

Division for Palestinian Rights

Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine

**Monthly media monitoring review
May 2009**

Monthly highlights

- UN Secretary-General transmits to Security Council a summary of the report of the Gaza Board of Inquiry ([5 May](#))
- UN international meeting focusing on action by parliamentarians for Israeli-Palestinian peace held in Nicosia ([6 - 7 May](#))
- The Pope arrives in the region for a week-long trip, to include Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory ([8 May](#))
- Security Council discusses Middle East situation, including Palestinian question, adopts Presidential Statement ([11 May](#))
- Fatah and Hamas hold new round of reconciliation talks ([16 May](#))
- US President Obama meets Prime Minister Netanyahu ([18 May](#)) , President Abbas ([28 May](#)) , stresses two-State solution, Road Map obligations, halt in settlement activities.
- PA President Abbas swears in new Government. ([19 May](#))
- UN Palestinian Rights Committee expresses utmost concern over house demolitions, settlement activities in East Jerusalem. ([19 May](#))
- Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu rejects US calls for a freeze on settlements. ([24 May](#))

1

Israeli Air Force aircraft bombed two smuggling tunnels along Egypt's border with the Gaza Strip, after a Qassam rocket from Gaza had hit Israel's western Negev region the previous day. No injuries or damage were reported in the strike. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces detained three Palestinian youths from the town of Al-Zababdeh, south of Jenin, during a raid. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli authorities announced that Palestinians working in Israel would be able to enter only through checkpoints equipped with the new computerized system. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 74,000 Palestinians work in Israel, about three quarters of whom are from the West Bank. Under the new system, limits and terms of permits for many Palestinians will change and, for some who arrive at checkpoints later than the time stamped on their permits, access may be revoked for a week or even permanently. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli settlers from "Gila", east of Qalqilya, attacked a 20-year-old Palestinian when he was working on his land. He sustained bruises and burns to the face. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a new [report](#) that some 1,500 demolition orders were currently pending in East Jerusalem and thousands more homes were at risk. The report stated that Israeli zoning restrictions made it difficult for Palestinians to build legally. After annexing East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel had expropriated more than one third of the land and built homes for 195,000 settlers there. But only 13 per cent of East Jerusalem had been zoned for Palestinian construction. With most of that area already built up and the housing shortage getting worse, Palestinians had been building without permits.

Some 28 per cent of Palestinian homes had been built in violation of the zoning laws, meaning 60,000 people, or one fourth of the Arab population of Jerusalem, were potentially at risk of losing their homes, according to the report. (*AP, www.ochaopt.org*)

A spokesman for the Human Rights Council said UN investigators headed by Richard Goldstone would travel to the Gaza Strip and Israel next week to investigate possible human rights abuses during Israel's recent offensive. (*Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA)*)

Two Palestinians were lightly injured following confrontations with settlers near "Havat Gilad." (*Haaretz*)

An Israeli settler from "Efrat" driving a bulldozer destroyed at least 10 dunums of agricultural land near the town of Al-Khadr. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

2

An Israeli air strike on smuggling tunnels on the Gaza-Egypt border killed two Palestinians, a medical official said. The strike came hours after Gaza militants had fired two mortar shells at southern Israel, causing no damage. The Popular Resistance Committees group claimed it had fired three mortar rounds at an Israeli special forces patrol. (*AFP, AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces opened fire at Gaza farmers near the security fence in the Faraheen area east of Khan Yunis, the witnesses said. According to security sources, the IDF also fired a machine gun from the border east of the town of Jabalya in the northern Gaza Strip. There were no casualties in the two shooting incidents.

Meanwhile, three Israeli bulldozers, backed by two tanks, rolled for a few hundreds of metres into Beit Lahia in northern Gaza. Residents said the bulldozers had levelled some groves. (*DPA*)

Israeli forces detained a 50-year-old father and his 28-year-old son from the town of Sa'ir, north of Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

3

Israeli soldiers shot at, wounded and then arrested a Palestinian after he had approached a border fence between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel, an Israeli military spokesperson said. (*AFP*)

At least one Palestinian was injured after Israeli artillery shelled an open area east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Witnesses said fighting had erupted in the village of Safa between Palestinians and settlers from nearby "Bat Ayin," where an Israeli youth had been killed last month. The Israeli army had intervened to stop the fighting, the witnesses said, adding that two Palestinians among a group throwing rocks at soldiers and settlers had been wounded by gunfire. Four settlers, including two off-duty Israeli soldiers, were arrested. (*AFP, Haaretz*)

Three Palestinian boys were injured when ordnance left by Israeli forces exploded in Gaza City. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces apprehended two Palestinian youths during a raid in the city of Beit Sahour, east of Bethlehem. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon told *Bloomberg*: "The Government of Israel, because of our democratic tradition and because of the continuity principle, is going to abide by all previous commitments the former Government took, including the acceptance of the Road Map to peace, which will lead to a two-State solution." (*Haaretz*)

PA President Mahmoud Abbas told reporters after a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II: "We plan to visit Cairo and other Arab countries before our 28 May visit to Washington, where we are going to have talks with the US Administration on all political issues and set forth conditions for future negotiations. ... Our conditions and vision are part of the two-State solution, which also involves halting settlement building and the policy of house demolitions. Our demands are also shared by the Americans as a pre-requisite for resuming dialogue with the Israelis." (*DPA*)

