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Security Council
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SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON ESCALATING SITUATION IN GAZA, SOUTHERN ISRAEL

"The conflict must end once and for all," United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed tonight as the Security Council held a New Year's Eve emergency meeting on the situation in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel.

Emphasizing also that he was profoundly troubled that the Security Council's call for an end to the violence had gone unheeded, he said Gaza's civilian population, its fabric, the Middle East peace process and the stability of the region and the world were all trapped by the indiscriminate rocket attacks carried out by Hamas militants and the disproportionality of Israel's continuing military operation. Conditions for 1.5 million people living in Gaza today were nothing short of terrifying, while a continuing stream of rockets fired by militants were hitting southern Israel, with hundreds of thousands of Israelis now within range.

He condemned unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms, the ongoing rocket and mortar attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants, while also condemning Israel's excessive use of force. All parties must fully uphold international humanitarian law. A ceasefire must create new conditions on the ground to ensure the reopening of border crossings, and a resumption of the political dialogue aimed at reuniting Gaza with the West Bank.

Even as the crisis raged, the underlying issue should never be forgotten -- there must be an end to the occupation, an end to conflict, and the creation of a Palestinian State, he said. No one should lose sight of the goal of two States living side by side and a lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the land-for-peace principle, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Permanent Observer for Palestine said the Israeli aggression against the people of Gaza continued for the fifth day in a row, claiming more than 380 lives and injuring more than 1,800 people, including innocent women and children. Israeli F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache helicopters had dropped hundreds of bombs on Gaza and, despite appeals by the Council, the Secretary-General and the Quartet, Israel continued to kill.

Recalling that he had repeatedly warned the Council that the aggression was about to be launched, he said the 15-member body had not taken any serious measures to prevent it and the Israeli side had publicly rejected its appeal to stop its military operation. The Council must adopt a binding resolution that would condemn Israel's crimes, stop the aggression, provide protection for Palestinian citizens, lift the Israeli siege of Gaza and establish a ceasefire.

Israel's representative said the military operation had been launched to protect citizens in the south from the incessant barrage of rocket and mortar fire. The country had been compelled to act after many weeks -- and, indeed, months and years -- in which its civilians had been subjected to deliberate terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations operating from the Gaza Strip. "Israel demonstrated utmost restraint before launching the operation, but there comes a time when a sovereign, responsible Government must take decisive action to protect its citizens and send a clear message to the Hamas terrorists: enough is enough."

While determined to protect its citizens, Israel continued to ensure passage of humanitarian goods and supplies to the people of Gaza, she said, adding that since the start of the operation more than 350 trucks loaded with food and medical supplies had entered the territory. Supplies and donations continued to flow into Gaza from international organizations and State donors. At the same time, however, Hamas continued to target crossings and to obstruct humanitarian relief.

Libya's representative, who together with Egypt had requested the emergency meeting on behalf of the Arab Group, recalled that, as part of an Egyptian-sponsored truce reached between the Palestinians and Israelis last June, Israel had pledged to open the border crossings while the Palestinians had observed the truce "religiously", despite at least 190 Israeli violations that had killed 25 citizens. The crossings had never been completely opened, and on 4 November, the Israeli Army had entered the eastern part of Gaza, unprovoked, and killed six Palestinians. The Palestinians had never fired except in response to Israeli violation of the truce.

Saying that those actions constituted a crime of genocide, a crime against humanity and a war crime according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, he introduced a draft resolution that would include a clear condemnation of Israeli military attacks, a call upon Israel immediately to cease those attacks, and a call for immediate protection for Palestinian civilians. The draft also called for the reopening of the border crossings to allow unrestricted, unhindered access of humanitarian aid and basic supplies. Libya appealed to the Council to adopt a quick and binding measure in order to prevent another Srebrenica or Rwanda.

Speakers in the ensuing debate agreed on the need for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, as well as unhindered humanitarian access. Many stressed that

there was no military solution and that everything must be done to find a political one. The commitment of the international community, specifically the Council, was essential in that regard.

