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### TIME HAS COME TO REBUILD 'SHATTERED BRIDGE TO PEACE' IN MIDDLE EAST, SAYS

#### SECRETARY-GENERAL AS SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATES SITUATION IN REGION

##### Speakers in Meeting Requested by Arab League Stress Need To Renew Commitment to Negotiations under Quartet Principles

With the world's attention fixed on the Middle East, the time had come to rebuild the shattered bridge to peace in that region, Secretary-General Kofi Annan told a ministerial-level meeting of the Security Council convened today at the request of the League of Arab States.

He said the Arab-Israeli conflict carried a powerful symbolic and emotional charge for people throughout the world. The narratives of the two parties to the conflict – dispossession, prolonged occupation and denial of statehood on one side, and terrorism and existential threats on the other – stirred fears and passions among people in many nations. The international community's continued failure to resolve the conflict called into question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Council itself. The events of the past summer had been a reminder of how dangerous it was to leave the broader Arab-Israeli conflict unresolved, and how interconnected the region's problems were.

Large majorities on either side desired peace, but what they desperately needed was a bridge to reach it, he said. That bridge to peace must be wide enough to accommodate all who had a legitimate stake in the process, long enough to span the enormous gulf of mistrust that separated the parties and strong enough to withstand the inevitable efforts to sabotage it. The Quartet recognized that the bridge badly needed repair. Its foundations seemed weak, and the destination on the far side – an end to occupation and a secure Israel at peace with all its neighbours, including the Palestinian State – remained distant, ill defined and, for many, almost unimaginable.

While the Quartet had agreed on the crucial importance of greater engagement with the parties on the ground and in the region, the test would be action, he emphasized. The parties must now rise to their responsibilities, as must the Quartet, its partners in the region and the Security Council. "With all the tools at our disposal, let us work together to put in place a credible political process, based on dialogue, parallel implementation of obligations, monitoring of performance and clarity as to the end goal", he said.

Outlining the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative on behalf of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States, Foreign Minister Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al-Khalifa of Bahrain said those States were ready to consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, enter into a peace agreement and establish normal relations with Israel. In exchange, they sought Israel's withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem and acceptance of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

He said the objective in convening today's meeting was not to apportion blame or exchange accusations, but to revive direct negotiations between the parties. Re-launching the peace process could mean reinvigorating the Middle East "[Road Map](#)" and devising a new mechanism for implementing it. The Arab League proposed that the Security Council initiate negotiations between the parties, based on agreed terms of reference within a set time frame, and request the Secretary-General to report on appropriate mechanisms for resuming negotiations. Once that report was submitted, the Council should reconvene at the ministerial level to consider further measures.

Israel's representative said his country was a committed partner for peace, and its people had shown time and again that nobody wanted it more. The dangers to peace would not be overcome by military means alone, and stagnation was not Israel's interest or policy. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the consequence – not the cause – of an ideology of intolerance and hatred that plagued the region and had now taken control of the Palestinian Authority in the form of Hamas. The Road Map was designed to confront the enemies of peace and ensure that the future Palestinian State would not perpetuate conflict, but end it. Discarding the building blocks of peace would not speed up the process, but ensure that it crumbled.

The goal must be to rekindle the Road Map without rekindling the conflict, he added. That meant not confusing paper with progress or form with substance.

Progress would only begin with genuine dialogue among those committed to peace and with the release of Israeli hostages and the end of terrorist attacks. It would also begin with the renewal of commitment to a two-State solution and the acceptance of the basic principle that each people's rights were to be realized in their own homeland, and not in the homeland of others. It was first and foremost about the commitment to prepare the people for the price of peace and accepting the true meaning of the two-State solution. "Tragedy is not just the pain we suffer, but also the opportunity we miss", he said.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said that that entity was fully committed to peace through negotiations, international legitimacy, the Road Map and living with its neighbours in peace and security. The world desired to reach a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in order to eradicate the source of tension that affected all aspects of life, not just in the Middle East, but also around the world. Council members had made clear their keen desire for peace, and it was to be hoped that their words would be followed by concrete deeds.

Welcoming the announced formation of a Palestinian Government of National Unity, Erkki Tuomioja, Finland's Foreign Minister, expressed the European Union's hope that the negotiations to that end would conclude rapidly, so that Quartet principles could be engaged. It was imperative to create new dynamics because the ultimate goal was to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the Middle East. The European Union welcomed the Quartet's reaffirmation of its commitment to the creation of two coexisting States and gave its full support to the Quartet's intention to meet regularly in the coming period and to engage with the parties and other regional members in monitoring progress.

France's Foreign Minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, said that, following yesterday's Quartet meeting, which had identified measures to facilitate the rebuilding of confidence, other steps must be taken, such as the preparation of the international conference, as proposed by President Jacques Chirac. That conference could take place in the context of the Arab League initiative and pave the way for a new regional framework for collective security and economic integration. The goal of two States living side by side in peace and security was not beyond reach, if the international community could demonstrate boldness and political courage in the weeks and months ahead.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Qatar, Denmark, Ghana, Peru, China, United Kingdom, Slovakia, Argentina, Russian Federation, United Republic of Tanzania, United States, Congo, Japan and Greece.

