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### POLITICAL AFFAIRS HEAD TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL GAZA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION 'FRAGILE'

#### URGES ISRAEL TO ALLOW DELIVERY OF FUEL, BASIC NECESSITIES TO PALESTINIANS

#### Palestinian Observer States Situation 'Humanly Unbearable and Morally Unacceptable': Israel Says Hamas, Rather Than Engage in Dialogue, Had Chosen Violence to Advance Goals

Expressing concern over the "extremely fragile" humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, strongly urged Israel during a Security Council meeting this afternoon to allow regular and unimpeded delivery of fuel and basic necessities to the Palestinian area.

Mr. Pascoe condemned the escalation of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza by Hamas militants into Israel in recent days. He acknowledged Israel's security concerns in the wake of those attacks, but said they did not justify disproportionate steps by the Israeli Government and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) that endangered Palestinian civilians.

"Israel must reconsider and cease its policy of pressuring the civilian population of Gaza for the unacceptable actions of militants. Collective penalties are prohibited under international law," he said. Israel must also thoroughly investigate incidents leading to civilian casualties and must ensure adequate accountability. Commercial and international humanitarian aid must be allowed into Gaza, he said, adding that in December only 34.5 per cent of Gaza's basic commercial food import needs had been met. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority should be allowed to manage crossings into Gaza, particularly the Karni crossing. He cautioned that the current upsurge in violence could thwart peace prospects in what should be a year of hope and opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to reach agreement on a two-State solution.

"The events of the past week have also underlined the ever-present potential for the Annapolis process to be undermined by the deterioration of the situation on the ground, and in particular the continuing crisis in Gaza," he said.

He stressed the importance of the United Nations continued presence there, as well as crisis management and containment. Today Israel had reopened two crossings to allow the entry of humanitarian aid and 600,000 litres of industrial fuel, with a target of 2.2 million litres by week's end, but it was not yet clear whether the crossing would stay open, he said. Nor would that amount fully restore electricity. Widespread electricity cuts in Gaza would continue. Without new supplies of benzene, the stocks of the World Food Programme (WFP) would be depleted by Thursday morning.

Since 15 January, militants had launched more than 150 rocket and mortar attacks at Israel, injuring 11 Israelis, he said. Forty-two Palestinians had been killed and 117 injured by IDF, which launched 8 ground incursions, 15 air strikes and 10 surface-to-surface missiles this past week. While the violence had significantly subsided in the last few days, the situation remained fragile. He called on Israel and its armed forces to strictly observe international humanitarian law, noting that the Israeli occupation – including with respect to Gaza – had clear obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Permanent Observer of Palestine echoed that claim, urging the international community to call upon Israel to immediately cease all illegal acts of aggression and terror against the Palestinian people. Israel's punitive measures severely undermined peace efforts and reignited the cycle of violence. The Council must compel Israel to lift the siege and reopen Gaza's border crossings to permit the movement of persons and goods, including food and medical supplies. The Palestinian Authority was ready and willing to operate the Palestinian side of all Gaza crossings. The Quartet's Special Representative, Tony Blair, had presented a plan to Israel, which the United Nations supported.

"The current situation is absolutely untenable, humanly unbearable and morally unacceptable," he said. Since the 27 November Annapolis Conference, more than 160 Palestinians have been killed by the occupying Power, including at least 12 children and nine women, mainly in Gaza. Since declaring the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity" last September, the occupying Power had imposed a continuous closure on all border crossings. It had intensified that closure last Friday to halt food deliveries and on Sunday cut fuel deliveries to Gaza's main power plant. International humanitarian assistance – the lifeline of Gaza's economy, social

services and health care – was now in jeopardy. Continued border closures would result in the suspension within a few days of supplies to more than one million refugees and other civilians in Gaza.

Israel's representative said Hamas was to blame for the current situation in Gaza. Rather than engaging Israel in dialogue and reconciliation to advance the two-State vision, Hamas had chosen to use terrorism and violence to advance its goal of destroying Israel, using Gaza as a base from which to launch rocket attacks, which were fired at a rate of one every three hours. In contrast, Israel had made the right choices, including withdrawing from the Gaza Strip, uprooting families, removing all its forces and disengaging, despite the fact that it was not required to do so by the [Road Map](#). Israel, he said, would act in accordance with its inherent right under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter to protect and defend its people. A clear distinction must be made between Palestinian terrorism and Israeli defence.

Palestinian terrorists chose to directly target Israeli civilians and use their own as human shields, he said. By firing on border crossings, those terrorists forced closures, hampering humanitarian aid and relief efforts. Israel had allowed electricity, fuel and medicines into Gaza and was working closely with aid agencies on the ground to ensure that humanitarian needs were met. Since June 2007, Israel's Government had permitted more than 9,000 Palestinians to enter Israel to seek medical treatment, while Hamas had fired more than 1,700 rockets and mortars out of the Gaza Strip into Israel. Gilad Shalit was still held captive by terrorists in Gaza and his whereabouts and condition were unknown.

Hamas did not recognize Israel's right to exist and there was no hope in its leadership. The international community must make it clear that Hamas' actions were unacceptable and that the path of rejection, violence and terrorism would not be tolerated by the Council.

Saudi Arabia's representative, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, and the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States called on the Council to shoulder its legal, political and humanitarian responsibilities to end the aggression. They called for an international inquiry into Israel's crimes, which they said clearly violated international humanitarian law. Further, they called for prompt action from the Quartet and a peaceful, comprehensive settlement based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 1397 (2002) that spelled out the principle of land for peace, and on the Madrid and Arab Peace initiatives.

Similarly, Indonesia's representative reiterated his country's full support for the two-State solution as envisioned in the Road Map and underscored the need for steps to sustain the Palestinian economy, including in Gaza, as well as circumstances that would allow for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. Israel's continued military incursions and operations in Gaza had exacerbated the burden of many Palestinians. "Military incursions, border closings, as well as continued rocket firings into Israeli territory will not offer solutions to the crux of the problem in the region," he said. They would only perpetuate the cycle of violence and undermine efforts to create an environment conducive to achieving the goals discussed in Annapolis. All parties concerned, on the ground, must exercise restraint and refrain from any actions that could undermine those efforts, he said.

The representatives of Italy, Burkina Faso, United Kingdom, South Africa, Russian Federation, France, Costa Rica, Panama, Croatia, United States, China, Belgium, Viet Nam and Libya also spoke, as did the representatives of Egypt, Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Slovenia (on behalf of the European Union), Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The representatives of Israel and Syria took the floor for a second time.