The representative of France voiced support for yesterday's European Union proposal calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; an unconditional end to the rocket fire; an end to Israel's military operation; and immediate humanitarian action. The end of the fighting would allow for the sustained opening of all border crossings.

South Africa's representative underscored the need for the Security Council to publicly voice its condemnation of the attacks and demand their immediate cessation. South Africa was disappointed with the Israeli Government's rejection of international calls for a 48-hour ceasefire, which would have allowed humanitarian aid into Gaza. Israel could not expect security for its people and political normalcy as long as it occupied Palestinian lands and continued its attempts to impose its rule over Palestinians by military force.

The representative of the United States supported an immediate, sustainable ceasefire implemented by all, which meant that Hamas must stop its rocket attacks. It had been the decision by Hamas to break the period of calm that had led to the renewed rocket attacks, and the extremely complex situation could not be solved by simple or one-sided and unbalanced declarations. The United States was working incessantly to ensure a ceasefire respected by all; end the smuggling of weapons into Gaza; increase the transit of humanitarian goods; and open the border crossings under appropriate and legitimate authority and control. Beyond that, a lasting peace would be reached through three tracks – negotiations, building the institutions of a Palestinian State, and implementation by the parties of their "Road Map" obligations.

Other speakers tonight included the representatives of Panama, Indonesia, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, Italy, Viet Nam, China, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Belgium and Croatia.

Also speaking was the representative of Egypt.

The Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States also addressed the Council.

Having begun at 6:40 p.m., the meeting ended at 8:45 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met this evening to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

According to a letter dated 31 December from the Permanent Representative of Egypt and addressed to the President of the Council, the meeting was requested to consider "the continued Israeli military aggression on the occupied Palestinian territory in the Gaza Strip", and to adopt an enforceable and binding resolution that would ensure an immediate ceasefire, a cessation of the Israeli military aggression, the lifting of the blockade, the opening of border-crossing points, an end to the Israeli policy of collective punishment, international protection for the Palestinian people and the assurance of calm.

In a letter dated 27 December addressed to the President of the Council, the Permanent Representative of Libya said the meeting was requested to discuss "the criminal aggression by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and casualties among the innocent civilians in the besieged Gaza Strip".

Statements

BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, noted that the dramatic crisis in Gaza and southern Israel had now reached its fifth day. The civilian population, the fabric of Gaza, the Middle East peace process and the stability of the region and the world were all trapped by the indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas militants and the disproportionality of the continuing Israeli military operation. The situation would be further threatening if the conflict continued or escalated. It was profoundly troubling that the Security Council's call for an end to the violence had gone unheeded. The call for an immediate ceasefire to be immediately respected by all parties must be underlined in the strongest possible terms. The parties must step back from the brink; all violence must end.

Conditions for 1.5 million people living in Gaza today were nothing short of terrifying, he said. They were living under heavy bombardment which targeted Hamas facilities, smuggling tunnels and other infrastructure, as well as former Palestinian Authority infrastructure, government buildings, residences, mosques and businesses. More than 300 lay dead, among them 60 women and children, and more than 800 were wounded. In southern Israel a continuing stream of rockets fired by Palestinian militants were hitting the country, with hundreds of thousands of Israelis now within range. Four had died since Saturday and more than 300 had been injured. Daily life in Israel was extremely difficult; the population lived in constant fear of rockets.

The Secretary-General condemned, unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms, the ongoing rocket and mortar attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants, while also condemning Israel's excessive use of force. All parties must fully uphold international humanitarian law since it was the civilian populations bearing the brunt of the escalation. That required swift action by the international community. All parties must seriously address the economic and humanitarian needs in Gaza and take the necessary measures to ensure the flow of humanitarian supplies. Without an end to the violence, it would remain difficult to get food or urgently needed medical treatment to the people in need. Conditions for parents and children in Gaza were dangerous and frightening.