It was announced that Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai had decided to approve recommendations by a special committee within the Interior Ministry to expand the "Ma'aleh Adumim" settlement by 12,000 dunums (12 million square metres). Expansion would include 6,000 housing units to be built between the "Ma'ale Adumim" and "Qedar" settlements. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

4

Israeli troops seized 10 Palestinians during raids in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. (*IMEMC*)

Israeli troops set fire to wheat and barley fields in Juhor Al-Dik in the southern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Dozens of settlers chopped down Palestinian-owned olive and fig trees in the village of Sinjil, north of Ramallah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli army fired artillery shells at agricultural land east of Gaza City, moderately wounding a Palestinian farmer. (*IMEMC*)

In Jerusalem, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed via satellite the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) 2009 policy conference, stating in a short speech his desire to pursue Middle East peace talks. "Next week, I'll be visiting Egypt with President Mubarak and I plan to discuss both matters with him—cooperation between the Arab world and cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians." He added, "We seek normalization of economic ties, diplomatic ties. We want peace with the Arab world, but we also want peace with the Palestinians. That peace eluded us for more than 30 years. Six successive prime ministers of Israel and two American presidents have not succeeded in achieving this peace ... I believe it's possible to achieve, but I think it requires a fresh approach." He added that the new approach he suggested was "pursuing a triple track towards peace between Israel and Palestinians, a political track, a security track and [an] economic track. The [political] track means that we resume peace negotiations without any delay, the sooner the better, without any preconditions." He said the security track would be coordinated with the Jordanians and the Palestinian Authority, something he believed could be advance in a joint effort. (*Haaretz, www.aipac.org*)

Israel's President Shimon Peres also [spoke](#) to the AIPAC conference via satellite, saying Israel was open to peace with all Arab States, with all Arab people. He said it was time for change but it was clear that peace might require painful compromises and difficult concessions. Compromises required two conditions. First, peace must be real, lasting, mutually respected. "We have to guarantee that our children — actually, all children — will be free from war." And secondly, peace should enable Israel to protect its people. The same was true for the future of the Palestinian people, who had the right to govern themselves. "We don't want to be their masters. They have the right to invest their resources, to direct aid to civil high tech, not military rockets — to books, not bombs — to their people, so their people can be both free and prosperous, free from fear, free from hunger", he said, adding, "In my judgment, today there is a chance for real peace". The Arab Peace Initiative was a serious U-turn, according to him, but Israel was not a partner to the wording of the initiative and did not have to agree to every word. Nevertheless, Israel respected the profound change and hoped it would be translated into real action, the sooner the better. (www.aipac.org)

Speaking in Rome, Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman promised to push for peace agreements with the Palestinian Authority and the Arab countries, but stopped short of endorsing a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He said: "This Government's goal is not to produce slogans or make pompous declarations, but to reach concrete results." (*Financial Times*)

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Hamas' Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said that Hamas fighters would stop firing rockets at Israel for now and reach out in a limited way to US President Barack Obama and others in the West. He also said that the movement was seeking a State only in the areas Israel had won in 1967. He repeated, however, that he would not recognize Israel, saying to fellow Arab leaders, "There is only one enemy in the region and that is Israel." But he urged outsiders to ignore the Hamas charter, saying it was 20 years old, adding "We are shaped by our experiences." (*The New York Times*)

A report released by Physicians for Human Rights - Israel (PHR-I) stated that Israel's intelligence services were increasingly pressuring Palestinian patients from Gaza to spy and inform on other Palestinians if they wanted to enter Israel for medical treatment. Data and 30 testimonies collected by the organization and presented at the UN Committee against Torture session in Geneva, indicated a rise in the number of Palestinian patients interrogated and forced to provide information, usually at the Erez border crossing into Israel. According to PHR-I, Israel's General Security Service (GSS) had interrogated minors, photographed patients against their will and harassed, accused, cursed and intimidated them during interrogations. Patients that had not cooperated had been returned to Gaza without receiving permits to exit for medical treatment, the report stated. Between January 2008 and March 2009, at least 438 patients had been summoned for GSS interrogations at the Erez crossing as a precondition for a review of their applications to access medical treatment outside the Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Funds from the Government of Italy to be used as social allowances for Gaza families were distributed under the European Union's PEGASE mechanism, following months of physical cash shortage in the Gaza Strip as Israeli authorities continued to refuse the regular shipment of cash for the financial system. Families each received \$200, to be paid four times a year to the most disadvantaged. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A Spanish judge said he would continue to investigate seven current and former Israeli officials concerning an air force bombing in Gaza in 2002 that had killed a suspected Hamas militant and 14 civilians, including nine children. Prosecutors last month urged Judge Fernando Andreu of Spain's National Court to suspend the inquiry on the grounds that Israel was still investigating the attack. But Judge Andreu rejected the request, saying he had found no evidence of such an investigation in Israel. Judge Andreu first agreed to open the case in January at the request of Palestinian relatives of victims of the attack. He said he was acting in accordance with Spain's observance of the principle of universal jurisdiction, which held that grave crimes such as genocide, terrorism or torture could be prosecuted in the country even if alleged to have been committed elsewhere. He said that the 2002 bombing in densely populated Gaza City might constitute a crime against humanity. (*AP*)

The mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, outlined a plan to give more building permits to Palestinian residents. Mr. Barkat said in a statement that he had devised what he called the city's first "master plan" in 50 years to allow the construction of some 23,550 housing units in East Jerusalem by 2030. Mr. Barkat's Palestinian-appointed counterpart, Jerusalem Governor Adnan al-Husseini, who has no real powers in the Israeli-controlled municipality, rejected the plan as insufficient to meet minimal housing needs. "This will not solve the problems for Palestinians in Jerusalem. It will cement Israel's grip on the city and will force more [Palestinian] people out", Mr. Hussein said. (*Haaretz, Reuters*)

The Jerusalem municipality handed demolition orders to Palestinian families in and around the Old City, saying the homes had been built without permits. (*IMEMC*)

The team of investigators tasked by the Human Rights Council with examining alleged human rights abuses and violations of international law during the recent conflict in Gaza began a week-long meeting in Geneva to prepare for a fact-finding mission to the region. The four-person team, led by the former prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, Richard Goldstone of South Africa, will hold discussions this week with representatives of Israel and Palestine, as well as other relevant Member States, civil society and UN agencies. (*UN News Centre*)

5

The Israeli military seized five Palestinians during raids in and around Hebron and Nablus. (*IMEMC*)

All three Gaza crossing points would be open for commercial and humanitarian deliveries for the second time this week, said crossings official Raed Fattouh. He said that Kerem Shalom was expected to allow the passage of 125 trucks with humanitarian aid and goods for the commercial and agricultural sectors. He added that the Gazan side had been told that the Karni crossing would open for a few hours to allow 45 trucks carrying grain and fodder through. Nahal Oz was also expected

to be open for the shipment of an unknown quantity of industrial diesel fuel and cooking gas. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Speaking to *Israel Radio* in Arabic, PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat rejected Prime Minister Netanyahu's statements in an address to AIPAC, suggesting that Mr. Netanyahu should be asked whether he would be willing to begin negotiations on Jerusalem, Palestine refugees and borders from the point at which the talks ended.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said that Mr. Netanyahu was playing with words and trying to mislead the world in order to continue creating facts on the ground by building settlements. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan and President Mubarak, meeting in Cairo, underlined the need for effective international action to create the appropriate atmosphere for launching serious Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in line with the two-State solution as soon as possible. (*The Jordan Times*)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair said that the Obama Administration and international negotiators were drafting a new strategy for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and were expected to unveil it within six weeks. "We're about to get a new framework", Mr. Blair said, adding, "I can only speculate right now about what that framework is going to be. The reason I say people should be more hopeful is that this is a framework that is being worked on at the highest level in the American administration [and] in the rest of the international community."

He said that after President Barack Obama had met with the Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian leaders, the Quartet was to convene in Washington to discuss and present the new strategy. (*AP*)

Since the axe-murder early last month of 13-year-old Shlomo Nativ in the West Bank settlement of "Bat Ayin", many settlers had begun to climb to the hilltop known as "Mukhtar Hill", holding Torah sessions, lectures and meetings with the intention of turning the location into an outpost. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli military courts announced longer prison terms for three Hamas lawmakers and added time to the sentence of former Palestinian Legislative Committee Speaker Abdel-Aziz Dweik. Before a military judge, the sentences of Jerusalem governorate lawmaker Muhammad Abu Teir and Hebron governorate lawmaker Nayef Arjoub were increased from three and a half to four years with no further charges against them. Bethlehem governorate lawmaker Mahmoud Al-Khatib's term was increased to three and a half years, up from three years. There were currently 40 Hamas lawmakers and ministers in prison. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The United Nations Committee asked Israel to grant the International Committee of the Red Cross access to a secret detention facility where torture was allegedly being practised. "Allegations of torture, ill-treatment and poor detention conditions in this facility have been reported to the Committee", the Committee stated in a document prepared for a hearing held on Israel's record on torture. The Committee stated that it had received reports alleging that Palestinian detainees had been "subjected by Israeli security officials to acts in violation" of the Convention against Torture, including beatings, sleep deprivation and sharp twisting of the head. The Committee also asked Israel to explain a law allowing for Palestinian detainees, including children from the age of 12, to be held for a period of up to eight days before being brought before a judge. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights while countering terrorism, some 700 Palestinian minors were arrested in 2006, with 25 held on "administrative detention" orders. Solitary confinement was also used to get confessions from minors and as a punishment, said the Rapporteur. The Committee was scheduled to publish a report on the hearing on 15 May. (*AFP*)