The meeting, which started at 10:45 a.m., was suspended at 1:10 p.m. It reconvened at 3:05 p.m. and adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

### Background

The Security Council this morning took up the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on the request of the Arab Group. In a 21 January letter to the President of the Council, the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of January 2008, requested the holding of an "urgent" meeting to consider "Israeli aggression in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

### Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said the crisis in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel had escalated dramatically since 15 January, due to daily rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilian residential areas by several militant groups from Gaza, and regular military attacks by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) on and into Gaza. There were also tight Israeli restrictions on crossings into Gaza to end rocket fire. IDF entered the Gaza Strip on 15 January and had been engaged in heavy battle by Hamas militants, including IDF air and tank operations. Hamas claimed responsibility for sniper and rocket attacks against Israel. Since then, more than 150 rocket and mortar attacks had been launched at Israel by militants, injuring 11 Israelis, and a sniper attack killed an Ecuadorian national on a kibbutz in Israel. Forty-two Palestinians had been killed and 117 injured by IDF, which had launched 8 ground incursions, 15 air strikes and 10 surface-to-surface missiles this past week. Several Palestinian civilians had been killed in ground battles between IDF and militants, and in Israeli air strikes and targeted killing operations.

Violence had dropped significantly in the last few days, as had rocket fire and IDF incursions, he said. Since this morning through 2 p.m. local time, one rocket landed on an open field and three mortar shells had been fired. There had been no IDF incursions or operations. The situation, however, remained extremely fragile. The Secretary-General had expressed deep concern over the bloodshed, appealed for an immediate cessation of violence and stressed the responsibility of all parties to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law and not to endanger civilians. Indiscriminate rocket and mortar firing on civilian population centres and crossing points was totally unacceptable. He condemned it, adding that such attacks terrorized Israeli communities near Gaza, particularly in Sderot. They also endangered humanitarian workers at crossing points and had occurred regularly since well before Israel's disengagement, causing civilian deaths and damage, school closures and high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder. More than 100,000 Israelis lived within range of standard Qassam rocket fire.

He also expressed concern that IDF Corporal Gilad Shalit was still held captive in Gaza, that Hamas continued to deny the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access and that there were allegations of smuggling of weapons and material into Gaza. He called on Israel and its armed forces to strictly observe international humanitarian law. The Israeli occupation – including with respect to Gaza – carried clear obligations under humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. While noting Israel's security concerns, he said it was obliged not to take disproportionate security measures or to endanger civilians. Israel must thoroughly investigate incidents leading to civilian casualties and ensure adequate accountability. He reiterated that the United Nations basic principled opposition to extra-judicial killings was compounded by the frequency with which such operations were carried out in densely populated areas. That was why the Secretary-General had repeatedly called on Israel to exercise maximum restraint.

The Gaza crossings had remained largely closed since the June 2007 Hamas takeover, except for imports to meet minimal humanitarian needs, he continued. Compared with the already precarious first half of 2007, imports into Gaza had dropped 77 per cent and exports 98 per cent. Most Palestinians could not exit Gaza, except for some students, humanitarian workers and some, but not all, needy medical cases. Large United Nations construction projects that could bring jobs and housing to Gazans were frozen, because building materials were not available. The request by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to import bullet proof windows to protect its Gaza offices had been denied.

On 17 January, Israel increased fuel into Gaza pursuant to a petition before the Israeli High Court, but, on 18 January, as rocket fire intensified, it imposed a comprehensive closure of Gaza, halting the import of fuel, food, medical and relief supplies, he said. The Gaza power plant was shut down on Sunday evening,

leaving all of Gaza, except Rafah, with daily power cuts of 8 to 12 hours. About 40 per cent of the population did not have regular access to running water and 50 per cent of bakeries were reported closed due to a lack of electricity and shortages of flour and grain. Hospitals were running on generators and had reduced activities to intensive care units only. Thirty million litres of raw sewage was pumped into the Mediterranean Sea, due to the breakdown of sewage pumping equipment. Earlier today, Palestinian demonstrators who tried to force open the Rafah border crossing were dispersed by Egyptian security forces, and injuries had been reported.

He said the United Nations had been actively involved, through interventions by the Secretary-General and others, in seeking an urgent easing of the blanket closure of Gaza. Today, Israel had reopened two crossings for fuel and the delivery of humanitarian supplies by international organizations, but it was not yet clear whether the crossing would stay open. He strongly urged Israel, at a minimum, to allow for the regular and unimpeded delivery of fuel and basic necessities. Approximately 600,000 litres of industrial fuel would be delivered today, with a target of 2.2 million litres throughout the week. That amount, however, would only restore the electricity flow to what it had been at the beginning of January. That could mean widespread cuts in the Gaza Strip. In addition, benzene was still not being allowed in Gaza. Unless supplies were allowed in, the stocks of the World Food Programme (WFP), which relied on benzene, would be depleted by Thursday morning.

The entry of commercial humanitarian supplies required to meet the total humanitarian needs of Gaza was still not permitted, he continued. In December, only 34.5 per cent of basic commercial food import needs had been met. It was imperative that both commercial and international humanitarian assistance be allowed into Gaza. Israel must reconsider and cease its policy of pressuring the civilian population of Gaza for the unacceptable actions of militants. Collective penalties were prohibited under international law. The Secretary-General strongly supported the plan for the Palestinian Authority to man crossings into Gaza, particularly Karni. Early implementation of that initiative should be a priority, for the benefit of the civilian population of Gaza.

The events of the past week had also underlined the ever-present potential for the Annapolis process to be undermined. Less than two weeks ago, the parties had launched negotiations on core issues, and President Bush had visited the region to underline his commitment to assisting them to reach a peace treaty in 2008, and to implement phase one of the Road Map. The Quartet and the entire international community were fully engaged in that effort. Crisis management and containment in Gaza would seem to be a minimal requirement, if that process was to be given a chance to succeed.

In conclusion, he reiterated the deep commitment of the United Nations to the welfare of the civilian population affected by the conflict. The work performed by United Nations agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, in Gaza was one of the few things that stood between the current crisis conditions and an even more dramatic deterioration of the situation. The United Nations would continue to do everything it could to ensure that civilians were protected and assisted, whatever the political environment.

#### Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said the Middle East was at a precarious juncture. The decisions and actions made now by all concerned parties, including the Council, would either help cross the threshold into a new era of reason, calm and stability or plunge the parties back into the dark abyss of violence, killing and destruction. Regrettably, despite the recent momentum generated by the revival of the peace process, there had been little progress and much deterioration, mainly because of Israeli actions that were destabilizing the situation on the ground. "Instead of truly turning a new page and embarking on the path to peace, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue the illegal practices it has actually never ceased pursuing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem."

He said the situation in the Gaza Strip was distressing and grave, as Israel had intensified its "collective punishment" of the Palestinian civilian population, obstructing the entry into Gaza of even basic food stuffs and other essential humanitarian supplies. "The current situation is absolutely untenable, humanly unbearable and morally unacceptable," he said. There was no pretext – security or otherwise – that could justify such inhuman punishment of innocent civilians, including children, women, the elderly, and disabled and ill persons. Moreover, such punitive measures by the occupying Power severely poison the environment between the two sides, undermining peace efforts and reigniting the cycle of violence.

Recently, the Israeli occupying forces had launched countless military assaults against the Gaza Strip, he said. Since the 27 November Annapolis Conference, more than 160 Palestinians have been killed by the occupying Power, including at least 12 children and nine women, with the majority of them in Gaza. "The message sent by such deadly and destructive actions is one that plays into the hands of those who seek to cast doubt on the peace process," he said. The international community must call upon Israel to immediately cease all illegal acts of aggression and terror against the Palestinian people.

He said that, since its declaration of the Gaza Strip as a "hostile entity" in September last year, the occupying Power had imposed a continuous closure on all border crossings, a closure that had been intensified since Friday, 18 January, preventing the delivery of food and completely cutting off fuel to the main power plant on Sunday, 20 January. If it were not for the international humanitarian assistance being provided, the economic, social and health situation in the Gaza Strip would have long ago collapsed. However, such assistance was now in jeopardy, as United Nations agencies had warned that, if the closures were to continue, food aid to more than one million refugees and other civilians in Gaza would have to be suspended within a few days.

The international community, including the Council, could not remain silent in the face of that perilous decline of the situation. He called upon the members of the international community to shoulder their responsibilities and to urgently intervene to bring a halt to that punishment of the Palestinian people, to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, to stem the deterioration of the security situation and to salvage the fragile peace process. The international community must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease its military aggression, its collective punishment of the Palestinian people, and all other violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

He called upon the Council today to take urgent, practical and specific measures to end the crisis situation in the Gaza Strip. Israel must be compelled to lift the siege, to allow for the opening of Gaza's border crossings to permit the movement of persons and goods, including immediate access for food and medical supplies. The Palestinian Authority was ready and willing to operate the Palestinian side of all Gaza crossings. A plan had been presented via the Quartet's Special Representative, Tony Blair, to the Israeli side and the Quartet had expressed its support. Mr. Pascoe had today also expressed the Secretary-General's support for that plan.

He said, "Now is the time for real action on the part of all concerned parties in the collective drive aimed at attainment of the just, lasting and comprehensive peace that will be achieved with an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab lands it occupied in 1967, the establishment of the independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the achievement of a just solution to the Palestine refugee question on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We must not lose this historical opportunity, for the alternatives and consequences will be dire and we must not continue allowing conflict, despair and injustice to prevail over peace, hope and justice."

GILAD COHEN (Israel) said the situation in the region today was the result of many wrong choices made by the Palestinians to adopt terrorism and violence over peace and negotiations with Israel. In contrast, Israel had made the right choice, including withdrawing from the Gaza Strip, uprooting families, removing all its forces and disengaging, despite the fact that it was not required by the Road Map. Since then, Hamas had ruled Gaza and was using the area as a base from which to launch rocket attacks against Israel. Rather than engaging Israel in dialogue and reconciliation to advance the two-State vision, Hamas chose to use terrorism and violence to advance its goal of destroying Israel. Since 2000, more than 7,000 rockets and mortars had been fired at Israel by terrorists in Gaza, including more than 2,000 in 2007. Since Hamas' violent June 2007 takeover of Gaza, rocket attacks rose 150 per cent, to more than 250 rockets and mortars monthly. On average, one rocket was fired at Israel every three hours.

Most rockets fell on the southern city of Sderot, where normal life is a thing of the past, he said. The "red alert" warning system, which gave people less than 15 seconds to seek shelter before a rocket attack, sounded daily. Why was the Council not concerned with the safety and security of Sderot's children, women and the elderly? Why was it silent? Israel faced the impossible situation and must and would protect its civilian population from rocket attacks. It was the duty of all States to ensure the right to life and safety of their people, especially from vicious acts of violence and terrorism intended to maim and kill the innocent. No Council member or country would be silent if London, Moscow, Paris or Tripoli were attacked. Israel would act in accordance with its inherent right under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter to protect and defend its people. It was deeply disturbing that some falsely equated Palestinian terrorism with Israel's actions of self-defence. A clear distinction must be made between Palestinian terrorism and Israeli defence.

Palestinian terrorists chose to directly target Israeli civilians and use their own as human shields, he said. Terrorists produced, transported and launched rocket attacks and mortars from inside densely populated Palestinian residential areas. By firing on border crossings, the terrorists cynically forced closures, hampering humanitarian aid and relief efforts. Israel chose to ensure the humanitarian welfare of the Palestinians in Gaza, even as Hamas chose to abuse those efforts. While Hamas chose to divert fuel from domestic generators for terrorist purposes, including the production of Qassam rockets, Israel chose to allow electricity, fuel and medicines into Gaza and was working closely with aid agencies on the ground to ensure that humanitarian needs were met. Since June 2007, Israel's Government had allowed more than 9,000 Palestinians to enter Israel to seek medical treatment, while Hamas had fired more than 1,700 rockets and mortars out of the Gaza Strip into Israel. Gilad Shalit was still held captive by terrorists in Gaza and his whereabouts and condition were unknown.

If terrorism ceased, life in Gaza would change, he said, adding that the Palestinians must understand that they would not profit from terrorism. Hamas was the antithesis of two States living side-by-side in peace and security and did not recognize Israel's right to exist. There was no hope in its leadership. There could be no moral equivalence between Israel's choices and that of Hamas. Israel was not only mindful of humanitarian conditions in Gaza, it was also interested in the well-being of the population living next door, with whom it wanted to work to advance the two-State vision. The international community must make it clear that the actions of Hamas were unacceptable and that continuing to choose Hamas would only lead to more suffering for both sides. Israeli security could not be sacrificed. The international community must make clear that the path of rejection, violence and terrorism would not be tolerated by the Council, and that it would not support those seeking to subvert the bilateral process and use violence to achieve their aims.