He paid tribute to United Nations staff working hard under deeply adverse conditions, as well as to the donors. Pursuant to assurances by the leadership of the parties to the conflict, some humanitarian aid was passing through the Kerem Shalom crossing. Today, a total of 84 trucks had entered Gaza and a skeleton staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) would begin distributing flour tomorrow. But the Karni crossing and conveyor belt remained closed, adding to the shortage of wheat. Already two thirds of Gazans had relied on some kind of food aid prior to the present escalation. There were power shortages for up to 16 hours a day. To address food and fuel shortages, Karni must be opened. All members of the international community, particularly those in the region, were urged to exert their influence on the parties to end the violence now.

He recalled that, during yesterday's Quartet meeting, he had stressed the need for decisive action and welcomed efforts by European and Arab leaders, but not enough had been done and more was required. A ceasefire must create new conditions on the ground that ensured that crossings would be reopened, that rocket attacks would end and that political dialogue would be pursued to reunite Gaza with the West Bank. Even as the crisis raged, the underlying issue should never be forgotten – there must be an end to the occupation, an end to conflict and the creation of a Palestinian State. No one should lose sight of the goal of two States living side by side and a lasting peace in the region, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the land-for-peace principle, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. The conflict must end once and for all.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer for Palestine, said that for the fifth day in a row the Israeli aggression continued against the people in Gaza, claiming more than 380 lives and injuring more than 1,800, including innocent women and children. Despite recent momentum following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), Israel, the occupying Power, remained in blatant violation of international law. Israeli F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache helicopters had dropped hundreds of bombs on Gaza and, despite appeals by the Council, the Secretary-General and the Quartet, Israel continued to kill. The attacks must be condemned and stopped immediately by all means. That would require immediate measures by the international community, including the Council.

Under the guise of withdrawing from Gaza, Israel had tightened its siege of the Strip as a collective punishment, he said. Weeks before the start of the latest campaign, Israel had crippled all sectors in Gaza, including the medical sector, and prevented international agencies, including UNRWA, from bringing in aid. The closure of the border crossings was preventing UNRWA from disbursing food aid to 800,000 people suffering shortages of water, fuel and electricity. All infrastructure construction projects had had to be halted.

He recalled that he had come to the Council repeatedly to warn that the aggression was about to be launched and to request practical steps to force Israel to stop its policy of collective punishment. However, the Council had not taken any serious measures and the Israeli side had publicly rejected its appeal to stop its aggression. The Council must adopt a binding resolution that would condemn the crimes, stop the aggression, provide protection for Palestinian citizens, lift the siege and establish a ceasefire. The international community, the Secretary-General and the Quartet had called more than once for an end to the aggression and the Council should respond by adopting the proposed resolution. The peace process and developments on the ground were linked and reinforced each other. The children and mothers of Gaza were looking to the Council to protect them from the hunger and the killing. "We hope you will not let them down."

GABRIELA SHALEV (Israel) said that, last Saturday, her country had launched a military operation aimed at protecting citizens in the south from the incessant barrage of rocket and mortar shell fire. Israel had been compelled to resort to a military operation after many weeks – and, indeed, months and years – in which its civilians had been subjected to deliberate terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations operating from the Gaza Strip. "Israel demonstrated utmost restraint before launching the operation, but there comes a time when a sovereign, responsible Government must take decisive action to protect its citizens and send a clear message to the Hamas terrorists: enough is enough."

She said that in the last two weeks, prior to Israel's reaction, there had been a steep escalation in attacks by Hamas. The country had been subjected to more than 300 rockets and mortar shells launched indiscriminately, striking cities and towns, schools and playgrounds, commercial centres and synagogues. In its military operation, Israel had exercised its inherent right to self-defence, enshrined in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. No sovereign State would allow more than half a million people constantly to be held hostage by a terrorist organization. Israel would not allow its citizens to be "sitting ducks for terrorist attacks", but would continue to take all necessary measures to protect its citizens and stop terrorism. That was not only a right, but the responsibility of every sovereign State.

