds. OIC members reaffirmed that all the Israeli colonial settlement measures and practices in Al-Quds and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory were null and void. The Israeli Government continued to ignore international community demands to lift its unlawful blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. OIC expressed serious concern about the grave deterioration of socio-economic conditions and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis. It called on Israel to end its collective punitive measures imposed on the civilian population in Gaza.

OIC remained deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and called on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land, he said. It reaffirmed that all measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan were null and void, and had no legal effect. OIC called for an intensification of efforts by the international community, including the Security Council, aimed at accelerating the process of achieving a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference – including the principle of land for peace – and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Speaking in his national capacity, Mr. JA'AFARI welcomed the statements of Council members that condemned unilateral Israeli actions. The Israeli measures contravened the will of the international community to establish a lasting peace in the region by creating a Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders. The Israeli Government did not recognize the Geneva Conventions and United Nations resolutions. It was high time to set up a board of inquiry to examine all resolutions adopted by the United Nations, as well as a committee that would register all terrorist crimes committed by Israel since its creation.

Refuting Israeli claims that Hizbullah was armed with weapons coming across the Lebanese-Syrian border, he recalled that the United Nations reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) did not refer to that. Israel just wanted to divert attention from its actions against its neighbours and the Palestinians, he said. Two days ago, Israel had prevented a Mediterranean-European meeting from adopting a resolution relating to the Middle East, because reference had been made to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Moreover, Israel possessed a nuclear arsenal of over 300 nuclear warheads, as well as long-range missiles that could strike both Europe and China. Israel had not joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and had refused to join a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, a Syrian initiative.

MANSOUR AYYAD ALOTAIBI (Kuwait), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said the terrible occupation of Palestinian territories was persisting and Israel was failing to live up to its international obligations. The international community was paralysed, even as Israel had continued its crimes since 1967 and right up to today, with the construction of the separation wall. In the meantime, Israel continued to defy international law, even as its partners in the peace process continued to say that it would stand by its obligations. While Israel's partners said that it would build no more settlements, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had said in a statement last week that such construction would continue apace. Israel must be compelled to respect Security Council resolutions on the issue.

He went on to say that Israel must view the Arab Peace Initiative as "a sign of weakness", since it continued its blockade of Gaza and continued to destroy holy places and mosques inside Jerusalem. Given the fact that there was no serious Israeli interlocutor, the Arab Group feared that the Peace Initiative was being ignored and that Israel would continue to try and change the character of occupied Palestinian lands and territories. With that in mind, he called on Israel to adhere to its international obligations.

PEDRO SERRANO, Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union, said that the absence of negotiations since December 2008 and the ensuing vacuum had been a source of great concern. The resumption of negotiations remained an absolute and urgent necessity. The Union called on both Israelis and Palestinians to resume meaningful negotiations on all final status issues without further delay. It would continue to work closely with the United States in support of its efforts and to look for ways to ensure a peace deal that should be finalized within 24 months. The creation of the State of Palestine and the realization of the two-State solution remained a core Union interest. The Union would continue to assist Palestinian state-building in preparation for Palestinian statehood, and was ready to extend full diplomatic, political and economic support to the Palestinian Authority's plan called "Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State".

He said that, in order to restore credibility to the peace process, the parties should implement their respective, agreed obligations under the first phase of the Road Map. Israel must end all settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, including natural growth, and should dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001. Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem should be allowed to reopen. The Palestinian side must continue implementation of its obligations to end violence. Deeply concerned about the situation in East Jerusalem, the Union called on all parties to refrain from further provocative actions.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continued to be a source of deep concern, he said, and the physical and political divisions between Gaza and the West Bank undermined the efforts of the international community to resume a meaningful peace process. The continued policy of closures was both counterproductive and unacceptable. The Union reiterated its call for the urgent and full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons. The Union also called on those holding Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay. It emphasized the importance of appropriate and credible investigations into possible violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by the parties to the conflict, in accordance with international standards.