ALDO MANTOVANI (Italy), aligning himself with the statement of the European Union, said he was extremely concerned about the 1.5 million people living in extremely severe conditions in Gaza because of the Israeli closings and its stopping of fuel deliveries. The fact that those closings put at risk the regular supply to meet humanitarian needs was also of great concern. He was shocked to hear that UNRWA would not be able to continue its support to 800,000 Gaza residents.

He condemned the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory, but said that what happened in Gaza was reason for extreme concern. He called on all parties to be consistent with the spirit of Annapolis and expressed relief at the de-escalation of violence and the indication of an easing of the blockages by Israel. He hoped that that trend would be a lasting one, one that would enable all to regain the Annapolis spirit.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) said the current emergency meeting was necessary in view of the tense and worrisome situation in Gaza, stemming from a resumption of hostilities between Israel and Palestine and aggravated by the draconian coercion measures taken by Israel against the civilian population in Gaza. The international community must take urgent measures to put an end to the unacceptable blockage of Gaza. The reasons for the present crisis were not being discussed now, although it was clear that Israeli reactions were a response to rocket fire into its territory. The fact that the civilian population was victim in a war in which it was not a prime actor must be addressed.

He said international law had to be applied, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. In depriving the population of electricity and other vital services, Israel was violating the rules of international law. The blockade also impeded the efforts of international humanitarian organizations to deliver aid. He strongly urged Israel to end the blockade without delay, in order to allow international assistance and the delivery of fuel supplies to resume. He invited the Palestinian party to scrupulously observe the ceasefire. Those were the only conditions under which the parties could move towards the creation, within the framework of the Annapolis agreement, of two States, the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

JOHN SAWERS (United Kingdom) said the developments in the last few days in Gaza were alarming. He shared Israel's frustration and anger at continued rocket attacks and mortars. Israel had the right to defend itself, but it was not acceptable that it would respond to those attacks by taking action designed to cause suffering of the civilian population. He welcomed the fact that Israel was now allowing in some aid and fuel to Gaza. He called on Israel to work with all parties to reopen the border crossing into Gaza to allow basic humanitarian supplies and civilian trade to flow. The recent meeting in Annapolis gave the international community hope for the peace process and he supported the process goals for 2008. It was encouraging that bilateral meetings between Israeli and Palestinian leaders had continued.

Still, there was a very real risk that the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation would undermine the political process, he said. The cycle of violence must be broken. Rocket attacks were unacceptable. The number of casualties was unacceptable. Israel had legitimate security concerns, but it did not have the right to cut off supplies to Palestinians. Palestinian mortar attacks were also unacceptable. The actions of both sides were counterproductive. The United Kingdom provided aid and money to resolve the conflict and would continue to do so. But, that was not enough. Leadership from the Israeli and Palestinian leaders was needed.

DUMISANI KUMALO (South Africa) said that the situation in Gaza could no longer be ignored: the Security Council could not remain silent hoping the situation would change as time went by. The recently reported easing in the situation that had allowed the delivery of some fuel supplies appeared not to be guaranteed and could end at any time, leaving the people of Gaza to suffer even more. He said that the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza, under which some 1.5 million people had been left without water, electricity and basic sewage, had drawn global condemnation.

Further, UNRWA had warned that food distribution to some 860,000 Palestinians might be suspended, and ICRC had warned that hospitals had limited fuel and medicines that could not last but a couple more days. "My delegation believes that the Security Council should call on Israel to permanently lift the blockade on Gaza, including restoring the electrical supply," he said, adding that border crossings must remain open to permit the unhindered access of humanitarian supplies. The Council must do this "without delay", by adopting the current presidential statement. That would send a message to the people of Gaza, indeed to the people of the entire Middle East, that the international community cared about them and had not abandoned them.

He said that the President of the United States during his visit last week to the Middle East had called for an end "to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza that began in 1967". South Africa reiterated that the pursuit of peace must mean that neither side created conditions that would undermine confidence-building measures and that any process to find a peaceful solution should also translate into parallel progress on the ground. "The continuing occupation undermines the credibility of the peace process," he said.

He went on to say that South Africa had always condemned attacks on civilians, whether they were Palestinian or Israeli. It would again call on all elements within Israel and Palestine to cease such attacks. The firing of improvised Qassam projectiles towards Israel was unacceptable, as was the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli Army, including the "collective punishment that is being meted out against the Palestinian people in general [...] and cannot be justified on the basis of self-defence."

The international community had the duty of assisting and supporting the parties reach a settlement and also in ensuring that political progress was coupled with change for the better in the lives of Palestinians and Israelis alike. While commending the earlier regional and international efforts to drive the peace process, he said that the United Nations, and especially the Security Council, must be committed to helping the respective parties in their quest for a lasting peace. He again called on the Council to send a clear message that the collective punishment of the people living in Gaza could not continue, since it was a threat to the process

that would lead to the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing alongside the State of Israel.

VITALY CHURKIN ([Russian Federation](#)) said the Israeli measures to ensure access for fuel to the power plant in Gaza were insufficient. More was needed. In that regard, he underlined his country's condemnation of all terrorist acts, including the firing of rockets into Israeli territory. Reprisals, however, should not lead to suffering or killing of Palestinian civilians. The blockades should be ended and the Palestinian population should not be turned into hostages. The international community should help the parties to get through the crisis and to establish institutions of Palestinian statehood.

He then went on to describe his country's assistance to Palestinian civilians and said that assistance would address pressing humanitarian and economic needs in the Palestinian territories. The issues of the peace process had been at the centre of attention in Moscow negotiations between the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and Israel. The Russian Federation side had reaffirmed that all parties should refrain from all steps that could intensify tensions. Conditions for settlement of the issue were clearly set out in the Road Map, which must be implemented. Settlement of the Middle East question must be a comprehensive one, including the Lebanon and Syrian track.