Hamas was a terrorist organization which promoted a radical agenda of hatred and violence, she continued. It was supported financially and militarily by Iran and other extreme forces in the region, while ideologically, it was tightly connected to Al-Qaida. Hamas did not recognize Israel and its charter called for the country's destruction. It rejected peace in the Middle East and, like other terrorist organizations, strove to achieve its political goals by targeting innocent men, women and children. Hamas controlled Gaza, not through democratic means, but through violence and force against its political rivals. It stood against the very principles and purposes upon which the United Nations was founded and sought to promote. It stood against any peaceful solution to the conflict in the region.

"Let me be very clear," she emphasized. "The targets of this operation are the terrorists and their infrastructure alone. We are not at war with the Palestinian people, but with Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza." As such, Israel was doing its utmost to minimize civilian casualties. Hamas, on the other hand, placed civilians in the line of fire, carrying out its activities from densely populated areas and directing its attacks towards Israeli civilian targets. The current operation had exposed, once again, the Hamas practice of storing weapons and explosives in homes, schools, mosques and hospitals. It was Hamas that bore sole responsibility for the current escalation and for any civilian casualties, Israeli and Palestinian alike.

While determined to protect its citizens, Israel continued to ensure passage of humanitarian goods and supplies to the people of Gaza, she said, adding that, since the start of the operation more than 350 trucks loaded with food and medical supplies had entered the territory. Supplies and donations continued to flow into Gaza from international organizations and State donors. At the same time, Hamas continued to target crossings and to obstruct the provision of humanitarian relief to the Palestinian people.

Pointing out that the Middle East faced crucial times that would shape its future, she urged the international community to reject the extremists' agenda and support that of the moderates, which called for coexistence and the realization of two States living side by side in peace and security. Only two weeks ago, the Council had adopted resolution 1850 (2008), reaffirming the Annapolis process. Israel would continue its efforts to pursue peace with the Palestinian people and their moderate leadership while taking all necessary measures to protect its citizens from terrorism.

GIADALLA ETTALHI (Libya) recalled that a truce had been reached between the Palestinians and Israelis last June under Egyptian sponsorship. As part of that truce, Israel had pledged to open the border crossings while the Palestinians had observed the truce "religiously" despite at least 190 Israeli violations that had killed 25 citizens. The crossings had never been completely opened, and on 4 November, the Israeli Army had entered the eastern part of Gaza, unprovoked, and killed six Palestinians. The Palestinians had never fired a single bullet except in response to an Israeli violation of the truce. Since 5 November, the Israelis had imposed a full blockade on Gaza, including blocking UNRWA

Those actions constituted a crime of genocide, a crime against humanity and a war crime according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, he said, pointing out that 80 per cent of Palestinian families were suffering from hunger and a collapse in water and sewerage services. Gazans could only get clean water once a week, according to the United Nations, while 150 basic medicines were unavailable. More than 400 Palestinians had died due to lack of treatment, a fact known to all, including the Council, which, however, had never lifted a finger. "What do you expect from people living under those conditions?"

Since 27 December, there had been air raids and bombardments which had led to the massacre that had claimed some 400 dead and 2,000 injured, most of them civilians, including large numbers of children. Buildings, schools, mosques, official buildings and the fragile infrastructure had been destroyed.

On the night of 27 December the Council had met in a closed session and issued a press statement calling for an end to the military action and the opening of the crossings, he recalled. The Israelis had not responded, despite pleas by the Secretary-General, the European Union, the Quartet and many Member States. Israel had said it would expand the attacks and that its ground forces were massing at the border. Israelis had proved once again that they were not interested in peace, but in seizing land, terrorizing Palestinians and expelling them from their homes by any possible means, including killing and starvation. No disrespect for international law and international humanitarian law could exceed what the Israelis had done in the Gaza Strip.

He then introduced a draft resolution that included a clear condemnation of the Israeli military attacks, a call upon Israel immediately to cease its attacks and abide scrupulously by its obligations as the occupying Power, and a call for immediate protection for the Palestinian civilian population. The draft also called for the reopening of the border crossings to allow unrestricted, unhindered access of humanitarian aid and basic supplies, while stressing the need for the restoration of calm in full. Libya appealed to the Council to adopt a quick and binding measure so that no other Srebrenica or Rwanda would be added to history.