At a [press conference](#) at UN Headquarters in New York, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that he had transmitted to the President of the Security Council a summary of the report of the Board of Inquiry regarding incidents affecting United Nations personnel, premises and operations during the recent conflict in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. He highlighted the independent nature of the Board, emphasizing that it was not a judicial body or court of law. It did not make legal findings and did not consider questions of legal liability. Mr. Ban said the report was an internal document that contained information shared with the Board in strict. It also contained information whose disclosure could prejudice the security or proper conduct of the UN's operations. For that reason, the Secretariat was releasing a summary of the report for the purposes of sharing its findings with the Security Council and other bodies. He said that the Government of Israel had reservations and objections to elements of the summary. At the same time he was pleased that the Israeli Government had agreed to meet United Nations officials to address some of the Board's recommendations, in so far as they related to Israel. The Israeli Government was also eager to improve existing coordination mechanisms. The report reflected the plight of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, the Secretary-General said, adding that it be kept in mind that Israeli civilians in southern Israel had faced and continued to face indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and other militant groups. The report indicated that there had been no progress on the critical elements that would secure long-term peace for the people of the region. Mr. Ban stated that there was a need for a durable ceasefire which included an end to arms smuggling, the opening of the crossings, recovery and reconstruction in Gaza, and steps toward Palestinian reconciliation. More importantly, there was a need to give new momentum to the direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and the international community must get engaged. He referred to US President Obama's forthcoming meetings with Israeli President Peres, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Abbas. He concluded by commending Russia for convening a special meeting on the Middle East in the Security Council on 11 May; he hoped that it would be an opportunity for the international community to reinvigorate the process. (*UN press release SG/SM/12224*)

6

Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian at the entrance to the Tomb of the Patriarchs [Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi] in Hebron. According to an initial investigation, border police troops stationed in the area opened fire on the man during an arrest procedure when he refused to heed their orders to stop. (*Haaretz*)

In a statement, the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, said that it had fired four mortar shells at an Israeli infantry unit which had entered the area of Wadi Abu Qatron, east of Al-Bureij [refugee] camp in the central Gaza Strip, contradicting *Israeli Army Radio*, which reported that the shells had landed across the border in Israeli territory. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Four Palestinians were injured in two Israeli air strikes on tunnels on the Egypt-Gaza border. Director of Ambulance and Emergency Services Mu'awiyah Hassanain said injuries ranged between slight and moderate. Earlier, Israel had stated that a home-made projectile launched from the Gaza Strip had landed near the beach at the Israeli city of Ashkelon. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

At a news conference with visiting King Abdullah II of Jordan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that a two-State solution was the only path to peace in the Middle East and urged the new Israeli Government to move quickly to begin talks with the Palestinians. Ms. Merkel was speaking ahead of a visit to Berlin the following day by Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman. She described the coming months as "decisive" and said progress between Israel and the Palestinians was essential for the success of Western efforts to reach a deal with Iran over its nuclear programme. King Abdullah II said the goal was to get Israel and the Palestinians to sit down at the negotiating table in the coming months. (*Haaretz*)

PA President Abbas said that Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and his Government would stay on in their posts with a "few new additions". Speaking after a meeting with President Mubarak, President Abbas said that that decision would not interfere with the planned national dialogue set to take place in Cairo on 16 May. Mr. Abbas said his meeting with President Mubarak had included coordinating positions vis-à-vis the Israeli Government and further peace talks. "We discussed what we are going to say to the Israeli Government, especially about the Road Map and efforts by the Israeli and Palestinian sides," he said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a statement, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Office said that he would head a high-level committee that would work on developing the Palestinian economy and improving the quality of life in the West Bank. The committee would include Israel's Finance and Defence Ministers and would soon begin work on several development projects in the West Bank. The official spokesman of the PA Presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, commented by saying, "Without moving on the political track ... it will not lead to peace or solutions ... on the contrary, it will make things worse." (*AP*)

At UN Headquarters, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Israeli President Shimon Peres discussed the report of the United Nations Board of Inquiry into incidents affecting the world body's personnel, premises and operations during the recent conflict in Gaza, UN spokesperson Michele Montas said. (*UN News Centre*)

The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, opened in Nicosia. The theme of this two-day event is "Action by European, Arab and other parliamentarians and their umbrella organizations for Israeli-Palestinian peace". The objective of the organizers is to emphasize the important role played by national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations in shaping public opinion, formulating policy guidelines and upholding international legitimacy in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. It will discuss ways in which lawmakers and their organizations can be instrumental in helping the parties resume and strengthen the political dialogue and in promoting and applying the principles of international law to efforts aimed at resolving the conflict. Participants will assess the current situation on the ground and modalities for peace, discuss prospects to mobilizing parliamentary action in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace and encourage coordination of the efforts undertaken by parliamentarians and their national, regional and international organizations. Opening statements were made by George Iacovou, Presidential Commissioner and representative of the President of the Republic of Cyprus; Marios Garoyian, President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus; Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Elisavet Papadimitriou, Vice-President of the Hellenic Parliament and Vice-President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; and Abdullah Abdullah, Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, representative of Palestine. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General, delivered a [message](#) to the meeting from the UN Secretary-

Israeli forces killed a 23-year-old Palestinian from Beit Hanoun. (Wafa)

A 35-year-old Palestinian woman was injured by Israeli fire while she was working on her farmland south of Rafah. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces arrested 16 Palestinians from Ramallah and Bethlehem. (Wafa)

Israeli troops detained two Palestinians at a military checkpoint near Jenin. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli warships surrounded and seized a fishing boat, detaining four [Palestinian] fishermen on the coast near Gaza City. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli soldiers had been reportedly hit with a number of mortar shells and anti-tank projectiles near the southern Israeli-Gaza border, *Israel Radio* said. No damage or injuries were reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