MARTY NATALEGAWA ([Indonesia](#)) expressed his country's deep concern at the current deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza as a result of Israeli actions. The Palestinian people were living in truly appalling and inexcusable conditions. He condemned that unjust and inhumane collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza, which constituted a grave breach of international human rights laws. Israel must lift the fuel blockade and open the border crossings into Gaza immediately. He noted yesterday's decision by Israel to ease the blockade of Gaza for one day, but called for all crossings to be opened and all blockades to be lifted permanently. Israel must abide by its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and immediately cease all its illegal measures and practices against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

He said the burden for Palestinians had been made heavier by the continuing military incursions and operations by the Israeli occupying forces into Gaza. "Military incursions, border closings, as well as continued rocket firings into Israeli territory will not offer solutions to the crux of the problem in the region," he said. They would only perpetuate the cycle of violence and undermine efforts to create an environment conducive to the achievement of the goals within the Annapolis framework. All parties concerned, on the ground, must exercise restraint and refrain from any actions that could undermine those efforts. Such violent acts as military incursions and rocket firings must be stopped immediately. Israel must ensure unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Beyond immediate humanitarian concerns, he underlined the need to find ways to sustain Palestinian economic activity, including in Gaza, and the importance of creating circumstances that would allow for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. He reiterated his country's full support for the realization of the two-State vision as envisioned in the Road Map and the efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all relevant Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

JEAN-MAURICE RIPERT ([France](#)) said it was timely that the Council consider the Middle East question, given recent developments. It was necessary to bear in mind the prospects laid out in Annapolis to continue the peace process and to create a Palestinian State by year's end. Implementation of that goal required support of, and for, the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. They both needed to be daring and creative to find a lasting settlement. The strong signal sent during the 17 December international donor conference in Paris for a Palestinian State must lead to action. A total of \$7.7 billion to support institution building of the Palestinian State in three years was a positive step forward and all States must deliver on their pledge. Otherwise, the Palestinians would not see any improvements in their living conditions. Today, the French Foreign Minister met in Paris with the co-chairs of the Paris conference, in order to ensure the necessary political action for follow-up to the 17 December conference. The momentum in Annapolis must be maintained.

All parties must implement the first phase of the Road Map, he said. Israel must do more with respect to prisoners, the lifting of restrictions on the West Bank and the disbanding and halting of the construction of illegal settlements. The Palestinians must do more to fight terrorism. Hamas must agree to comply with Israel's right to exist and must renounce violence. The realities on the ground showed a clear increase in violence and a serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation. He condemned the current violence in all forms. Hundreds of rockets were fired into Israel. He called for a ceasefire. No State could tolerate a threat to its civilians without using its legitimate right to defend itself, but, in defending itself, the internally displaced persons must spare civilians.

The humanitarian situation was now of extreme concern, he said. He regretted Israel's decision to impose a blockade on Gaza as such measures had led to collective punishment of all civilians. He called for the immediate resumption of all supplies of fuel and the maintenance of basic services into Gaza. He called for the lifting of all obstacles to humanitarian activities. He called on both parties to meet their obligations under international law, particularly international humanitarian law. France was ready to work to adopt the text circulated by Saudi Arabia, which should be amended to take into account all recent developments of the human situation in Gaza.

JORGE URBINA ([Costa Rica](#)) said the recent circumstances in Gaza were cause for concern and sadness. The severing of supplies affected hopes and made it less likely that a quick solution could be reached to achieve peace in the region. The situation created by recent Israeli measures was unsustainable. But, it was up to the Council to take measures not only on the basis of recent reports by external sources. The Council must assess the reports of the situation provided by the United Nations own representative, including those in the field. Last Friday, the Secretary-General said the Israeli decision to close the Gaza crossing and deny access to humanitarian aid had separated the civilian population from necessary supplies. After calling on Israel to abstain from taking measures, the Secretary-General also expressed his regret over the action that affected the south of Israel. He reminded both sides of the need to comply with international humanitarian law. Under-Secretary-General Holmes also said the restrictions on Gaza were unacceptable and that the Israeli response to the rocket attacks was not proportionate. That appeal should be pure and simple.

All members of the Council must have a full view and understanding of the situation, he said. The actors involved had common, but different responsibilities. The Palestinian authorities must control terrorist activities and Israel must be called upon to adhere to its responsibilities. The Council should carefully weigh measures that could effectively contribute to a sustained improvement of the situation. The Council should today give a clear indication of its will and the need to protect the 860,000 civilians that were suffering in Gaza. It was good news that some restrictions had been lifted, thanks to international pressure. He expressed hope that the situation would soon be normalized.

RICARDO ALBERTO ARIAS ([Panama](#)) said the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, particularly during the last few days, had reached unacceptable levels and deserved the Council's urgent attention. The Council must take major measures concerning the Middle East and must do so not only during times of crisis. The reports received today about the situation in Gaza were alarming. The Israeli Government's actions brought the humanitarian situation to a catastrophic point and those actions were unacceptable. The attacks by armed Palestinian groups from Gaza against Israel did not contribute to peace either, but the Government of Israel should not seek retribution against an innocent civilian population. Israel had the right to defend itself. Nevertheless, its methods of self-defence must be measured and suitable, in accordance with the level of threat.

Israel's actions violated international humanitarian norms and law, he continued. They were not the actions of a liberal democracy that desired to be a just partner in the peace process. They only served to intensify the conflict. He took note of Israel's decision to partially lift its recent closure on Gaza. Still, that did not mean the situation had improved. The Security Council must call for an end to all acts of violence and must demand that Israel immediately lift its blockade of Gaza. That was necessary for the Middle East peace process to move forward in accordance with the expectations of the international community.

MIRJANA MLADINEAO ([Croatia](#)), associating herself with the statement on behalf of the European Union, said there had been renewed hope for peace after the Annapolis Conference. It was, therefore, disturbing to begin 2008 with a debate prompted by the recent violence and conditions on the ground in Gaza. The

recently imposed restrictions were all the more troubling because they already affected an area where four out of five people depended on aid. Moreover, the hostilities would hurt the chances for peace.

She stressed that both parties were bound to respect humanitarian law. Disproportionate action was a detriment to the peace process. She hoped to see an increasing number of crossing points opened. Stressing Israel's legitimate security concerns, she called for immediately halting all rocket and sniper attacks on Israel. She called upon both sides to act with restraint and implement the first phase of the Road Map, in the spirit of Annapolis.