The meeting began at 3:45 p.m. and adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

#### Background

The Security Council met at the ministerial level this afternoon to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The request for the meeting is contained in a letter to the Council's President (document S/2006/700) from the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, dated 30 August 2006.

In an annex to the letter, Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa states that the Council of that body met at the ministerial level on 20 August 2006, following the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1701 (2006) and issued a decision, in which it reaffirmed complete Arab solidarity with Lebanon and the offer to provide political assistance to that country's Government with a view to maintaining its national unity, security and stability, and sovereignty over all its territory. The decision called on the Security Council to exert pressure on Israel for the immediate lifting of its air, land and sea blockade on Lebanon, which the League considers a violation of resolution 1701. It also stressed the need for a permanent ceasefire, condemned Israel's violations of the resolution and held it responsible for them.

According to the letter, the Arab League Council reaffirmed its support for the "seven point plan" presented by the Government of Lebanon, and called on the United Nations Secretary-General and the Security Council to adopt the Lebanese proposal concerning the Shebaa Farms area when the Secretary-General presents his proposals regarding that question. The Arab League attributed to Israel full responsibility for the losses sustained by Lebanon and for the deliberate targeting of civilians and infrastructure, and stated that Israel was to be held responsible for compensating Lebanon and its people for those losses.

The letter says that the Arab ministers for foreign affairs welcomed the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council regarding the establishment of a high-level inquiry commission to investigate Israel's human rights violations during its aggression against Lebanon. The League's Council considered Israel's actions during that aggression as constituting war crimes, and called for the prosecution of their perpetrators before the competent international jurisdictions.

Regarding the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the League's Council adopted a decision calling on the Security Council to convene at the ministerial level in September. The meeting would consider the settlement of that conflict in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace through the establishment of effective, clearly defined mechanisms for the rapid resumption of direct negotiations between the parties with full Security Council supervision, the fixing of a time frame for their completion and agreement on international guarantees on implementation.

#### Statement by Secretary-General

KOFI ANNAN, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said the Arab-Israeli conflict carried a powerful symbolic and emotional charge for people throughout the world. The narratives of the two sides – dispossession, prolonged occupation and denial of statehood on one side, and terrorism and existential threats on the other – stirred fears and passions among people in many nations. The international community's continued failure to resolve the conflict called into question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Council itself.

The events of the past summer were a reminder of how dangerous it was to leave the broader Arab-Israeli conflict unresolved, and how interconnected the region's problems were, he said. At the same time, the Security Council's role in bringing about the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah, and charting the way towards a sustainable ceasefire through resolution 1701 (2006), had shown that it could play a vital role in the search for peace in the region. The resolution rightly stressed the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all its earlier relevant resolutions. To do that, the international community must make progress on the issue at the heart of the conflict, which was the problem of Israel and Palestine.

Large majorities on either side desired peace but what they desperately needed was a bridge to enable them to reach it from their present sad state of conflict, he said. The bridge to peace must be wide enough to accommodate all who had a legitimate stake in the process, long enough to span the enormous gulf of mistrust that separated the parties and strong enough to withstand the inevitable efforts to sabotage it. Yesterday, he had stressed to his Quartet partners that the existing bridge to peace was badly in need of repair. Its foundations seemed weak, since both parties had failed to take the concrete actions needed to meet their existing obligations. The destination on the far side – an end to the occupation that had begun in 1967 and a secure Israel at peace with all its neighbours, including the Palestinian State – remained distant, ill defined and, for many, almost unimaginable.

The international community was dealing with a difficult situation in Gaza, where there were closures and the authorities were starved of resources, he said. The institutions were in sharp decline and Palestinian society was rapidly becoming poorer. If that was allowed to continue and the Palestinian Authority collapsed, the consequent fragmentation and radicalization of Palestinian society would be a terrible, perhaps irreversible, strategic setback. Today, Palestinians living under occupation in Gaza and the West Bank had neither a State nor a functioning Government. Was it any wonder that they looked to the international community for help, protection and hope? If those were not forthcoming, the young people of Palestine would be attracted to the false promises of those who advocated violence.

He said that Israelis rightly demanded an end to rocket attacks against southern Israel, the return of the soldier captured on 25 June and a Palestinian Authority that accepted the basic principles of the peace process and took credible action to prevent attacks against Israel. Yet, in the absence of a political process, which was the only way to bringing about lasting peace, Israelis naturally looked to their military to deal with security threats. It would be easy for the international community to declare that the parties were not ready for dialogue and that little could be done until they were. But that would be deeply irresponsible and unfair to the parties. People on both sides understood there was no military solution to the conflict and that a two-State solution could not be achieved through unilateral actions by either side. Both Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas understood those realities and were searching for a way forward.

Expressing his own support and that of the Quartet for the two leaders' quest, he said the Quartet had also encouraged efforts to form a Palestinian Government of National Unity, in the hope that its programme would reflect Quartet principles and facilitate early engagement by the international community. The wisdom of President Abbas in pursuing that path must be recognized, as must the efforts of Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.