DUMISANI KUMALO (South Africa) said it was imperative that the Security Council publicly voice its condemnation of the attacks and demand that they cease immediately. Four days ago, the Council, in a rare moment of unity on Middle East issues, had issued a press statement expressing serious concern at the escalation in Gaza, calling for an immediate halt to all military activities and violence, and for all parties to address the serious economic and humanitarian needs, including the opening of the border crossings. South Africa was disappointed that that call had yet to be heeded.

The Government of South Africa had expressed the view that the Israeli air strikes, using the most sophisticated war machinery, was a violation of international humanitarian law, and had formally called on the Government of Israel to stop the military onslaught and immediately and unconditionally withdraw its forces currently amassing on the Gaza border. The air strikes represented a disproportionate use of force. South Africa joined the Secretary-General in reiterating Israel's obligation to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law and in condemning its excessive use of force. While Israel's legitimate security

concern, arising from rocket attacks, must be recognized, its right to self-defence did not entitle it to violate the rights of innocent civilians, particularly those who had been living under foreign occupation for 40 years.

He expressed further disappointment with the Israeli Government's rejection of international calls for a 48-hour ceasefire, which would have allowed humanitarian aid into a territory besieged for many months by an illegal blockade. Israel could not expect security for its people and political normalcy as long as it occupied Palestinian lands and continued to try to impose its rule over Palestinians through military force. Violence and counter-violence would not advance the cause of either the Israelis or Palestinians; both sides must pursue an amicable solution, resulting in two States living side by side in peace. The Council should again demand an end to both Israeli attacks and the rocket attacks. To do less would again call the Council's credibility into question. Avoiding action was no longer an option and for that reason, South Africa fully supported the draft resolution tabled by Libya.

JEAN-MAURICE RIPERT (France) firmly reiterated his country's condemnation of the provocation that had led to the present situation, as well as Israel's disproportionate use of force and the rocket fire by Hamas. France offered its condolences to the innocent victims and their families, and reiterated its commitment to the parties' full compliance with international humanitarian law. It also stressed the importance of opening the border crossings, in accordance with the Agreement on Access and Movement.

Stressing that there was no military solution to the situation, he said everything must be done to find a political solution. The commitment of the international community was essential, specifically that of the Council. Given current events, the priority now was to end the spiral of violence so that immediate assistance could be provided and a lasting truce and political solution assured.

He voiced support for yesterday's European Union proposal calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; an end to the rocket fire, without conditions; an end to Israel's military action; and immediate humanitarian action. The end of the fighting would allow for the sustained opening of all border crossings and the European Union was prepared to resume its role in that regard. It also supported a return to the peace negotiations and for stepping up the talks. France was in contact with its partners in seeking ways to end the violence as soon as possible. President Nicolas Sarkozy would visit the region in the next several days, and the European Union would send a ministerial mission to the region.

ALFREDO SUESCUM (Panama) expressed his country's dismay at the collapse of the ceasefire, calling on both parties to stop the violence immediately and unconditionally in order to allow unrestricted access of humanitarian aid. Only a renewed ceasefire could open the way to establishing the minimum acceptable conditions for the people of Gaza. Only political negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority could lead to a lasting solution.

Stressing the absolute need for an immediate resolution of the root causes of the Middle East conflict, he expressed concern, however, that the Council was on the sidelines of the process. Some Council members might support one side or the other, but they did so unconditionally. It seemed there was no will to promote an understanding that could help a peaceful solution. Panama called on Council members to fulfil the responsibilities set by the Charter – namely, to make a serious effort to understand the causes of the conflict and promote solutions leading to peace.