ZALMAY KHALILZAD ([United States](#)) said his country shared the concerns of the international community about the very difficult situation in Gaza. However, one should not lose sight of how that situation came to be. The United States would continue to provide humanitarian aid to help meet the basic needs of the Gazans, he said, but stressed that the current situation was a direct result of Hamas policies and actions, especially the ongoing rain of rockets into southern Israel, despite a complete Israeli withdrawal in 2005.

His country expected the Government of Israel, when responding to those attacks, to take all possible steps to avoid civilian casualties and to minimize the impact on innocent civilians in Gaza. "We do not want the innocent Gazans to suffer," he said. The idea of allowing the Palestinian Authority to control the crossings should be examined. Hamas, which had violently seized power in June, was seeking to exploit the current situation, a situation of its own making. The Council should not fall into that trap.

He said the aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples for peace and security would never be realized through violence. A better future for both peoples could only be realized through negotiations and peaceful means. That was why President Bush had just completed a trip to the Middle East. Dealing with the current situation in Gaza, one must maintain focus on the long-term goal of establishing a Palestinian State that was democratic, contiguous, independent and viable.

Efforts to achieve peace must progress along four tracks, he said. Both sides needed to fulfil their commitments under the Road Map. That meant that Israelis must end settlement expansion and remove unauthorized outposts. Palestinians must confront terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure. The Palestinians needed to build their economy, and political and security institutions. On the international track, the United States appreciated the Arab Peace Initiative. Finally, the parties' bilateral negotiations were essential in establishing a peace settlement that ended the occupation that began in 1967. It was important to sustain the momentum for the two-State vision generated in Annapolis. His country remained committed to the creation of a Palestinian State, which would enhance stability in the Middle East and contribute to the security of the people of Israel.

LIU ZHENMIN ([China](#)) regretted that, just as the Palestinians and Israelis were starting negotiations on core issues of the final status of a Palestinian State, the humanitarian situation in Gaza had deteriorated. There were large numbers of casualties, including many innocent civilians. Israel's complete blockade of Gaza and the grave humanitarian situation for the 1.5 million people there were unacceptable. The international community must take immediate action to prevent the further deterioration of the situation. Israel must lift the blockade, in order to facilitate humanitarian aid. The international community must provide new humanitarian assistance for the Palestinians. While the international community had high expectations for the peace process initiated in Annapolis, the Palestinians in Gaza were experiencing more suffering in their daily life, rather than peace dividends.

While he understood Israel's security concerns, he said he was opposed to any attacks that targeted innocent civilians. Neither violence nor collective punishment would provide security for anyone. They would only aggravate the situation and lead to more confrontation. Furthermore, the two-State solution would become more remote. This year, there was new hope for peace in the Middle East. Both sides needed to be involved. The international community should intensify diplomatic efforts and ensure that international humanitarian law be implemented in the Middle East. Both sides should be urged to exercise restraint. He called on the parties concerned to proceed forward with the peace process and to reject any interference. They must build upon consensus and push ahead. The Council should stand ready at all times to provide whatever useful help it could.

JOHAN VERBEKE ([Belgium](#)) condemned the repeated rocket fire attacks from Gaza on Israel. He recognized Israel's right to self-defence, but said any Israeli response must respect the principle of proportionality. He deplored the far too large number of civilians that had been victims of uncontrolled violence. He called on both sides to exercise restraint. The humanitarian situation was extremely grave and was a direct result of increased violence. But, it would not be honest to state that the responsibility lay with one party. While it was necessary to condemn the rocket attacks, they in no way justified collective punishment of the Gaza Strip. He applauded Israel's decision to lift the blockade and said it must completely lift it, to allow in all essential supplies and allow humanitarian actors to resume their work.

The peace process had just been relaunched in Annapolis, with goals set for a two-State solution, he said. The parties to the conflict had invested in that process and its integrity must be preserved. The hope of the Israeli and Palestinian populations for peace could not be held hostage by an uncontrolled escalation of violence. Two months after the Annapolis meeting, urgent attention was needed for the situation in Gaza and south Israel. The Israeli and Palestinian leadership must effectively implement the Road Map. That required the total end of colonization and settlements. Belgium, along with European Union partners and the Quartet, would support that path. He trusted that the Arab countries would do the same.

LE LUONG MINH ([Viet Nam](#)), associating himself with the statement on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the situation in the Gaza Strip had deteriorated even more since the escalation of military operations by Israel, the occupying Power. The measures taken by Israel over the past few days, such as the closures of crossings and the cutting of fuel supplies to the power plant, had brought the situation to an appalling level. Such collective punishment measures were severely affecting the civilians in Gaza.

He said a settlement must be based not only on the right of Palestinians to set up a State of their own, but also on the security of Israel. The acts of Israel against Palestinian civilians, as well as acts targeting innocent Israeli civilians, were unacceptable. They were violations of humanitarian and human rights law and undermined the peace process, which had gained new momentum following the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis Conference. He called upon Israel to open border crossings and ensure unhindered access of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip. He called upon the international community to extend to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip the necessary humanitarian assistance.

Council President GIADALLA ETTALHI ([Libya](#)), speaking in his national capacity, said that, after the Annapolis Conference, Israeli authorities had escalated their aggression against the Palestinian people. It was regrettable that Israel's actions were not new, but rather consistent with past behaviour – ignoring international law and resorting to mass punishment. It was also regrettable that Israel's representative had insinuated that the Palestinians were punished because they had elected Hamas. In light of the situation, in which even UNWRA had said it was very concerned, the Israeli practices could not be justified by any act.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza had reached an unprecedented level, he said, with people living in darkness and much of the Strip flooded by sewage. All of that had happened because the occupying Power had decided to declare Gaza a "hostile entity", which was unprecedented. The Council must show its responsibility and urgently adopt measures to protect the civilian population in Gaza from "genocide" by the occupying authorities. The siege of Gaza must be ended immediately. The occupying Power must respect international law, and that must begin by putting an end to policies of siege and closure. He hoped a draft presidential statement on the matter would be accepted.

ABDULLATIF SALLAM ([Saudi Arabia](#)), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said war crimes were being committed against the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank by Israel, which had, despite all efforts to achieve peace, continued to commit crimes and blatantly violate international law. The occupying Power in recent days had killed 47 Palestinians, including several children. On 15 January, Israel undertook a broad-scale attack against residents in Gaza. It invaded the

area with armoured vehicles, tanks and bulldozers. Israel must calm the situation. That aggression against Gaza raised doubts about the seriousness of negotiations begun in Annapolis that were ultimately aimed at ending the occupation. He called for the immediate end of Israeli aggression, and for Israel to lift the embargo imposed against the Palestinians in Gaza. He also called on Israel to reopen the border crossing into Gaza to allow aid to enter.