He said he was glad that the Quartet had agreed on the crucial importance of greater engagement with the parties on the ground and in the region. The test, however, would be action. The parties must now rise to their responsibilities, as must the Quartet, its partners in the region and the Security Council. "With all the tools at our disposal, let us work together to put in place a credible political process, based on dialogue, parallel implementation of obligations, monitoring of performance and clarity as to the end goal. The time has come to rebuild the shattered bridge to peace", he concluded.

KHALID BIN AHMED BIN MOHAMED AL-KHALIFA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain, speaking on behalf of League of Arab States, said the Arab-Israeli conflict was a very serious and dangerous situation that affected not only the Middle East but the entire world. The ministerial Council of the Arab League had come before the Security Council to take up its responsibilities with regard to contributing to the attainment of a just and lasting peace. The persistence of the conflict was exhausting the region's resources, creating instability and nourishing extremist forces. The objective of the League of Arab States in convening the current meeting was not to apportion blame or exchange accusations, but to address the situation in a constructive spirit and a forward-looking manner and to revive direct negotiations between the parties.

He said it was time to re-launch the peace process, which could mean reinvigorating the Road Map and devising a new mechanism for implementing it, as well as implementing relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. Under that Initiative, Arab States were ready to consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, enter into a peace agreement and establish normal relations with Israel. In exchange, they sought Israel's withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem and acceptance of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Arab League proposed that the Security Council initiate negotiations between the parties based on the agreed terms of reference within a set time frame. The Council should also request the Secretary-General to prepare a report on appropriate mechanisms for resuming negotiations. Once that report was submitted, the Security Council should reconvene at the ministerial level to consider further measures.

DAN GILLERMAN ( Israel ) said he realized that today's meeting had been convened by people who wanted peace, but he had been unsure until the last moment whether to attend, as experience had shown that such forums were not always helpful. However, he had, nevertheless, been instructed to update the Council on developments from Israel's perspective. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had had a good meeting with President Abbas in which they had agreed to re-energize the dialogue to advance the process, which must be based on the Middle East "Road Map". They had reached that understanding, as both sides had recognized that no other forum was needed for acting out their differences and that the only way to resolve them was at the negotiating table. They shared a common vision for peace, which was embodied in the Road Map, endorsed by the international community and reaffirmed by the Quartet yesterday.

Israel was committed to being a partner for peace, and its people had shown time and again that nobody wanted peace more, he said. The dangers to peace would not be overcome by military means alone and stagnation was not in Israel's interest or its policy. For that reason, it had embarked on the disengagement process last year, as a way to create opportunity for progress. What it had received in return, however, was terror. Israel was committed to dialogue with Palestinians who believed in mutual compromise and reconciliation. If that vision had not yet turned into reality, it would not be for a lack of resolutions, conferences or meetings.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the consequence, not the cause, of the ideology of intolerance and hatred that plagued the region and that had taken control of the Palestinian Authority in the form of Hamas, he said. That reality could not be ignored. The Road Map and the three international conditions were designed to confront the enemies of peace and ensure that the future Palestinian State was not a terror State perpetuating conflict, but one that would end it. Discarding the building blocks of peace would not speed up the process, but ensure that it crumbled. The goal must be to rekindle the Road Map without rekindling the conflict, which meant not confusing paper with progress or form with substance. It also required genuine consultation, negotiation and agreement between the parties. There was no other way.

Any progress would begin with genuine dialogue among those committed to peace and with the release of Israeli hostages and the end of terrorist attacks, he stressed. It would begin with the renewal of commitment to a two-State solution and the acceptance of the basic principle that each peoples' rights were to be realized in their own homeland, and not in the homeland of others. There was much that could be done, but not in the form of initiatives or meetings. It was first and foremost about the commitment to prepare the people for the price of peace, accepting the true meaning of the two-State solution and teaching the children the value of tolerance. "Tragedy is not just the pain we suffer, but also the opportunity we miss", he said.

HAMAD BIN JASSIM BIN JABR AL-THANI, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, said the failure to achieve international peace and security in the Middle East had led to catastrophic repercussions in the region. Occupation had extended to other territories, as had human suffering involving millions. Arsenals grew, the problems of human development worsened and financial resources were squandered on military expenditure instead of improving people's lives. The situation was ideal for the growth of extremism and hatred, which had led to a resort to violence and terrorism as a means of realizing rights, without regard for the lives of Palestinians, Arabs, Israelis and others.

Stressing that his intention was not to criticize or accuse, but only to underscore the bare facts, he said Israel was not the only party entitled to the legitimate right to live in peace and security. The Palestinian and Arab sides were also entitled to that right, and had affirmed for quite some time that they wanted a just and comprehensive peace. The problem did not need a magic solution because the solution was known to all. It was the principle of land for peace, based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel. Just and fair solutions were not impossible, provided there were good intentions and political will based on sincere compliance with international law. Tackling the other political, security and development problems was not possible without an honourable solution to that question.

