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BRIEFING SECURITY COUNCIL, MIDDLE EAST COORDINATOR SAYS WITHOUT CREDIT PATH FORWARD,

VIABILITY OF PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY, TWO-STATE SOLUTION IN JEOPARTY

Noting Gaps of Trust, Perception, Substance, Appeals to Parties to De-escalate, Adhere to Obligations, Enter Direct Talks, Come Forward with Negotiable Proposals

"Without a credible path forward, accompanied by more far-reaching steps on the ground," Robert Serry, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process told the Security Council today, "the viability of the Palestinian Authority and its State-building agenda — and, I fear, of the two-State solution itself — cannot be taken for granted".

Briefing the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Mr. Serry, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority, said gaps of trust, perception and substance remained between the parties. He appealed to them to de-escalate, refrain from provocations and adhere to their obligations, enter direct negotiations, and come forward with concrete and negotiable proposals.

He said that both parties had engaged separately with the Quartet in the framework of the 23 September statement. Direct negotiations without preconditions, in which the parties would be expected to table territorial and security proposals within 90 days, were still not taking place, however, and provocations, including settlement expansions and withholding of the Palestinian Authority's tax revenue by the Israeli Government, continued to damage confidence. Palestinian unity had not moved forward and Gaza had once again witnessed dangerous violence.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had publicly warned that the status quo was not endurable, he said. The 23 September statement remained the framework for a way forward if both parties showed flexibility and responsibility. Quartet envoys and Quartet Representative Tony Blair had met in Jerusalem with Israeli and Palestinian representatives separately on 26 October and 14 November. They had stressed the need for the parties to avoid provocations, develop serious proposals on borders and security, and discuss them directly with each other, without delay or preconditions.

He said the United Nations appreciated the substance that had been discussed by the Palestinian side, which showed serious intent, but its potential could only be realized in direct negotiations. While appreciating Israel's stated security concerns and its readiness to enter direct talks, he said Israel should provide genuine assurances that it was willing to present serious proposals, including on territory, in the context of direct negotiations.

Israel continued to engage in settlement activity, including in highly sensitive areas, he said. After the decision by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to admit Palestine as a member, Israel had publicized its intention to invite tenders for the construction of 1,557 new units in East Jerusalem and 673 units in other areas of the West Bank. The Israeli Government froze the transfer of VAT and customs revenues it collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Amounting to some \$100 million per month, those funds represented two thirds of the Authority's annual revenues. The United States was also partially withholding assistance funds to the Authority.

"We must de-escalate this situation," he said. In addition to acting on its settlement obligations, Israel should unfreeze the transfers immediately. The Palestinian Authority should find ways to contribute to de-escalation and improve the prevailing divisive climate, including in the international arena.

Underscoring the importance of the security efforts of the Palestinian Authority, he said Palestinian security forces had seized and defused unexploded devices. In a positive gesture, 51 alleged militants being held in protective custody by the Palestinian police in the West Bank had been granted amnesty by Israel on 4 November.

Weekly demonstrations against the barrier in the occupied West Bank continued, he said. The barrier deviated from the green line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and the barrier's route had reportedly been moved in the northern Jordan Valley, resulting in a de facto

annexation of Palestinian land.

President Abbas, while firmly rejecting violence, had called for the widest possible Palestinian “non-violent resistance”, he further reported. However, violent incidents continued. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had conducted 218 operations, injuring 44 Palestinians, including three children, and resulting in the arrest of 113 Palestinians, including a prominent West Bank Hamas leader. Twenty-one settler attacks on Palestinians had resulted in six injuries and the destruction of another 174 olive trees. Palestinian stone throwing against Israeli vehicles in the West Bank had resulted in three injuries and several Palestinian arrests. A Jewish holy site in Nablus had been desecrated on 31 October.

Mr.erry noted that the weekly average number of settler attacks had increased by 40 per cent in 2011 compared to 2010, and by 165 per cent compared to 2009.