Arab Foreign Ministers were meeting in Cairo to formulate a united approach on the Middle East peace process. The Ministers were also to discuss a report on alleged crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip last January. A spokesman for the Arab League said that the Arab States should emerge from the meeting in Cairo with a clear vision of how to deal with the new Israeli Government, adding, "Some of the Israeli policies should be confronted firmly". The Arab Foreign Ministers would also decide whether to send their report on alleged Israeli crimes in Gaza to the International Criminal Court. (BBC)

In a statement to the media before their meeting in Berlin, Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier urged his Israeli counterpart, Avigdor Liberman, to adopt a two-State plan as the basis for peace in the Middle East and the "sole path to peace and security". At an earlier meeting with members of the German parliamentary foreign affairs committee, Mr. Liberman refused to commit to a two-State approach under which the Palestinian Territories would achieve statehood. He also spoke about a "peace industry", which to date had achieved little but waste of money. (DPA)

Quartet envoy Tony Blair visited the West Bank where he met with Bethlehem Governor Salah Ta'mari and local security chief A'mran Abu Hadeed at the Governor's office. He discussed the forthcoming framework for peacemaking based on the two-State solution. He said that the new Israeli Government was still formulating its policy vis-à-vis the peace process. He reiterated support for a programme of change in the day-to-day lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, [citing] Bethlehem as an example of success for the newly redeployed Palestinian security forces. He noted that Bethlehem's tourism-based economy was also slowly rebounding from collapse during the second intifada. Governor Ta'mari presented Mr. Blair with details about Bethlehem's suffering from the Israeli occupation, the wall and the expansion of the settlements. Mr. Blair said, "The Palestinians have lost all confidence in the peace process due to the Israeli actions", adding, "The international community is demanded to restore Palestinians' to show that it is serious in the peace process." (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian Legislative Council member Essa Qaraqie said that the PA had scrapped plans to host Pope Benedict XVI next week on a stage near the West Bank separation wall. Palestinians had hoped that receiving the Pope next to the towering cement wall and military watchtower inside the Aida refugee camp would highlight their suffering under Israeli occupation. He said the location had been changed to a United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school after Israeli military officials forbade them to erect the stage near the barrier. The Pope's convoy would, however, still pass close to the barrier. (Haaretz)

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs issued a [report](#) entitled "Urban contraction and rural fragmentation of Bethlehem governorate", which examined how Israeli measures had impacted Palestinian livelihoods, development and residential expansion in the area. Only 13 per cent out of 660 sq. kilometres of Bethlehem land was available for Palestinian use, much of which was fragmented. It was stated in the report that 20 per cent of the remaining land was an Israeli-controlled "nature reserve". While the West Bank barrier cut Bethlehem off from its hinterland, it also cut through Bethlehem's western edges, blocking off grazing and agricultural land. As a result, Bethlehem's potential for residential and industrial expansion and development had been reduced, as well as its access to natural resources. However, actions like freezing construction of the barrier inside the West Bank and opening closed military areas and nature reserves for Palestinian development could restore parts of the lost space to the governorate. (BBC, [www.ochaopt.org](#))

According to the Secretary-General of the Palestine Charity Union in Austria, Hani Ibrahim, the Hope Convoy, which had left Italy for the Egyptian port of Alexandria on 4 May, was bound for the Gaza Strip next week. The European anti-siege convoy was bringing a variety of medical supplies, including 12 ambulances and 25 copies of special computer software to help the blind. Volunteers and members of parliament were also joining the convoy. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hundreds of Palestine refugees gathered in the UNRWA centres at refugee camps across the Gaza Strip, demanding an improvement in their living situation following the war and two years of siege. The joint action was organized by the Palestine People's Party (PPP), which printed banners demanding that emergency aid be doubled and delivered to Gazans, including the unemployed and those needing urgent medical attention. PPP Central Committee member Raed Abu Zaid spoke to crowds at the Deir El-Balah camp, after which protesters handed a list of their demands to the office of John Ging, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

An Israeli human rights group, Yesh Din (Volunteers for Human Rights), said Israel was expanding settlements in the West Bank at the fastest rate since 2003. The construction had reportedly been sped up since Prime Minister Netanyahu took office in March. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Security Council failed to agree on the procedures for a debate on the report of the Gaza Board of Inquiry. Council President Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, said Council members had discussed "the modality of possible handling by the Security Council of the summary [of the report of the Board of Inquiry]". "We have not reached an agreement on the subject", he told reporters, adding that he would discuss further "if and how" the Council should take up the summary. (DPA)