He said the Union called on all regional actors to take confidence building measures, in order to stimulate mutual trust, and encouraged Arab countries to be forthcoming, both politically and financially, in assisting the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian refugees through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

KHALID ABDULLAH KRAYYEMSHAWABKAH (Jordan) said the Middle East region was rife with conflict and tension largely because there had been no progress towards ensuring a two-State solution as the comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The continuation of the status quo would only make matters worse for the region and the world, especially if Israel continued to flagrantly defy international law and to ignore its obligations under numerous Security Council resolutions. The only way to avoid a "bleak outcome" was for the international community to exert all efforts to ensure broad implementation of all obligations under the Road Map and Arab Peace Initiative. Jordan appreciated the efforts exerted by the United States, as well as those of the European Union and others in that regard.

He said his delegation had repeatedly and resoundingly condemned Israel's illegitimate and illegal activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in general, and in and around East Jerusalem, in particular. Israel continued its provocative activities in the Holy City, as it demolished homes, confiscated land and changed the



demographic nature of that area, as well as attempted to erase its Islamic, Arab and Christian features. Such actions contravened international law and must be denounced. Every effort must be made to protect the identity of Jerusalem, he said, calling on the international community to hold Israel accountable for all its actions, especially those that might undermine initiatives aimed at restarting negotiations.

Further, he said that Israeli settlements were a real obstacle to the establishment of a future Palestinian State and he called on Israel to immediately halt all such construction, including natural growth. He also called on the international community to support all efforts to ameliorate the ongoing suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, including by pressuring Israel to end its ongoing blockade of the area and by ensuring full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). He said that all Arab States stood by the calls for ensuring a two-State solution, in line with the framework set out in the Arab Peace Initiative. Those States also reiterated the call for ending the Israeli occupation of all Syrian and Lebanese lands.

MONA JUUL (Norway) said that, yesterday, her country had chaired the biannual meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, the coordination mechanism of the international donor community. Stock had been taken of the implementation of the Palestinian Government's two-year plan and the way forward had been discussed. Overall, the Palestinian Authority was progressing towards the goal of completing the state-building process by the end of 2011. A precondition, however, for a sustainable Palestinian economy and reduced donor dependency was access and movement of goods and people throughout the Palestinian Territory. The Authority estimated its annual loss of revenue from the Gaza blockade at \$500 million, around 42 per cent of the estimated donor funded budget support to the Authority in 2010.

There was a limit as to how far the Authority could move the reform agenda forward without a meaningful peace process and a negotiated settlement, she said. Norway, therefore, strongly supported United States efforts to resume negotiations and would continue to work with the international donor community to ensure support for the two-year plan. That support could not be taken for granted, she warned. Without the strong determination by the parties to enter into a meaningful peace process with a timeline for the completion of negotiations and the two-State solution, willingness to continue funding the Palestinian state-building project would erode.

She said that, although once more a critical juncture had been reached, one element had changed the picture. The notion of a Palestinian State had evolved over the years from merely a concept to a reality within reach. The Palestinian Authority had provided a timeline for the completion of the state-building process. It was time the parties provided a timeline for completion of the final status negotiations.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) said any neutral observer of the latest developments in the Middle East could not help but recognize the disparity between the tireless efforts of the international community to ensure peace and the contradictory and obstructive actions taken by Israel on the ground. Indeed, while the international community had tried to work towards a resumption of peace talks, Israel had announced that it was planning to construct some 1,600 new homes near the West Bank. While the international community called for peace, Israel continued to destroy property in and around the West Bank, and to expel Palestinians from Jerusalem. Those actions were part of a "long chain of procrastination" by the Israeli authorities aimed at derailing negotiations.

Israel was continuing its "feverish campaign" against Islamic holy structures and actively provoking peace-loving peoples of all religions. He appealed to the diplomatic Quartet and the Security Council to live up to their obligations by putting an end to Israel's illegal and unilateral actions and pave the way for substantive negotiations. No effort should be spared to ensure that all the people of the region live in lasting peace. Morocco would continue to support all initiatives aimed at ensuring realistic negotiations, based on the Arab Peace Initiative, relevant Security Council resolutions and the Road Map peace plan.

DOCTOR MASHABANE (South Africa) said the current insecurity in the Middle East was the result of the continued illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territory by Israel, the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip, unlawful settlement activities, the failure to address the right of return of Palestinian refugees and the continuation of rocket attacks from Palestinian territory into Israel. He noted with concern the recent settlement announcement in East Jerusalem by Israel and its decision to declare two mosques to be national heritage sites. Those two actions constituted yet another attempt by Israel to extend its control over the West Bank and create a new reality on the ground. He called on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to abstain from further actions in East Jerusalem.