MARTY M. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia) said Israel must immediately end its attacks against innocent civilians in Gaza and comply with international humanitarian and human rights law. Humanitarian access should be provided continuously and permanently so as to achieve tangible improvement. Indonesia called on Israel to lift the blockade and end the closures immediately, and its Government would send \$1 million worth of humanitarian assistance to help ease the suffering of Gaza's people. The Council's call of 28 December remained unheeded by Israel and the Council should consider the possibility of pursuing stronger measures to end all violence and military activities, and to restore the ceasefire. Indonesia fully supported the draft resolution submitted by Libya.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said the crisis had already led to great loss of life and suffering among Gaza's civilian population. Council members on 28 December had clearly expressed their view in favour of an immediate end to all military actions in Gaza, but that call had yet to be heeded. The parties must do so without further delay. The key task today was to end the armed confrontation and restore calm, a necessary precondition for preserving life and ensuring the security of both populations. Catastrophes and destabilization in the region were fraught with unpredictable consequences for international security. Ad hoc and disparate measures were not enough.

Calling on the parties to comply with international law to the fullest extent, and for the opening of all humanitarian corridors, he said that would permit the necessary humanitarian presence and allow the evacuation of injured Gazans, in which Russia was playing a part. The parties must return to full and unconditional implementation of their obligations under the "Road Map", including the end of settlement activities and effectively fighting terrorism. In a broader sense, there was a need to bring about a lasting peace for Israelis and Arabs. There was also an increasing need for inter-Palestinian reconciliation. Those points constituted the thrust of resolution 1850 (2008). Guided by such important decisions, the parties should ensure an immediate end to the violence, leading to a true settlement. There was no alternative. The Russian Federation would study the draft resolution submitted by Libya.

JOHN SAWERS (United Kingdom) noted that European Union Foreign Ministers had met yesterday and set out the steps that they believed must be taken. One thing was clear: the conflict must be brought quickly to an end. The cost in civilian lives was unacceptable. Several steps were required, including an immediate and permanent ceasefire. Hamas must ensure the complete and unconditional end to its rocket attacks, which had triggered the crisis, and Israel must cease its military strikes, which had continued for too long.

Urgent actions were needed to restore supplies of food, fuel and medicines, which meant opening the border crossings and proper distribution, he said, stressing that Israel must meet its humanitarian obligations. UNRWA would have a vital role to play, for which it needed more support. Alongside the opening of the crossings, there must be action to clamp down on the smuggling of weapons across the Egyptian-Gazan border.

He said the parties, and the entire international community, must reinvigorate collective efforts to achieve Middle East peace. Resolution 1850 (2008) mapped out the way forward, having highlighted the importance of both the Annapolis process and the Arab Peace Initiative. A comprehensive approach aimed at a two-State solution was needed. The current crisis was another reminder that there could be no military solution in the Middle East. The Council had an important role to play in setting out the necessary steps for preparing the ground for a durable ceasefire. To ensure broad support for a Council resolution, it must reflect the obligations of all the parties. The United Kingdom would work along those lines.

GIULIO TERZI DI SANT'AGATA (Italy) said his country was extremely concerned both at the ongoing military operation in Gaza and at the launching of rockets into Israel. He noted that the six-month truce had ended with the firing of rockets and called for an immediate end to those attacks against Israel. He asked Israel to use the utmost restraint in its military operations, as it was deplorable that the attacks had cost civilian lives. It was essential that unity among Palestinians was restored.

He said there was an urgent need to re-launch the Annapolis process, with the Arab peace initiative as a point of reference. There must be a call for an immediate ceasefire and for a halt to rocket attacks, combined with immediate resumption of humanitarian aid through the opening of all crossings. In that regard, he said that an international observation mechanism could be helpful. Palestinian reconciliation under the Palestinian Authority remained a key element.

BUI THE GIANG (Viet Nam) condemned the indiscriminate attacks on civilians, while recognizing Israel's right to self-defence. The violence, however, was disproportionate. He was also dismayed by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and its impact on 1.5 million people if the operations continued. As there was no military solution to the conflict, he urged all parties to immediately and unconditionally halt all acts of violence. He also urged Israel to open immediately all crossings for unhindered humanitarian access. It was imperative for the Council to have an enforceable resolution to prevent further escalation and bring the peace process forward. He would, therefore, study the draft text carefully and work towards its early adoption.