On 1 and 7 November, the Israeli Defense Forces had demolished structures in three West Bank settlement outposts, but the Israeli Government had delayed the demolition of two unauthorized settler outposts built on private Palestinian property. Israel must remove outposts consistent with its Road Map commitments, and provide adequate law enforcement for acts of settler violence in line with its obligations towards the Palestinian civilian population under occupation.

Preserving calm in Gaza and southern Israel remained crucial for improvements there and for the overall political atmosphere, he said. The fragility of the relative calm was seen last month when militants fired tens of rockets and mortars into Israel, which conducted air strikes in Gaza. Both Israel and the de facto Hamas authorities had signalled their desire to de-escalate, and on 1 November, Egypt’s diplomatic efforts helped to restore calm. However, Islamic Jihad video footage showed increasingly sophisticated mobile rocket launchers smuggled into the coastal strip.

During the reporting period, 56 rockets and 16 mortar shells were fired into Israel, killing one civilian and injuring four others. The Israeli Defense Forces had fired nine tank shells and conducted 25 air strikes and four incursions into Gaza, killing 14 militants and injuring 12 others, and killing 2 civilians and injuring 5 others, including a French consular official, his daughter and pregnant wife, who miscarried. Israel must exercise maximum restraint and minimize the risk to civilians, he said, reiterating the Secretary-General’s call for all to fully respect international humanitarian law.

In a welcome development, he noted that Israel had granted approval for \$5.5 million in construction projects in Gaza. The start of private-sector equipment and material deliveries represented a significant step towards rebuilding the Gaza economy. He now awaited further approvals of vital United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) housing projects. Calling for further measures towards lifting the land closure on Gaza, he said “opening Gaza is vital for the well-being of Gazans and for closing gaps in supply increasingly filled by other actors, including illicit tunnel trade largely controlled by the de facto authorities.” During the reporting period, the Israeli navy stopped two boats attempting to reach the Gaza Strip by sea, he added.

Following Fatah-Hamas contacts, a further high-level meeting was being prepared to discuss implementation of the May reconciliation accord agreed in Cairo, which envisaged elections next May following the formation of a transitional government, he reported. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had reaffirmed that he would not be an obstacle to an agreement on a new government. Issues among the Palestinians remained challenging, while the substance of any reconciliation arrangement would be assessed by donors, he said.

The situation in Syria was a source of deep and growing concern for the United Nations, he said. Violent repression by the Syrian security forces had escalated, and there were signs of future armed confrontation in several areas. The League of Arab States had proposed a work plan to which the Syrian Government agreed to in principle. In the absence of full implementation by the Syrian authorities, the Ministerial Council of the League had suspended Syria from participating in meetings and activities and had decided to consider economic sanctions. The League was seeking to dispatch an Arab observer mission to monitor the plan’s implementation and protect civilians in Syria.

Mr.erry called for the work plan’s full and expeditious implementation. “All violence should stop for a Syrian-led process of comprehensive political change to take place that will address the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people regardless of their political, religious or ethnic background,” he said. There was no progress towards peace between Syria and Israel, which continued to maintain settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan. No incident had been reported in the area of separation since June.

Turning to Lebanon, he said developments in Syria had continued to stoke political tensions there. Lebanon’s 12 November vote against the Arab League’s proposal to suspend Syrian membership had become a divisive issue between the coalition in power and the opposition. The disappearance of four Syrian opposition figures in Lebanon earlier this year had also sparked a heated debate between the 14 and 8 March movements. The situation on the border remained a concern, with the Syrian army planting landmines on the Syrian side in areas commonly used as illegal crossing points. The United Nations continued to coordinate with Lebanon to assist the registered 3,581 displaced Syrian nationals.

He added that two explosions in Tyre at a liquor store and hotel caused material damage, including two United Nations vehicles. Lebanese authorities had launched an investigation, but thus far, the motive and the identity of the perpetrators remained unclear. The area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally quiet, but Israeli flights over Lebanese airspace continued almost daily, he said.

The Council was last briefed on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on 24 October (see Press Release [SC/10420](#)).

The meeting started at 10:13 a.m. and adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

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