He said the responsibility for establishing a just and comprehensive peace did not fall solely on the parties directly concerned, but also on the international community, especially influential States, foremost among whom were the five permanent members of the Security Council. The momentum necessary for continuing the peace process must be maintained regardless of the prevailing political climate. Qatar called on the international community to support that process, as well as the endeavours of President Abbas to form a Government of National Unity. It sought peace and was aware that a large majority in Israel shared the same desire.

PER STIG MØLLER, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, said the momentum created by common efforts to end the hostilities in Lebanon and put in place a process leading to a lasting peace must be used to revive the Middle East peace process. Against that backdrop, Denmark welcomed yesterday's Quartet meeting and associated itself fully with it. There was an urgent need to give the people of the region a reason to hope. Their growing sense of desperation must be overcome, which could only happen if they were given a credible prospect for a better future.

Noting that his recent meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders had been encouraging, he said it was his clear impression that both sides recognized the urgent need to revive the peace process. The international community must do everything possible to assist them in that endeavour and provide the incentives needed to foster lasting peace. A framework was already in place and, over long years, a basis had been developed for achieving lasting peace, including the Arab Peace Initiative, the performance-based Road Map for a permanent two-State solution, as well as relevant Council resolutions, all based on the principle of land for peace. That framework must continue to be the guidepost as the Council tried to revive the peace process.

The underlying premise of the Road Map was that the two sides would take a series of simultaneous and parallel steps leading to peace, he said. Even given a need to revisit the time frame, the principles and the sequencing that it laid down remained as relevant as ever. It was to be hoped that the political platform of the new Government of National Unity were welcome and he hoped they would reflect the Quartet principles and allow for early engagement. President Abbas could only be successful in that regard with the international community's committed support. Denmark was, therefore, committed to providing him with financial assistance.

He said he was encouraged by the prospects of a meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert in the near future, aimed at restarting the peace process. To be successful, the negotiations must be accompanied by an end to violence. Moreover, the captured Israeli soldier must be released and the Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody immediately freed. Urgent attention must be paid to humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territories and Denmark welcomed the contributions made this month at the Stockholm International Donor Conference, as well as the decision to extend the Temporary International Mechanism. At the same time, Israel should release the Palestinian tax and customs revenues it was withholding and keep open all border crossings. All Palestinian factions must immediately stop their attacks, just as all Israeli military activities in the Palestinians territories must cease.

NANA AKUFO-ADDO, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ghana, noted that the tragic consequences of the failure of previous peace initiatives had been enacted recently in Lebanon. With the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 under way and the Lebanese people beginning to rebuild, it was time to seize the momentum and work towards changing the dangerous status quo in the Middle East.

Ghana supported a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would meet the aspirations of both peoples and alleviate the fear and desperation that bred extremism, he said. A sovereign and independent democratic State of Palestine with structured and well-functioning institutions would be better placed to cooperate with Israel and guarantee its long-term security. Ghana viewed Palestinian moves to form a Government of National Unity as a positive development and welcomed the outcome of yesterday's meeting of the Quartet, particularly regarding measures to alleviate humanitarian conditions in the West Bank and Gaza. Those positive developments could be enhanced further by the freeing of hostages and prisoners.

He said that all who genuinely believed in the vision of an independent, viable, and sovereign Palestine State living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security must commit equally to the elimination of all direct and indirect threats to Israel's existence and security. Ghana urged the parties to muster the courage to compromise and negotiate in good faith for the sake of all peoples in the region. It was the duty of the Security Council, together with the Quartet, to provide the necessary leadership.

JOSE GARCIA-BELAUNDE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru, said all parties must fully respect the cessation of hostilities and the "Blue Line". Israel must provide the precise maps and information needed to facilitate demining activities and the clearance of unexploded ordnance in the south of Lebanon. Also, moving the peace process forward required the disarming of Hizbollah, a task for which the cooperation of other countries would be important, with respect to avoiding the sale or supply of arms to its those "irregular forces". The urgent demarcation of Lebanese borders, especially those in the Shebaa Farms area, was also needed, and Peru looked forward to receiving proposals from the Secretary-General and the special envoys on that matter.

Turning to the Palestinian question, he associated his country with the call to strengthen the Temporary International Mechanism, and urged Israel to use the Mechanism in transferring tax and customs revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, commitment to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations – benchmarks to aim for in the path of negotiation and confidence-building – were areas where the Security Council could play a more active role. Peru shared the Quartet's hopes that the new Palestinian Government of National Unity would reflect those aims.

LI ZHAOXING, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, remarked that, while the Middle East once had been a land of peace and tranquillity, flowing with milk and honey, wars and hostilities over the past half-century had left the region shedding blood and tears. Fighting two months ago between Hizbollah and Israel – which had caused more than 5,000 casualties, left 1 million people homeless and caused massive damage to infrastructure – showed that the international community must focus its attention on the Middle East.

Welcoming the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) as an important step for a settlement of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, he called for its full implementation and for the early expansion and deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). China stood ready to contribute more troops and would promptly honour its commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people. The international community should urge Israel and Lebanon to reach a long-term political solution, turn swords into ploughshares and live in peace.