ZALMAY KHALIZAD (United States) said he was deeply concerned by the continuing violence and supported an immediate, sustainable ceasefire implemented by all. That meant Hamas must stop its rocket attacks. There could be no meaningful ceasefire without that or an end to weapons smuggling into Gaza. The United States had not yet seen any evidence that Hamas was willing immediately to cease the rocket attacks. It was the decision by Hamas to break the period of calm that had led to the renewed rocket attacks. Knowing that it was intolerable for Israelis to live under that terrorism, Hamas had continued its barrage of scores of rockets each day. The result was the crisis being confronted today.

Expressing his country's regret over the loss of life and suffering, he said the United States favoured a ceasefire and, to attain that crucial result, it had been engaged in intensive efforts to restore calm with Governments in the region and worldwide. The extremely complex situation could not be solved by simple or one-sided and unbalanced declarations. The United States welcomed the Arab contributions to a viable solution and was working incessantly to achieve the following objectives: ensure a ceasefire respected by all; end the smuggling of weapons into Gaza; increase the transit of humanitarian goods; and open the border crossings under appropriate and legitimate authority and control. Beyond that, a lasting peace would be reached through three tracks – negotiations, building the institutions of a Palestinian State, and implementation by the parties of their Road Map obligations.

ZHANG YESUI (China) strongly condemned all actions that caused civilian casualties, while drawing attention to the Council's press statement of 28 December (Press Release [SC/9559](#)), which regrettably had gone unheeded. Israel should immediately halt its military activities and the Palestinian armed factions should also stop launching rockets. The parties, with the international community's support, should re-establish a ceasefire as soon as possible. The Israeli air attacks had exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, and China urged Israel to open all border crossings immediately so as to facilitate unhindered access. China would provide \$1 million to relief agencies for essential goods.

Two weeks ago, the Council had adopted resolution 1850 (2008), which reaffirmed the international community's determination to promote the Middle East peace process, he recalled. Under the current circumstances, the Council should take action to ensure that the text's objectives were implemented. It was to be hoped that the Council could reach consensus on Libya's draft resolution as soon as possible. In addition, the Quartet should intensify its efforts to exert its influence. The international community and other partners should also play a constructive role. Hopefully, the military actions would be halted as soon as possible, paving the way for a return to the negotiating table.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) condemned the use of force by any side and voiced regret over the great loss of human lives, particularly among civilians, as a result of Israel's disproportionate use of force. While that country should comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Burkina Faso could not condone the repeated rocket attacks on Israel by Hamas and called for an immediate ceasefire. The parties must abandon the military option and focus on the path of dialogue.

Describing 2008 as a year of great tragedy for the people of Gaza and southern Israel, he said that, pending a comprehensive solution to the conflict, the Council must agree on steadfast action, including Israel's opening of border crossings to allow access for humanitarian assistance and workers. The international community, including the League of Arab States, was duty-bound to assist the parties in seeking a solution. Burkina Faso would carefully consider the draft resolution just circulated.

JORGE URBINA (Costa Rica) hoped to see significant action by the Council that would be respected by both parties. Israeli actions in Gaza, including the blockade, were disproportionate and did not fall under the right to legitimate self-defence. While understanding Israel's concern for its security, Costa Rica condemned terrorist attacks against southern Israel. However, one should not enter into a controversial discussion as to who had started the cycle of actions.

Stressing that there could be no peace while there was an occupation without international legality, he said the Council could not remain indifferent and must play a significant role. The Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute must be respected, which meant that parties in conflict must distinguish between civilians and combatants, as well as between civilian and military targets. Costa Rica was also concerned by the collective punishment approach taken by Israel. A permanent ceasefire was needed to halt the hostilities and it was the Council's priority to seek adherence by the parties to their obligations under the Road Map, other agreements and Council resolutions.