He said his country was also deeply concerned about Israel's prohibition on the importation of construction material into Gaza, which undermined the reconstruction efforts following the devastating attacks there. As an occupying Power, Israel had specific and clear obligations under international law. The blockade was in violation of international humanitarian law and contrary to the will of the international community. The creation of a viable and independent Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital within the 1967 borders, as well as the guarantee of the right of return of all Palestinian refugees, were the only means of finding a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict. Mere statements and goodwill by the international community were no longer good enough. Israel must be held accountable, including through action by the Security Council.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON (Pakistan) said the situation in the Middle East was no longer tenable. An end to mutual suspicion and discord was an essential prerequisite for a durable and viable political settlement. That would require the international community to unequivocally call upon Israel to check the repressive policies of its occupying forces that had converted the sacred land into a complex of checkpoints, roadblocks, military siege and the separation wall. Besides improving the humanitarian situation, it was also essential that any provocative measures must stop, including settlement activity, especially in and around East Jerusalem, and a growing trend to alter the status of centuries-old mosques, churches and cemeteries of the Palestinian people. Those provocations resonated as a loud political statement of utter disregard to the norms of international law and respect for culture, history and traditions.

He said that more disquieting were the latest reports of imposition of a military order that empowered the occupying forces to arbitrarily expel the Palestinian people from the West Bank and Gaza. Such a measure would not only vitiate the atmosphere conducive to the cause of peace, but also raised doubts about the commitments of Israel for a negotiated political settlement. The cessation of repressive and provocative measures was essential, if an environment conducive to implementing the strategies of peace within given timelines was to be built. The Quartet must back its strong words with greater political drive for a sustained dialogue towards the final settlement, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Quartet's commitment did not obviate the role of the Council, but reinforced it. He hoped that the Council would continue to strive for implementation of all its relevant resolutions.

PEDRO NÚÑEZ MOSQUERA (Cuba) said that the ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories by Israel remained the major obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. In flagrant violation of international law and in conflict with the objectives of the peace process, Israel, the occupying Power, continued its illegal construction of the wall, in particular in and around East Jerusalem. Settlement activities continued unabated.

He expressed great concern at the ongoing demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, as well as at other illegal acts of incitement, provocation and aggression by extremist settlers against the Palestinian population. He urged the international community, including the Council, to act in response to those dangerous illegal measures, saying that Israel could not be allowed to continue to perpetrate with impunity serious and flagrant breaches of international law.

He said the situation in the Gaza Strip was unsustainable, because of Israeli closings and restrictions on the free circulation and access of people and goods, including humanitarian and medical supplies. The international community must take all possible practical measures to compel Israel to end those inhuman and illegal policies. He reaffirmed that all measures or actions taken by Israel with the purpose of modifying the legal, physical and demographic condition and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the Israeli measures to exercise jurisdiction and administration there, were null, void and had no legal effect.

HAMIDON ALI (Malaysia) said that by constructing thousands of new illegal settlements in the occupied territories, Israel was killing off whatever hopes there were for peace in the Middle East and had put itself on the wrong side of history. The intransigence of Israel in building those settlements was another example in a

general pattern of behaviour that was proving its general unwillingness to undertake any measures that might lead to peace. Other examples included the building of the separation wall; eviction of Palestinian families and demolition of their homes; revocation of residency rights of Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem; the new military order that would give Israeli forces the power to deport Palestinians in the West Bank; and incessant attacks on Palestinians by illegal Israeli settlers.

He said that the blockade imposed on Gaza was a form of collective punishment forbidden by international law and had forced 1.5 million Gazans to live in deplorable conditions. He urged Israel to lift the inhumane blockade to allow the movement of essential goods and construction materials. It was also imperative for the parties concerned and the relevant United Nations bodies, including the Council, to undertake actions in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/10 and 64/254, in order to ensure accountability by bringing the perpetrators identified in the Goldstone Report to justice. Resolving those issues required the international community to focus all energy and effort at restoring comprehensive peace in the region and guaranteeing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State. That required, among other things, the political will of the Council to bring into effect its very own resolutions.