He offered a five-point proposal to revive the Middle East peace process. First, full consideration should be given to the historical background involving religious conflict, colonialism, ethnic clashes and border disputes. At the same time, Israel should respect the choice of the Palestinian people and agree to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. Correspondingly, all forces in Palestine should recognize Israel's right to existence and its sovereignty. Secondly, Israel and its Arab neighbours should stop violent conflicts, particularly military actions targeting civilians, and take steps to rebuild mutual trust. On that basis, they should speedily restart negotiations and make necessary compromises to achieve peace.

The third point was the need to address the root causes of conflicts and work for a comprehensive solution, he said, noting that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was closely connected to other conflicts in the region. Adherence to Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace was critical to the realization of a just and sustainable peace, and all related issues should be addressed in a coordinated way to avoid complicating the already volatile situation. The fourth point was the need to promote cooperation for the benefit of the people. China called on Israel to lift its blockade against Palestine, dismantle the separation wall and facilitate the supply of humanitarian assistance to Palestine. Palestine and Israel should expand business and trade ties, so that the people could enjoy the peace dividend, which would help create a good atmosphere for pursuing a political solution.

Finally, he stressed the need for impartial and stepped up mediation. The help and support of the international community were essential for progress in the Middle East peace process. China supported the efforts of the Quartet and reiterated that the Security Council should shoulder its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security. China also welcomed any new initiative that would help advance the Middle East peace process.

PHILIPPE DOUSTE-BLAZY, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, said that, a little over a month after the adoption of resolution 1701, one should recognize one fact; stability in the Middle East required the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinian question fuelled most of the hotspots in the region, bred frustration in public opinion, widened misunderstandings between societies and played into the hands of extremists. As the status quo was not viable, reviving the momentum for peace between Israelis and Palestinians must become a priority again. The conflict in Lebanon had confirmed that there was no military solution to the crises in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was no exception.

Among encouraging factors, he listed the fact that the parties themselves said they wished to return to dialogue. The regional environment was more favourable now, as manifested in particular by the revival of the Beirut initiative of the Arab League, which proposed the basis for sustainable peace in the Middle East.

France supported it.

The desire for peace in Israel and the Palestinian territories remained deeply rooted, despite the death, destruction and humiliation, he continued. But confidence had to be rebuilt on both sides and efforts to restore it must be made immediately through concrete measures on both sides. The release of the soldier kidnapped at the beginning of the summer would be an indispensable measure, together with the halting of rocket fire, the freezing of all settlement activities and the lifting of drastic restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of goods and people within the Palestinian territories and between the territories and the world. The announced formation of a Palestinian National Unity Government that would take on board the demands of the international community would also be a major development. If confirmed, it would have to be met by a re-evaluation by the international community of its policy of assistance and contacts with the Palestinian Government. It should give new impetus to the peace process.

The international community must stand side by side with President Abbas, who could count on France's support, he said. It must help the parties by resolutely committing to help re-establish dialogue and launch a real drive for peace. An initial step had been made yesterday with the Quartet meeting, which had emphasized the urgent need to move towards a just and lasting agreement, and identified certain measures to facilitate the return of confidence. Other steps must follow, such as the preparation of an international conference proposed by President Jacques Chirac. The objective there would be to define the guarantees, especially security ones, expected by the parties in the framework of a peace agreement. That conference could take place in the context of the Arab League initiative and pave the way for a new regional framework for collective security and economic integration. The goal of two States living side by side in peace and security was not beyond reach, if the international community was able to demonstrate boldness and political courage in the weeks and months ahead.

MARGARET BECKETT, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, said events over the summer had shown once again the terrible human cost resulting from the lack of progress towards peace in the Middle East. The central importance of peace in the region had never been clearer. There could be no higher priority for the international community, which was united in its goal of a two-State solution. Only a handful of extremists who benefited from the ongoing conflict opposed that vision. The Road Map contained a framework for getting there. It should be reinvigorated with both sides meeting their obligations. The Quartet had a mechanism for coordinating the international community's engagement and the United Kingdom welcomed the Quartet's statement, which provided a clear framework for moving forward.

"There was no shortage of vision or mechanisms or frameworks", she said, adding that practical ideas and political will were needed to deliver them. First, there must be a resumption of contact between the parties, and the United Kingdom welcomed the commitments made by both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to meet without conditions. The United Kingdom particularly welcomed the role of Egypt and other Arab States in working for the release of Corporal Shalit, and helping to create the conditions for a productive dialogue. Also needed was a Palestinian Government with which the international community could engage. That meant one based on the Quartet's three principles.

She said it was also necessary to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Pending the outcome of negotiations on a National Unity Government, the United Kingdom supported an extension of the Temporary International Mechanism to help alleviate the situation. The institutions of a future Palestinian State as a means to build peace also must be developed. That was in no way a new idea, but it was an important and increasingly urgent one, as well as a practical agenda to take the process forward. What the United Kingdom wished to see from today's meeting was a clear commitment of the political will necessary to implement it.