The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace [concluded](#) in Nicosia with a firm endorsement of the special role of national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations in advancing the faltering peace process. A statement issued by the meeting's organizers, capping two days of deliberations, press conferences and consultations, encouraged parliamentarians to develop closer cooperation among themselves, with Israeli and Palestinian lawmakers, and with the United Nations and the Committee, with a view to supporting a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region, including a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. In the second plenary, held earlier during the day, entitled "Identifying the most efficient ways in which parliamentarians can make a difference in advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace", parliamentarians said their contribution to Israeli-Palestinian peace could only be a quiet, modest, unpretentious, bottom-up approach based on informed, impartial, balanced and genuine engagement between parliamentarians of the world and Israeli-Palestinian parliamentarians, out of whose ranks emerged the national leaders and main actors responsible for the actual task of peace-finding and making. In the final communiqué, the meeting's organizers noted the valid recommendations that had emerged to strengthen the role of parliamentarians at the national, regional and international levels in contributing to resolving the question of Palestine. It called on the Committee, in collaboration with the relevant inter-parliamentary organizations, to examine those proposals with a view to their eventual implementation. The participants urged the new Israeli Government to declare its support for the two-State solution. (UN News Centre, UN press release [GA/PAL/1123](#))

"By agreeing to reconstruction without specific, binding assurances from the State of Israel, international donors were effectively underwriting Israel's illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territory", a report released by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association, Al Haq, the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, the BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Ittijah (Union of Arab Community-Based Organizations), Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, the Public Committee against Torture in Israel and the Women's Affairs Center stated. The report continued, "International law – including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and the law of State responsibility for wrongful acts – placed specific, binding obligations on the State of Israel (based, inter alia, on its duties as an Occupying Power) with respect to the maintenance and development of normal life in occupied territory. By repeatedly restricting their action to provide aid, without holding Israel accountable for its specific obligations, international donors are relieving Israel of its legally binding responsibilities." Donors, "by repeatedly covering the cost of the occupation, without demanding accountability from Israel", were "implicitly encouraging violations of international law," and "individual donor States may thus be acting contrary to their own legal obligations". The rights organizations noted that "aid alone cannot resolve the conflict" and urged Governments and international organizations to use political action rather than donations to spur peace and justice in the region. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli navy ships opened fire at fishing boats off the shore near Gaza City. The boats were damaged, but there were no injuries. Six hours later Israeli ships opened fire on fishing boats near the coast of Tel Al-Sultan in the southern Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli troops seized three Palestinians during a raid in Bethlehem. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli military fired a number of artillery shells towards the eastern Gaza Strip. No injuries were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Pope Benedict XVI expressed hope that his visit and the power of the Catholic Church could help further peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians. "We are not a political power but a spiritual power that can contribute", Pope Benedict had told reporters on the plane before he landed in Amman as part of his first trip to the region. He will also visit Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory during his week-long tour. (*AP*)

During the course of their [week-long session](#) in Geneva, the four members of the independent fact-finding mission established on 3 April 2009 by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of the recent conflict in the Gaza Strip, headed by Justice Richard Goldstone, held initial meetings with a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including representatives of UN Member States, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. The mission also established its terms of reference and a three-month programme of work. In the course of its work, the mission intends to conduct visits to affected areas of southern Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza, and has requested the cooperation of the Government of Israel in this regard. "I would like to emphasize that we will focus our investigation not on political considerations, but on an objective and impartial analysis of compliance of the parties to the conflict with their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, especially their responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians and non-combatants", Justice Goldstone said. (www.unhcr.ch)

10

Haaretz reported that the Israeli Government and settler organizations were working to surround the Old City of Jerusalem with nine national parks, pathways and other sites, drastically altering the status quo in the city. The secret plan was assigned to the Jerusalem Development Authority (JDA). In a report presented to former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on 11 September 2008, the JDA described the purpose of the project as "to create a sequence of parks surrounding the Old City", all in the aspiration "to strengthen Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel". (*Haaretz*)

11

A Qassam rocket was fired from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel's western Negev region. The rocket exploded in an open area, causing no injury or damage. (*Haaretz*)

The Israeli military arrested three Palestinians in Hebron and three others in Jenin during raids.

Two IDF soldiers were arrested for allegedly looting a Palestinian home in Gaza during the army's offensive there. The soldiers were suspected of stealing a credit card belonging to a Palestinian whose home they had entered and using it to purchase goods worth thousands of shekels. (*Haaretz*)

According to Israeli news reports, a mortar shell was launched from the Gaza Strip and landed in the western Negev causing no injuries or damage. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh for the first time since taking office. Following the meeting, Mr. Netanyahu told reporters: "We want, as soon as possible, to resume the peace talks with the Palestinians, and I hope they will resume in the coming weeks". (*Haaretz*)

PA President Abbas told a meeting of Fatah that a new Palestinian Government would be formed within 48 hours. Palestinian officials said Mr. Abbas would once again ask Salam Fayyad to form the new Government, which would not include Hamas. (*AFP*)

At Sharm el-Sheikh, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he appreciated Egypt's efforts for "strengthening and establishing peace". Continuing, he said: "We wish to expand this peace, first and foremost with our Palestinian neighbours. We want to see Israelis and Palestinians living together with the prospect of peace, security and prosperity. We believe that these three things go hand in hand, one does not come at the expense of another, one does not come in place of another, but rather peace, security and prosperity go together". (www.pmo.gov.il)