ESHAGH AL HABIB ([Iran](#)) said that, although more than a year had passed since the end of the Israeli regime's brutal attack on the Gaza Strip, reconstruction of damaged buildings and infrastructure remained impossible, due to that regime's ongoing blockade. Relief agencies were still working in a very harsh environment to help those in need. Turning to broader issues, he said that what the Middle East lacked was not peace plans, but a correct reading of the real causes of the crisis there. "The fundamental problem [...] is the illegitimate occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and the Israeli regime's intransigence towards any single principle of international law," he declared, adding that since its "unblessed birth", Israel had been trying to introduce external elements as the main factors hindering the so-called peace process in an attempt to divert attention from its "crimes and responsibilities".

He said that, in line with the Israeli regimes policy, Israeli officials, instead of answering for their unparalleled record of non-compliance with all humanitarian and human rights principles, as well as their "dark catalogue of crimes and atrocities" such as occupation and State terrorism, had instead continued to make inflammatory remarks about other nations. Moreover, it was now widely recognized that the Israeli regime's clandestine and unlawful possession of between 100 and 300 nuclear warheads, and its constant threat to use them, posed a graver threat to regional and global peace and security. He added that one of the bitterest realities of today's world was the blatant support the Israeli regime received from "certain Powers". By blocking every single action that might address or call into question that regime's inhumane policies, its supporters had given the Israeli regime a blank check to violate with impunity the internationally recognized rights of the Palestinian people, as well as others in the region.

He hoped that those on the Security Council would reconsider their unwavering support for Israel in the coming months, as international calls grew louder for justice and the prosecution of those identified by the Goldstone Report as having committed war crimes in Gaza last year. Responding to comments made by the Israeli regime's representative, he said that his delegation rejected such baseless and distorted allegations. "This is yet another tired practice by this regime to distract the attention of the international community from its nuclear arsenal, as well as its criminal policies and abhorrent atrocities in the region, including its recent heinous crimes against the people of Palestine and Lebanon," he said. Finally, he said that lasting peace in Palestine would be possible through justice, as well as through ending discrimination in and occupation of Palestine and other occupied territories. "Today we need to act collectively to demonstrate our all-out support for the cause of Palestine, and to rally to assist those who have been deprived of their rights," he said.

DANILO ROSALES DÍAZ ([Nicaragua](#)) reiterated the wholehearted condemnation of Israel's illegal occupation of all Arab and Palestinian lands and called for its withdrawal. He also condemned Israel's attempt to change the character of East Jerusalem. In an illegal and provocative way, Israel had also designated two holy sites as belonging to it. If that weren't enough, Israeli authorities had begun implementing a policy that was aimed at erasing all Palestinians from the West Bank. Its brutal occupation and attendant human rights and humanitarian violations continued unabated. All that made it clear that Israel was not really interested in a two-State solution. Israel's impunity was unacceptable. In fact, it seemed as if that Government was being rewarded for its unilateral, provocative and callous illegal actions. What was worse was that Israel's impunity and blatant defiance of international law were a glaring reflection of "the inability of this very body" to carry out, for nearly 50 years, the duties that had been entrusted to it by the international community.

BANDULA JAYASEKARA ([Sri Lanka](#)) said his country believed that a resolution of the Palestinian conflict was crucial in restoring peace in the Middle East, and had therefore called on all sides to fully implement resolutions regarding both the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the two-State solution. While the relaxation of restrictions regarding the economic blockade in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were noted, there were still deep concerns about the daily suffering and hardships the Palestinian people continued to endure while living under occupation, he said.

Viable, sustainable peace could only be obtained if Israel were to withdraw from the territories back to the 1967 borders and end the blockade, illegal expansion of settlements and the construction of the separation wall, he said. The Palestinian Authority, in honouring its obligations, needed to implement its security plan to ensure its territory was not used for illegal attacks on Israeli civilians. Allegations of illegal arms flows must be investigated. Both sides must do everything possible to ensure the safety and security of civilians. Sri Lanka supported the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, as well as international efforts for early resumption of negotiations, and cited the unity of the Palestinian people as essential to the process for lasting peace. He hoped both sides would ensure a climate conducive for the resumption of negotiations and regretted that the announcement of new settlement construction had resulted in a setback to the progress made.