JAN KUBIS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, said it was symbolic that today's meeting was taking place on the International Day of Peace. As recent events in Lebanon had proved, there was no military solution to the many challenges and problems of the Middle East, with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute at the core. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, and the Israeli-Palestinian one in particular, was through negotiations and full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the principles defined by the Quartet and the Road Map. Slovakia welcomed yesterday's Quartet's statement, in which it had reaffirmed its commitment to the Road Map.

The recent tragic conflict in Lebanon had caused much suffering and destruction on both sides, he said. Resolution 1701 provided an important basis for starting the process of a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Lebanese crisis and that was the first step in addressing all the causes that had led to it. For the whole process to be successful, full implementation of that resolution was needed. While noting with satisfaction the progress achieved in addressing the difficult humanitarian situation in Lebanon, and in providing humanitarian assistance to large numbers of returnees, Slovakia agreed with the Secretary-General's assessment that much still remained to be done. Recovery and reconstruction would require continued support from the international community.

He said that it would be impossible to achieve a comprehensive settlement of that conflict without addressing its root causes. Slovakia called on all parties in Lebanon to secure the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers, and he also accepted and supported the necessity to address the question of Lebanese prisoners. Those two issues, however, must not be linked, and the release of the Israeli soldiers must be immediate and unconditional. The Lebanese Government must regain full authority and control over its entire national territory, in order to stop any activities by militias, which must be disarmed and disbanded expeditiously. Efficient measures must be undertaken on the borders of Lebanon to prevent the flow of illegal weapons, an arms embargo that must be fully observed by all relevant parties. In that respect, the cooperation of the Government of Syria was very important. It was also to be hoped that the delineation of the border between Syria and Lebanon, including the Shebaa Farms area, would be solved soon.

Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said that the Road Map, possibly updated to reflect recent developments on the ground, was still the most efficient plan for achieving a lasting peace settlement. Slovakia welcomed the efforts of President Abbas to form a Government of National Unity, and hoped that it would be committed to the principles of the Quartet and would allow for the continuation of dialogue. Slovakia called also for an immediate end to violence by Palestinian factions and for the release of the abducted Israeli soldier. At the same time, Slovakia remained deeply concerned over the humanitarian and economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza.

He urged Israel to resume the transfer of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues and encouraged it to carry out the transfers through the Temporary International Mechanism. Slovakia also called for full implementation of the agreement on movement and for the opening of all border crossings. At the same time, the Israeli Government was expected to continue its commitment to peace based on the principles of the Road Map and to refrain from steps that might contradict the principles of international law. Slovakia called for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody and for a freeze on all settlement activities.

JORGE TAIANA, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina, said the Arab League initiative provided an opportunity for the Council to reflect on the status of the peace process and begin considering concrete measure to revitalize it. The historical and political importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict transcended the Middle East, where it had been a cause of instability for more than a half a century and, for that reason, the Council should make finding a lasting solution a priority. The principles of the peace process had been set out almost four decades ago and should not be reviewed. The occupation that had begun in 1967 must end through a negotiated solution between the parties. The result should be the emergence of an independent, democratic, viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, living in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

There was no military solution to the conflict, he stressed, adding that the path of violence and mutual denial would only lead to an increase in the suffering of the region's peoples. The situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank demonstrated that a policy based on unilateral actions would not solve the conflict, and fails to accomplish in the field, such as the construction of the separation wall and settlement activities, would only exacerbate resentment, increase distrust and strengthen extremists on both sides. There was only one path for the peoples of the Middle East – mutual recognition as a necessary step towards a definite peace. The parties by themselves could not overcome the current stalemate and the international community's active assistance was essential for achieving that objective.

The Quartet had an important role to play in that regard, he said. In light of delays in implementing the Road Map, the Quartet must seriously reflect on the consequences of maintaining the status quo and consider urgent additional measures to achieve concrete results. The international community in general should also be more proactive in the search for peace. The proposal to convene an international conference for the Middle East could contribute positively to re-launching the peace process, and it was to be hoped that it would be convened as soon as possible. The Secretary-General should present a report to the Council before the end of his mandate with concrete proposals to overcome the current stalled situation.

He said efforts by President Abbas to form a Palestinian Government of National Unity also deserved support and expressed the hope that the platform of any new Palestinian Government would be compatible with the three principles duly endorsed by the Council – recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and acceptance of previous agreements. International assistance must urgently be re-established to alleviate the grave humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people, and Israel must transfer all Palestinian tax and custom revenues to avert the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

SERGEY V. LAVROV, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said that, at a time when the Middle East peace process had been dealt a serious blow, collective efforts would be timely and useful in restoring political dialogue between Arabs and Israel. The war in Lebanon had confirmed once again that force not only failed to solve existing problems, but also delayed progress towards peace. New impetus was needed based on a comprehensive settlement. Despite all the difficulties, however, the situation was not hopeless.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said there were opportunities to find a political solution, and it was necessary to take advantage of them. The basis for action was the Road Map, and the Quartet must play the leading role. Yesterday, a decision had been made to reinvigorate contacts between the Special Representatives and Quartet ministers with Israel, the Palestinians and leading Arab countries. The Russian Federation welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative in returning James Wolfensohn to his Middle East team.