The cut off of electricity and gas had caused much tragedy in Gaza, to the point that even hospitals and clinics were incapable of providing basic support and services, he said. He called on the Security Council to shoulder its legal, political and humanitarian responsibilities to end the aggression that clearly violated basic human rights. He also called for an international inquiry into Israel's crimes of aggression in Gaza, and to put an end to those crimes that had clearly violated international humanitarian law. He called for prompt action from the Quartet concerning its responsibilities in Gaza and the West Bank. The Council must bring about a peaceful, comprehensive settlement based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 1397 (2002) that spelled out the principle of land for peace, and on the Madrid initiative. All parties must work to create an independent, viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

MAGED ABDEL AZIZ (Egypt), aligning himself with the statements of the Arab Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said his country opposed the brutal punitive measures imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people in a blatant breach of international law and international humanitarian law. It called on the Council and the entire international community to take all necessary actions to end the policies of closure and siege in order to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people, without distinctions between the West Bank or Gaza, as the Palestinians were one people. President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak had called Israel's Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence to ask for the immediate cessation of punitive measures. Egypt had also intensified, at the highest levels, contacts with the Quartet and with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah.

While fully rejecting the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, he stressed the importance for the Israeli side to respect international law and its obligations as an occupying Power, according to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Despite Egypt's success in ensuring the resumption of electricity to northern Gaza and the start of providing fuel to the Strip and its continued commitment to provide electricity to southern Gaza areas, the Council had to fulfil its responsibility in lifting the siege, opening all crossings to humanitarian assistance, and preventing Israel from violating the rights of the Palestinian people.

RODRIGO MALMERCA DIAZ (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the members of the Movement condemned the recent military assaults by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip. The violent military escalation by Israel constituted a grave breach of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, fuelled the cycle of violence and threatened international peace and security, as well as the fragile peace process between the two sides. Israel, the occupying Power, had intensified its closure of the Occupied Palestinian Territory by hermetically sealing all border crossings, preventing even the delivery of food supplies to the population since 18 January. Israel had cut off fuel to the main power plant on 20 January. Such illegal measures of collective punishment threatened to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and were hastening the deterioration of the situation on the ground.

He said Israel should be called upon to lift the closures and allow for the opening of crossings to permit the access, at the very minimum, of necessary food and medical supplies. Immediate action must be undertaken to ensure the entry of essential supplies and the restoration of fuel to the Gaza Strip. The Non-Aligned Movement called upon the international community, especially the Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and to urge Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease its violations and to comply with its obligations under international law. The group expressed its solidarity with the Palestinian people and reaffirmed its principle position calling, among other things, for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab lands occupied since 1967 and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

SANJA STILIC (Slovenia), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that her delegation was deeply concerned about the recent violence afflicting Gaza and communities in southern Israel. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the European Union called for an immediate end to all acts of violence, including the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory and all activities that contravened international law and endangered civilians.

The European Union reiterated its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and called for the continuous provision of essential services, including fuel and power supplies. "The European Union reiterates its call on all parties for unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza and to work urgently for the opening of crossings for goods and people," she added. At the same time, she welcomed the start of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials on all outstanding issues, including all final status issues, towards concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008, as agreed two months ago in Annapolis.

She reaffirmed that this was "a crucial opportunity" for regional and international partners to effectively support a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In that context, the European Union called for "a continued, broad and constructive involvement" by Arab partners, building on the Arab Peace Initiative. It also urged the parties to implement their Road Map obligations in parallel to their negotiations.

The goal remained the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza that would unite all Palestinians, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours, she asserted, adding that, in that context, the European Union was concerned about recent settlement activity – "a major obstacle to peace". She reiterated that the Road Map was unambiguous on that matter.

Finally, she said that the European Union would remain actively involved with all parties to keep the negotiations on track, and to that end had laid out an action strategy – "State building for peace in the Middle East" – which covered the broad range of its assistance activities. She also welcomed the outcome of the recent international donors conference, at which some \$7.4 billion had been pledged towards assistance for the Palestinian people. She called on all donors to deliver on those pledges to build a future Palestinian State, in accordance with the Reform and Development Plan presented by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

FARUKH AMIL (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that, in the wake of high hopes for peace rekindled by the Annapolis Conference, one was faced, once again, with the spiralling violence and a further deterioration of an already fragile humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The gravity of the situation had also necessitated the convening of an emergency session of the Human Rights Council. The closure by Israel of the crossing points, cutting off delivery of humanitarian assistance, the fuel and electricity supplies, and other essential medical and relief items, was entirely unacceptable. Nothing could justify that kind of behaviour.

He said the escalation by Israel, coming on the heels of its decision, right after Annapolis, to press ahead with construction of new settlements and the unabated construction of the illegal separation wall, was a serious blow to confidence-building and good faith. The impunity enjoyed by Israel was a major factor in inciting desperate reaction and the cycle of violence that had bedeviled the peace efforts. In order to ameliorate the situation in the short-term and ensure success in the long-term, Israel must immediately stop militia campaigns and end all policies and actions that sought to change the realities on the ground. There must be immediate and unfettered provisions of adequate humanitarian assistance and enhanced economic and social support from the international community. Efforts for reviving intra-Palestinian unity were also necessary.

The root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict was the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, with, as a direct consequence, human rights violations and recurring humanitarian crises, he said. The Organization of the Islamic Conference called for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, which required complete withdrawal from occupied territories, the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and sovereignty over their independent and viable State of Palestine. In order to achieve a comprehensive peace, it was necessary to address all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Syria and Lebanon tracks. A just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine would have a positive impact on regional and international peace and security.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon), aligning himself with the statement on behalf of the Arab Group, named some of the children killed by Israel in the Gaza Strip during the last three days and said it was "just a sample" of the victims of the punishment imposed by Israel on the civilians of the Gaza Strip. Israel strangled Gaza,

prohibiting the delivery of food and energy, and bringing it to the edge of a human catastrophe. That could not be accepted by the human conscience. Even those killed were not saved from punishment, as there was not even the cement necessary to build their tombs.