ZAHIR TANIN ([Afghanistan](#)), Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said the violence that continued to affect the lives of the Palestinians and Israelis needed to stop. The Committee had condemned acts of violence from either side, including the use of Israeli military power against the occupied Palestinian people and the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian groups from Gaza into Israel. He noted that the Committee found it "totally unacceptable" that Israel had ignored calls to halt illegal settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and expressed concern over the new Israeli military order in effect that had threatened many West Bank residents with deportation.

In that regard, the Committee supported the Middle East Quartet's demand that Israel freeze all settlement activity, not as a precondition for resuming negotiations, but as an Israeli obligation under the Road Map endorsed by the Council, he said. The Palestinian Authority's programme, known as the Fayyad Plan might be understood as the Palestinian answer to settlement building, by creating unilaterally positive facts on the ground. The Plan was consistent with international law, promoted negotiations towards peace and was welcomed by the international community, unlike Israel's settlement activity. He said the Committee strongly supported the Palestinian Authority's two-year State-building programme and urged the Council to support it. Such support could help create the necessary political framework for ending the occupation and implementing the two-State solution.

GHAZI JOMAA ([Tunisia](#)) said that, since the Council last discussed the situation in the Middle East, the international community had endeavoured to create an environment that would lead to ending the stalemate that had stalled Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. However, while Arab States and others had hoped for some progress, unfortunately, Israel had ignored those efforts, as its Defense Forces continued to carry out provocative acts on the ground aimed at derailing the process. Tunisia had joined the United Nations and others in the international community to denounce the decision by the Israeli Government to establish more settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank. It also rejected the continuation of the status quo in the Gaza Strip that was creating a dire humanitarian situation for the people living there.

He said Israel's actions were a cause for real alarm, and Tunisia called on the Quartet and others to compel Israel to end its provocation and seriously enter into substantive negotiations. Israel must also be made to ensure the well-being of all Palestinian people, especially those living under the endless blockade in Gaza. Tunisia supported all efforts to bring about a comprehensive solution that would end Israeli occupation of all Arab territories, in a manner that would restore Arab nations and in line with all relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

CHARLES NTWAAGAE ([Botswana](#)) pointed out that Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi had written about the question of Israel and Palestine where the partitioning of

Palestine was being discussed in 1938. What was apparent was that neither party was more qualified to impose their will on the other. More than 60 years down the line, the international community was still struggling to find a solution, he said. It was inconceivable that people who were born in the same place could not agree to live peacefully side by side. That was why there was merit to the two-State solution, and that Israel and Palestine must coexist as two sovereign States that share a border, as well as a desire for peace, security and prosperity. He urged the people of the Middle East to begin working towards peace and the protection of civilian lives, which would include implementing all relevant Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as the strict observance of international law and international humanitarian law.

Given that, Botswana called for both parties to fulfil their obligations and refrain from any actions that would undermine the negotiation process, as such actions could compromise either party's credibility as a committed and genuine partner in the quest for solutions to both the situation in the Middle East and the settlement of the Palestinian conflict. A transformative change in the Middle East needed to be seen as the ultimate reward and goal, in order to secure a peaceful future for the children of the region.

JOSÉ LAUTARO DE LAS OVALLES COLMENARES ([Venezuela](#)) said that, in order to put an end to the violence in the Middle East, a sustainable and comprehensive negotiated solution was necessary that did not undermine the rights of the peoples, including the right to protect their sovereignty. As the conflict constituted a threat to world peace, he supported all initiatives aimed at encouraging possible solutions. Mutual trust should be built within the framework of the Road Map. In that regard, it was necessary for Israel to end its settlement policies and to accept East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital. He supported the Palestinian programme for building a State. He opposed the blockade of Gaza and other closures, as they constituted a violation of international law.

He said that, according to the Secretary-General, almost all recent incidents had taken place in Palestinian areas where Israeli forces were present. Israel's Prime Minister had ignored requests by the international community to freeze settlements. Further, the closing of Gaza required immediate resolution. The impediments suffered by the Palestinian people in their attempt to use their lands and build homes constituted an attack on economic development. The repeated violations and acts of aggression against Lebanon also constituted a threat to stability in the region. He supported the Syrian Government in its demands for compliance with resolution 497 (1981) on the Syrian Golan.

The expulsion of Palestinian people from their own lands constituted a violation of humanitarian law. His Government had, therefore, underlined the need to examine Chapter II, Articles 5 and 6 of the United Nations Charter.

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