He said it was necessary to continue providing vigorous support to President Abbas and his efforts to establish a Government of National Unity on a platform that would move towards the principles of the Quartet. It was also important to make clear to the Palestinians the links between their steps towards Israel and movement towards a settlement. Hopefully, the international community would support President Abbas, particularly by providing economic support to the Palestinians and releasing their sources of financing.

Regarding the Lebanese track, he stressed the importance of fully implementing resolution 1701, which meant that all Lebanese political forces must be involved, including Hizbollah. Also needed was the lifting of Israel's blockade. Russia welcomed the continued deployment of the strengthened UNIFIL contingent in the south of Lebanon, but, at the same time, it was concerned over the humanitarian situation, and would provide assistance to restore Lebanon's infrastructure.

The Syrian track must also be resuscitated, he stressed. Contacts with the Syrian leadership gave the impression that Damascus was interested in establishing firm peace in the region. The Russian Federation also viewed favourably the initiative of the League of Arab States to begin preparations for an international conference on the Middle East. While it would not be easy to implement that initiative, it was necessary to move forward. The forum must be well-prepared and could not be reduced to a one-day exchange of statements. It should become the beginning of negotiations on all interrelated tracks in the Middle East.

ASHAROSE MGIRO, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania, characterized the relationship between Israel and its neighbours as one that had experienced an erosion of trust, which was a serious threat to peace and security in the region. Regrettably, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was deteriorating because of excessive military operations in Gaza and parts of the West Bank. In addition, Israel's withholding of financial resources to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority meant even more hardship for the Palestinian people.

Calling for an end to any actions that would escalate the already precarious situation, she urged Israel to strive to live on the basis of its democratic and humane origins by respecting both international law and human rights. The peace process laid down in the Road Map would have to be revived, she noted, while Israel's restrictions on the freedoms of Palestinians, its settlement activities and the building of the separation wall, must all be stopped. It was also imperative that the kidnapped Israeli soldiers and Palestinian parliamentarians be released.

CONDOLLEEZA RICE, Secretary of State of the United States, said today's discussion was an important one, in which her country was pleased to participate. On Tuesday, President George W. Bush had affirmed the commitment of the United States to a vision of two States living side by side. President Bush believed that both Israelis and Palestinians deserved to live in dignity and, to that end, had directed her to work with moderate leaders and to support leaders from both sides as they worked to resolve their differences.

She said Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas were dedicated to peace, and she looked forward to working with them. Progress depended on many obligations that both sides must fulfil, as well as on a true Palestinian partner committed to peace. The United States would support the re-emergence of such a partner and had called on the Palestinians to commit to the Quartet's three principles. The United States also welcomed the effort by President Abbas to achieve a Government of National Unity that could facilitate engagement on a range of security, political and economic concerns.

The United States welcomed the meeting between Ms. Livni and President Abbas and was encouraged that Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas intended to resume direct talks. The parties were urged to foster an atmosphere in which those talks might take place. The United States called for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit, as well as that of the two soldiers held in Lebanon. The United States was mindful of the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and had increased its direct assistance to some \$468 million. It had also agreed to expand the Temporary International Mechanism to ensure that the Palestinian people received assistance.

Noting that the Quartet had declared the urgent need for progress, she asked the Council to support the Quartet's efforts as it sought to build the foundation for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, a goal to which the United States was fully committed. While resolution 1701, which had ended the fighting in Lebanon, was being implemented, much work remained to be done. The United States looked forward to the Council's engagement in ensuring the resolution's full implementation, so that the people of Lebanon could live in peace and the Lebanese Government could fully extend its authority throughout the national territory.

RODOLPHE ADADA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Congo, noted that the Security Council had not reacted in time when the conflict in Lebanon had begun. The adoption of resolution 1701, however, had opened new prospects for building peace in the Middle East. It was necessary to look for long-term and viable solutions to the conflict, taking into account the need to ensure the national unity and sovereignty of Lebanon, its relations with its neighbours and the security of Israel. The role of the reinforced UNIFIL was crucial and Congo commended the countries that had quickly answered the call for new troops.

He said the progress achieved in Lebanon could not overshadow the tragedy of the Palestinian people. While calling on Hamas as a Government authority to shoulder its responsibilities and recognize the validity of the previously concluded agreements within the framework of efforts to settle the Middle East conflict, Congo also called on the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, who had been reduced to counting on the rest of the world for practically all necessities. All Palestinian political forces should seek unity and refrain from all provocations.

The international community must assist in re-launching the peace process without starting a new framework for negotiations or new "rules of the game", he stressed. All the parties must implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council had for too long been accused of partiality to close its eyes to the violations committed by one of the parties to the conflict. An Arab initiative had been put forward, which represented a good basis for a settlement. Of course, there was also the Road Map, which was based on the principle of two States living side by side in peace and security. The Council's assistance to the protagonists in returning to the negotiations table would be a valuable contribution. It must clearly indicate to the parties that there was no solution based on the

use of force, and that a political and diplomatic settlement must be pursued.