He said the Israeli policies constituted flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention that explicitly forbade collective punishment. Israel had the right to self-defence, established by international norms and conventions, but that right could not be taken as a pretext to wage a war against innocent civilians and did not allow the disproportionate use of force. Some had said that Israel had ended its occupation of the Gaza Strip. It had indeed withdrawn its forces, but had kept its stranglehold on the arteries of life. Gaza could be described as the largest prison of the world.

More than two thirds of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip were refugees who had no clear address in their own lands except in the refugee camps, he said. All those addresses were targeted by Israel. The crime continued and escalated. The duty of the international community was to save the Gaza Strip immediately from all forms of collective punishment. That was necessary to save the hope for a just and comprehensive peace.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said the issue of Gaza had been admitted to the intensive care unit. The Israeli escalation of aggression in Gaza required the Council's urgent attention. It was crucial to reinstate the international community's trust and the rule of law. The Council must protect the Palestinians from the irresponsible Israeli war machine. Israel had violated international law. Its occupation gave it free reign to commit war crimes against unarmed Palestinians and to continue its policy of collective siege, closing crossing points and cutting off electricity, food, fuel and medicine. Israel's claim that it had withdrawn from Gaza was a blatant forgery. It controlled the international border and border crossing points, as well as the flow of food, water, medicine and electricity. Israel had transformed Gaza into a sealed off ghetto and the West Bank into a besieged area. Israel would not have dared commit such inhuman violations, nor continued its defiance of international public opinion, had it not been for the huge vacuum of commitment by influential countries to establish a comprehensive peace process. He pointed to the absence of active pressure on Israel to abide by its legal obligations, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Council must take urgent measures to end Israel's illegal practices, he said. But, the Council had not done so and, because of that, Israel had insisted on refusing to implement the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion to halt construction of the separation wall and demolish the areas already built, as well as illegal settlements in the West Bank. Since 2007, Israel had killed 4,437 Palestinians, including hundreds of minors. Israel was a terrorist country and was eight times more violent than the Palestinian resistance. The Palestinian firing of rockets was essentially a reaction to Israel's assassination of Palestinians in Gaza.

It was not surprising that former United States President Jimmy Carter and Archbishop Desmond Tutu described Israel as a racist State, he continued. The urgent call for relief must be a loud alarm heard clearly by the Council. The fact that United Nations agencies and hundreds of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations had rushed to call for urgent action to save the population in Gaza meant that something was wrong with international moral and political decision-making. The Council must strongly intervene to make clear to Israeli policymakers that they were not above the law. The Council must urgently take immediate steps to ensure that Israel abided by its international legal obligations dating back to 1949.

MOHAMMED AL-ALLAF (Jordan) said Gaza was facing a very difficult humanitarian emergency situation, which required the international community to intervene immediately. Any delay would have an impact on the peace process. Jordan was very concerned at the lack of basic needs in Gaza and rejected all policies of collective punishment. In response to the situation, the King of Jordan had issued instructions to send an immediate relief convoy aimed at ameliorating the suffering of the Palestinian people. The Israeli Government must facilitate the passage of Jordanian assistance.

He said that sending aid was just an immediate humanitarian response. The real response was the one to be made by the Council. He called on the Council to immediately intervene to end the crisis and create the conditions to continue with the peace option of Annapolis. He called for "nothing short" of immediately stopping military actions and opening all crossings. Israel must continue to provide water, energy and fuel. The real challenge was to contain the situation, and the final goal was to bring about an independent, contiguous, viable Palestinian State.

YAHYA AL MAHMASANI, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States, said the dangerous and deteriorating situation in Gaza required that the Council take immediate action to put an end to Israeli aggression. Israel must reopen border crossings to allow in humanitarian aid and guarantee the rights and protection of civilians in accordance with international law. He called on the Council to conduct an international investigation into the inhuman crimes committed by Israel in Gaza and the Occupied Territories and to issue an urgent call to the international community to support and aid the Palestinians. The Council must call Israel's decision to impose a blockade illegitimate.

He expressed deep concern over the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in the area. The Palestinian economy was at the point of complete collapse, because of Israeli practices. Many Palestinian families were struggling just to survive. Infrastructure, education and health services were inadequate. Palestinians were experiencing increasing social and economic hardship. The forceful seizure and razing of land, the confiscation of homes, harsh limits on transportation and frequent closures were evidence that Israel was ignoring all international humanitarian norms and values. Aid could not reach people in need due to the closures, which could lead to an unprecedented humanitarian disaster in the region that would have severe consequences and would threaten the Annapolis process. Israel's occupation was the main reason for the conflict. There must be a solution based on international law and relevant Council resolutions.

Taking the floor for the second time, Mr. COHEN (Israel) said the Hamas terrorist organization was responsible for the current situation. Hamas, and other terrorist organizations, were supported by States in the region, such as Syria, in violation of international law and Council resolutions. It was the height of hypocrisy for Syria to condemn Israel for merely defending itself against the Hamas terrorists Syria supported. Israel urged all States to end their support of terrorism.

He said it was regrettable that one Council member had utilized the term "genocide", something which was highly insensitive to genocide survivors all over the world. He called on delegates to be more careful in their word use. It was astonishing, he said, but not surprising, that some delegations were able to refer to the situation in the Gaza Strip without any understanding of the true causes of the situation, as evidenced by the absence of the word Hamas in their statements. Israel was committed to facilitating the necessary humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. The current situation Israel faced was the same challenge every democracy faced when fighting terrorism.

Taking the floor a second time, BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said Israel's representative had not understood that the occupation and the fact that Israel was denying the Palestinians their basic and inherent rights was a story that was well-known by the international community. Israeli non-governmental organizations had begun to contribute to effectively revealing Israel's inhuman practices against Palestinians. The Palestinians had nothing more than stones to counter Israeli aggression. Israeli State terrorism began in 1948 and had since resulted in the killing of thousands of civilians, including children, in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine.

Peace would not prevail in the Middle East until Israel understood that peace was in everyone's interest, including its own, he said. The Arab States had not invited millions of Palestinian refugees to reside in their countries. Palestinians residing in hundreds of camps in Arab countries and inside Palestine had been forcefully displaced from their homelands. They would like to return today and on the basis of Council resolution 194, which spelled out the right of return to a homeland. That homeland was Palestine. It was on the map. Israel would not keep the Council nor the international community from seeing the truth. All States must adhere to international law. Israel was no exception.

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