During a fiscal cabinet meeting, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said that an incoming new Government would prioritize the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, as well as create a suitable atmosphere for the success of the national dialogue. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II told *The Times* of London that America was putting the final touches to a hugely ambitious peace plan for the Middle East, aimed at ending more than 60 years of conflict between Israel and the Arabs. The Obama administration was pushing for a comprehensive peace agreement that would include settling Israel's conflict with the Palestinians and its territorial disputes with Syria and Lebanon, King Abdullah said. "If we delay our peace negotiations, then there is going to be another conflict between Arabs or Muslims and Israel in the next 12 to 18 months," the King said. "What we are talking about is not Israelis and Palestinians sitting at the table, but Israelis sitting with Palestinians, Israelis sitting with Syrians, Israelis sitting with Lebanese," he added. (*The Times*)

Pope Benedict XVI said at a welcoming ceremony at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv: "In union with people of good will everywhere, I plead with all those responsible to explore every possible avenue in the search for a just resolution of the outstanding difficulties, so that both peoples may live in peace in a homeland of their own, within secure and internationally recognized borders. In this regard, I hope and pray that a climate of greater trust can soon be created that will enable the parties to make real progress along the road to peace and stability." (*AP*, www.vatican.va)

Christian clerics and Palestinian officials said that some 150 of 250 Christians from the Gaza Strip who applied to attend a papal mass in Jerusalem or Bethlehem had been denied permits to do so. (*Reuters*)

The South African Government expressed regret at an Israeli decision to prevent PA President Abbas' envoy Abdul Rahim Mallouh from travelling to the inauguration of President Jacob Zuma, which had taken place in Pretoria the previous day. (www.dfa.gov.za)

In East Jerusalem, Israeli police and intelligence forces entered the Ambassador Hotel, shutting down a temporary Palestinian media centre planned in advance of the Pope's visit to Jerusalem. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Security Council [met](#) to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Council President Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said that the most pressing topic was to reaffirm the international legal basis for a two-State solution, and that backing the Arab Peace Initiative, relevant Council resolutions and the Road Map was of special importance. The task before the Council was to ensure progress in the negotiations and the rapid resumption of the peace process, which should not be hampered by emotions. The Moscow conference would be the next important step and a schedule had been agreed, taking into account the views of the main stakeholders, he said. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [said](#) that the Middle East Quartet was expected to meet soon for close consultations with the League of Arab States. There was a deep crisis of confidence among ordinary people on the ground, and for good reason, he said. Palestinians continued to see unacceptable unilateral actions in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, such as house demolitions, intensified settlement construction, settler activity and oppressive movement restrictions due to permits, checkpoints and the barrier, which were intimately connected to settlements. "The time has come for Israel to fundamentally change its policies in this regard, as it has repeatedly promised to do, but not yet done", Mr. Ban said. On Gaza, he said, Israel's continuing closure policy did not weaken its adversaries. However, it did cause untold damage to civilian life. Four months after the conflict, during which 3,800 houses and 2 health centres had been destroyed and 34,000 homes, 15 hospitals, 41 health care centres and 282 schools damaged, only food and medicine were allowed into the territory. That was completely unacceptable, he said. Israel should respond positively to repeated calls to allow glass, cement and other building materials into Gaza. The United Nations sought the support of all Council members, as well as the Quartet, for its efforts in Gaza. The Organization was ready to work with local businessmen to help start action to repair and rebuild houses, schools and clinics, he said. The Council adopted the following presidential statement (*S/PRST/2009/14*):

"The Security Council stresses the urgency of reaching comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Vigorous diplomatic action is needed to attain the goal set by the international community — lasting peace in the region, based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations.

"In this context the Security Council recalls all its previous resolutions on the Middle East, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), 1860 (2009) and the Madrid principles, and the Council notes the importance of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

"The Security Council encourages the Quartet's ongoing work to support the parties in their efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

"The Security Council reiterates its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations built upon previous agreements and obligations. The Council reiterates its call for renewed and urgent efforts by the parties and the international community to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

"The Security Council further calls upon the parties to fulfil their obligations under the Performance-Based Road-Map refraining from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations on all core issues.

"The Security Council calls on all States and international organizations to support the Palestinian Government, which is committed to the "Quartet" principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and respects the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Council encourages tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, including in support of Egypt's efforts on this basis. It calls for assistance to help develop the Palestinian economy, to maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority and to build Palestinian institutions.

"The Security Council supports the proposal of the Russian Federation to convene, in consultation with the Quartet and the parties, an international conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow in 2009." (UN News Centre)

12

Israeli forces seized a 42-year-old Palestinian in Hebron, claiming that they had found weapons at his house. In Qalqilya, Israeli forces seized the 52-year-old mother of a "wanted" member of Hamas' armed wing. (Ma'an News Agency)

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would be arriving on 18 May, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak would be in Washington on 26 May and PA President Mahmoud Abbas would be arriving two days later. Mr. Gibbs said the talks would be discussions on "the steps all parties should take to help achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians and between Israel and the Arab States". (AP)

At a joint news conference with visiting Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak urged rival Palestinian factions to unite in order to achieve the creation of a Palestinian State. Mr. Mubarak also urged Israel to allow movement between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Mr. Berlusconi reiterated his support for a two-State solution. (AFP)

In London, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown met with Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, saying that the United States must seize the chance to push Israel and the Palestinians to make progress on a Middle East peace deal. He said the United States must show ambition and step up efforts to persuade all sides to urgently return to peace talks. (AFP)