TATSUO ARIMA, Special Envoy of the Government of [Japan](#), said the United Nations must play a more active role in facilitating peace efforts in the Middle East, and that the region's leaders must also possess the political will necessary to achieve that peace. The international community must support efforts to disarm militias in Lebanon and delineate the country's borders, so as to ensure a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the Lebanese crisis. Indeed, Japan called upon Syria, which had a crucial role to play in achieving those goals, to join proactively in international efforts.

On the Palestinian question, he welcomed efforts by President Abbas to form a Government of National Unity, with the expectation that it would pursue coexistence with Israel. The international community, in turn, should look upon it as an opportunity to move the peace process forward and Israel should make its best effort to resume dialogue. Indeed, statements by the two sides expressing readiness to hold a summit meeting were welcome.

Regarding the humanitarian situation in Palestine, he said Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had promised \$25 million to the Territory in July, in line with pledges made to President Abbas in May 2005. In addition, preparations were under way to form a consultative body to carry out Prime Minister Koizumi's proposed programme, "The Corridor for Peace and Prosperity", which would promote the development of the Jordan valley through regional cooperation. The programme had been enthusiastically endorsed by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan.

Council President DORABKOYANNIS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of [Greece](#), spoke in her national capacity and associated her delegation with the European Union. She said that the multifaceted challenges that the international community faced in the Middle East affected not only the peoples of the region, but the entire international community. All partners of the United Nations, be it the European Union, the Arab League or the Non-Aligned Movement, to name just a few, consistently placed the Middle East question very high on their agendas and there was one crucial element common to all of them – the need to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. That constituted the collective will of all the world's peoples, as repeatedly expressed by their representatives during the opening session of the General Assembly. Yet, as years turned into decades, generations grew up knowing nothing but hatred. Reason and understanding gave up their place to fundamentalism and extremism.

She said that, as a citizen of Athens and guided by the spirit of that city's ancient forefathers, she could not but maintain her firm belief in the prevalence of reason tolerance, acceptance and even – to use a Greek word – symbiosis over force. Peace could be served neither by refusing to recognize the existence of one's neighbour, nor by perpetuating a climate of fear and insecurity through a combination of suicide and missile attacks. Nor could peace be advanced by such practices as the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit.

Equally, peace could not be achieved by denying an entire nation its rightful place where it could live in dignity and freedom, or by imposing restrictions that were both humiliating and disparaging, she said. Peace could not be achieved by forcefully confiscating land and erecting barriers. Any settlement must be reached in conformity with international law. It must be the product of negotiations, the outcome of which should not be prejudged by unilateral measures on the ground. The well-known principles for a comprehensive and lasting peace included all relevant Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Quartet should continue its active engagement to fulfil its role and Greece welcomed its recent decision to meet regularly, including with the parties and other regional partners, to monitor developments on the ground and discuss the way ahead.

ERKKI TUOMOJA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of [Finland](#), spoke on behalf of the European Union, saying that the regional body had mobilized more resources than ever before through the Temporary International Mechanism to meet the needs of the Palestinian people. The mechanism had been extended and other donors were urged to make use of it. The European Union called upon Israel to resume the transfer of withheld Palestinian tax and custom revenues, and to open the Rafah and Karni border crossings. Indeed, the European Union was committed to the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah, and parties to the Agreement on Movement and Access were urged to take concrete steps towards its implementation.

He said the enlargement of settlements and continued building of the separation wall on Palestinian land threatened the viability of the agreed two-State solution. The European Union would not recognize any changes to pre-1967 borders, other than those agreed by both parties. At the same time, Palestinian militants must cease all violence directed towards Israel or other Palestinians. Meanwhile, detained Palestinian ministers and legislators must be released, and Israel was urged to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, such as the obligation to protect civilians and not use disproportionate measures. Security was not an exclusive matter for one party, but one for everyone in the whole region.

Welcoming the announcement by President Abbas of the Government of National Unity, he expressed the hope that negotiations towards that end would conclude rapidly so that the Quartet principles could be engaged. Because the ultimate goal was to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the Middle East, it was imperative to create new dynamics. The European Union welcomed the Quartet's reaffirmation of its commitment to the creation of two coexisting States, and gave its full support to the Quartet's intention to engage with the parties and other regional members in monitoring progress.

MAHMOUD ABBAS, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the [Palestinian Authority](#), thanked the Council President for agreeing to convene today's meeting, thus demonstrating the world's desire to reach a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict as soon as possible, in order to eradicate the source of tension that affected all aspects of life, not just in the Middle East region, but also around the world.

Expressing appreciation to all the previous speakers, he said he felt their keen desire to reach a just, durable and permanent settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. Hopefully, words would be followed by concrete deeds, so that the results that all desired to see could be achieved, namely the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel. The Palestinian Authority was fully committed to peace through negotiations, international legitimacy, the Road Map and peaceful relations with its neighbours.

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