



## Security Council SC/10926

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Security Council  
6926<sup>th</sup> Meeting (AM)

### **MIDDLE EAST AT MOMENT OF 'HEIGHTENED RISKS ACROSS MULTIPLE FRONTS', SAYS TOP**

#### **UNITED NATIONS POLITICAL OFFICIAL IN MONTHLY BRIEFING TO SECURITY COUNCIL**

It was a moment of "heightened risks across multiple fronts" in the Middle East, the United Nations political chief told the Security Council today, saying it was time to end the conflict and the occupation that had scarred the lives of far too many Israelis and Palestinians for far too long, as well as reverse the destructive military spiral in Syria that "churns more forcefully each day and threatens to pull its neighbours, most notably, Lebanon, into its vortex". In the Council's regular monthly briefing on the region, Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said today's troubling rocket attack fired from Gaza into Israel — the first breach of the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire of 21 November 2012 — demonstrated the temperature was again rising with no negotiations to offer hope on the horizon.

It was already two months into a year that could preserve or extinguish what hope remained for a two-State solution, he said, adding he did not believe it was hyperbole to say so. New life must be injected into the political process, he said, to counter the negative forces on both sides, which drew strength from stalemate and paralysis. Both sides had a responsibility to marginalize those forces by creating the conditions for successful negotiations. Given the current situation, he said the difficulty in developing a serious and substantial political initiative, with a realistic and not unlimited timeframe, and collective support could not be underestimated. But, progress could not be expected this year without the articulation of a credible political framework to achieve the negotiated two-State solution.

Resignation was not an acceptable option, he cautioned, as that would represent a failure of the parties and the international community at the very time when opportunities should be seized to help the parties define and implement a final status agreement. All must act decisively and with concerted purpose if the two-State solution was to be salvaged, he said.

As for Syria, he said opportunities existed to reverse the destructive trends, but "not if the international community sits still". The proposal for dialogue from Mbaz al-Khatib, President of the Syrian National Coalition, was a positive development, but even tentative steps to dialogue "are struggling to take root", as the warring parties "remain locked in a military logic which is bound to bring more death and destruction". Stepped up efforts by the Council could make a substantial difference, while there was still time to do so.

Elaborating on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, he described discussions taking place in the aftermath of the 22 January Israeli elections and a willingness to resume negotiations. Both sides, he stressed, must be prepared to embrace their responsibilities in that regard. He touched also on the dire fiscal situation of the Palestinians, insisting that it must be addressed. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee's meeting next month was an opportunity to renew the collective commitment to support State-building efforts and promote Palestinian financial and economic sustainability.

The United Nations, he went on, was following closely the security, political and human rights dimensions of the issue of Palestinian prisoners. On Saturday, it was concerned to learn that a Palestinian man had died in detention after his arrest by the Israeli Defense Forces days earlier. Today, Gaza militants from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade cited the death as responsible for a rocket attack on Israel — a "most troubling" development. The prisoner's death sparked a series of demonstrations and clashes, which reports indicate, resulted in the injuries of 43 Palestinians; two Israeli soldiers were also wounded.

He reiterated the United Nations call for an investigation into Arafat Jaradat's death. Also of particular concern was the deteriorating health of four prisoners engaged in an extended hunger strike. The Secretary-General had raised his concern with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and had urged an immediate end to the prisoners' plight. He also urged all to adhere to the [14 May 2012 agreement](#), including implementation of the prisoners' family visiting rights.

Touching on several other worrying developments, he said that operations by Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank, including in Area A, had continued apace, resulting, since his last briefing, in 617 Palestinian injuries, including 116 children and 10 women, and the arrest of 491 more. Nine Israeli soldiers had also sustained injuries.

He said that settlement activity also continued, with Israeli authorities giving final approval for the construction of 90 housing units in the settlement of Beit El, and reported that since he last briefed, Israeli security forces had demolished 30 structures in the occupied West Bank, resulting in the displacement of 89 Palestinians, including 49 children — the highest number of such demolitions in a single month in more than two years.

Regarding Gaza, he was deeply troubled by today's rocket attack into Israel. "There is no justification for such attacks, which not only target innocent civilians indiscriminately, but which risk triggering a renewed spiral of violence that will only bring suffering to Palestinians and Israelis alike." Until today's rocket attack, that was the longest period without projectiles fired from Gaza in recent years. It was essential that today's attack not be repeated and not interrupt efforts to strengthen the understandings reached in November.

In related developments, he said that Palestinian fishermen had been able to access up to six nautical miles from shore, and while such steps were welcome, he continued to advocate for a further extension of the fishing limit to 12 nautical miles, as well as for unrestricted entry of all construction materials.

Further to the State-building process, the Palestinian Central Election Commission had been able to conduct voter registration from 11 to 20 February in the West Bank and Gaza, for the first time since 2007, he noted. Recent opinion polls suggested a popular demand for an inclusive democratic process, including the holding of the long-overdue Palestinian general elections.

Further elaborating on developments in Syria, he said those remained a source of "extreme concern" for the United Nations, which was daily reminded of the

heavy toll being paid by Syrian civilians. Citing the appalling number of civilian casualties, the Secretary-General strongly condemned the reported ballistic missile strikes in Aleppo, as well as the series of bombings in Damascus.

As predicted, he said, the war had taken on sectarian overtones, permeated by opportunistic criminality and aggravated by the presence of foreign fighters and extremist groups, as well as by some actions by the Government, including its affiliated *shabbiha* militia. The humanitarian situation was worsening, and the situation in the occupied Golan was precarious and posed risks to the ceasefire between Israel and Syria and the safety of civilians and United Nations personnel.

Additionally, he said: "We are concerned at any actions that risk drawing Lebanon into the conflict in Syria." Moreover, reports of arms transfers to and through Lebanon were contrary to international obligations, he said, calling on all sides to respect Lebanon's border integrity and sovereignty, and on all Lebanese parties to honour the Baabda Declaration of June 2012.

He informed members about recent legal developments in Lebanon, including the 20 February indictments by a Lebanese court of Syrian General Ali Mamlouk and an unarmed aide for their alleged involvement in a terrorist plot in the country, along with former Lebanese Minister Michel Samah. On 21 February, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon had postponed the start of the trial provisionally scheduled for 25 March, he said, adding that the eighth anniversary of the assassination of Rafik Hariri on 14 February underlined the need to achieve justice for past assassinations and attempted ones, including in the past year.

The situation along the Blue Line remained generally calm, although there had been an increase in Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, notably ahead of the airstrike in Syria on 30 January, he said. In the political realm, a draft law for the parliamentary elections in June still eluded consensus, and he encouraged work to continue to ensure that the polls took place on a consensual basis within the legal and constitutional context.

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 a.m. and adjourned at 10:38 a.m.

\* \* \* \* \*

For information media • not an official record