CHRISTINE DETAILLE (Belgium) said the unprecedented escalation of the violence was a serious threat to regional stability, having already killed hundreds, and the grave humanitarian crisis was linked to the blockade of Gaza. Belgium condemned the breach of the truce by Hamas and its rocket attacks against southern Israel. However, Israel's right to defend itself did not give it the right to a disproportionate response. Neither party had anything to gain by the escalation; there was no possible military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That was why Belgium and the European Union called on the parties to respect the populations concerned by installing a full and immediate ceasefire. They also called for a normal, sustained reopening of all crossings into Gaza. Both parties must take immediate humanitarian action, allowing the entry of urgent supplies into the enclave, and permitting the evacuation of the wounded, as well as unhindered access for humanitarian workers.

Council President NEVEN JURICA (Croatia), speaking in his national capacity, said all violence must immediately be brought to a halt, as a lasting and just peace could only be achieved through peaceful means. There was a need to adhere strictly to international humanitarian law and to avoid civilian casualties, since the loss of even one life was one too many. The duty to protect civilians applied to all. Croatia was deeply concerned about the desperate situation of Gaza's citizens and sought the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian supplies, as well as the evacuation of the wounded. It appreciated the efforts of UNRWA and other agencies, and France's initiative in that regard.

The situation in Gaza, including the latest Israeli military action, could not be addressed in isolation from its context, he said. Hamas militants positioned among the civilian infrastructure had consistently been carrying out rocket attacks on Israel, the frequency and range of which had increased in past days. Israel could not be denied its inherent and legitimate right to defend itself, and its obligation to protect its citizens. However, civilian casualties must be avoided. The Council must stand firmly behind the message of resolution 1850 (2008), which prepared the ground for a political settlement. Croatia would continue to support any constructive effort aimed at curbing the violence and would study Libya's resolution carefully.

MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ (Egypt) said the Israeli aggression that had claimed more than 400 lives and the continuing blockade ran counter to Israel's obligations as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The disproportionate and arbitrary use of force was a threat to peace and stability not only in the Middle East but the whole world. The Council must, therefore, take immediate action to ensure a comprehensive and binding ceasefire that would be respected. The crossings must be opened to ensure humanitarian assistance. International efforts to reach a settlement and establish a Palestinian State as soon as possible must be stepped up.

Pointing out that Israel had failed to heed the Council's appeals in continuing its military aggression, he said the Council must impose its collective will by adopting a decisive resolution that would entail all the elements expressed in its recent press statement, in addition to elements to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people. Double standards should be avoided and all measures must be taken to prevent an Israeli land attack. The Palestinian people's right to self-determination must be restored. A solution would be guaranteed by an end to the occupation of all occupied territories, a solution to the refugee question, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative. Egypt supported Libya's draft resolution.

YAHYAA MAHMASSANI, Permanent Observer for the [League of Arab States](#), said that the strikes by Israeli warplanes had led to more than 2,000 casualties among Palestinians, including many women and children. Buildings, homes, schools and mosques were being destroyed, with people inside. Last Saturday, the Council had held an emergency meeting during which an understanding had been reached, as expressed in a statement on Sunday morning. Since then, the

call for a ceasefire and an opening of the crossings had persisted, yet Israel was still perpetrating its aggression and its suffocating siege of Gaza, which for more than 18 months had prevented medical and other essential needs from reaching Gazans. That was a policy of collective punishment, followed now by one of collective killing. That served nobody's interest; it would provoke more extremism and violence in the region and reduce the opportunity to reach a just peace.

He said that the Arab League had taken a ministerial-level decision today strongly condemning the Israeli aggression, demanding that it instantly cease all military activity in Gaza, and condemning its blockade against the Palestinian people there. The League had also stressed the urgent need to provide humanitarian assistance. It appealed to the relevant organizations to shoulder their responsibility and called on the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to convene a meeting to ensure implementation of its 2001 decisions. The Council should take the necessary measures to compel Israel to cease all military activities in Gaza, allow unimpeded humanitarian access and ensure the protection of the Palestinian people. How could the Council condone the daily killing of hundreds of people? How could it remain silent while Israeli raids killed and razed buildings? Where was the international community?

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