Pope Benedict XVI celebrated an outdoor mass at the Kidron Valley just outside the gates of Jerusalem's Old City, saying in a homily that he felt the pain of conflict and displacement in the Holy Land. He said, "I wish to acknowledge the difficulties, the frustration, and the pain and suffering which so many of you have endured as a result of the conflicts which have afflicted these lands, and the bitter experiences of displacement which so many of your families have known and God forbid may yet know". (AFP)

In Jerusalem, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound where he was welcomed by the Mufti of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, who delivered a speech focusing on the plight of Palestinians in East Jerusalem under Israeli occupation. The Pope also met with Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger. Rabbi Amar told the Pope: "You represent a large nation of believers that knows what the Bible is and it is your duty to pass on the message that the Jewish people deserve a renaissance and a little respect — to live in this land". (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

The European Commission announced that the Government of Spain had contributed a further €3 million through the EU PEGASE mechanism to help the Palestinian Authority settle bills due to the private sector for the purchase of medicines. (www.delwbg.ec.europa.eu)

Nearly 7,000 UNRWA workers in Jordan began a three-day strike, closing schools and forcing health centres to work on an emergency-only basis. "Almost all the workers with UNRWA, who total around 7,000, began a three-day strike today to demand a 7 per cent pay increase," said Matar Saqr, the Agency spokesman in Jordan. (AFP)

13

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad decided to postpone the forming of a new Government until 17 May, citing Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Bethlehem as the reason for the delay. (Ma'an News Agency)

At the request of Libya, the Security Council held a closed meeting to discuss the findings of the Board of Inquiry into the Gaza attacks on UN property. Libya had circulated a draft resolution calling on Israel "to publicly retract and regret untrue allegations" and pay reparations, which would also authorize the Security Council "to consider any actions or measures" to avoid a repetition of attacks on UN premises. Council President, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation Vitaly Churkin indicated in a brief press statement after the meeting that "the members of the Council expressed their concern about the findings of the report ... [and] expressed general interest being kept abreast of progress in the matter as the Secretary-General deemed appropriate." When asked about the status of the Libyan draft, Mr. Churkin said he believed the Libyan delegation "sensed the tenor of the discussion of this matter by the members of the Council and does not currently intend to move on its proposed draft resolution". (AP)

Four former US ambassadors of Jewish origin sent a letter to US President Obama asserting that there was a broad consensus within the American Jewish community in support of an active US role in reaching a two-State solution. The former diplomats were: Samuel W. Lewis, former ambassador to Israel; Robert H. Pelletreau, Jr., former ambassador to Egypt; Thomas R. Pickering, Jr., former ambassador to Israel and Jordan; and Edward S. Walker, Jr., former ambassador to Israel and Egypt. They also called for an immediate renewal of US-mediated Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, a freeze on West Bank settlement construction, the immediate reconstruction of Gaza and the cessation of Palestinian terror attacks on Israelis. (Haaretz)

Pope Benedict XVI witnessed the watchtowers and high walls sealing Bethlehem off from Jerusalem as he entered the West Bank, and pressed his call for a Palestinian State. The papal convoy drove slowly through three big steel gates in the fortified barrier of towering concrete slabs. A warm welcome greeted him along the steep, ancient streets of Bethlehem. "Mr President, the Holy See supports the right of your people to a sovereign Palestinian homeland in the land of your forefathers, secure and at peace with its neighbours, within internationally recognized borders. Even if at present that goal seems far from being realized, I urge you and all your people to keep alive the flame of hope, hope that a way can be found of meeting the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians for peace and stability", Pope Benedict told PA President Abbas at a ceremony shortly afterwards. (Reuters, www.vatican.va)

Israel opened the Kerem Shalom, Kami and Nahal Oz crossing points with the Gaza Strip to allow the passage of 115 trucks carrying commercial and humanitarian goods, as well as limited amounts of fuel and cooking oil. (Ma'an News Agency)

Haaretz reported that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was expected to promise during his meeting with US President Obama at the White House on 18 May that Israel would remove all restrictions on the movement of foodstuffs into the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)

The office of Hatim Abdul Qader, the Jerusalem affairs adviser to PA President Abbas, stated that the Jerusalem municipality had decided the previous day to demolish nine more Palestinian homes that provided shelter to more than 70 residents in the Al-Thoury neighbourhood near Silwan in East Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Jerusalem municipality had handed the owner of an apartment building an order to demolish the building housing 250 residents. (IMEMC)

14

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Jordan's King Abdulla II in Aqaba, where he pressed Mr. Netanyahu to immediately commit to the establishment of a Palestinian State and urged him to accept the Arab Peace Initiative and to take the necessary steps to move forward towards a solution, according to a Royal Court statement. (Haaretz)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair told the Foreign Relations Committee of the US Senate that there was no workable alternative to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "The opportunity is there. But it won't remain if not seized. As President Obama has recognized, this is the right time to seize it", Mr. Blair

said. (AP, www.foreign.senate.gov)

Commemorating the 61st anniversary of Al-Nakba, crowds in Beit Hanoun called for a restoration of unity so Palestinians could remain steadfast and insist on their right of return to the villages and towns they were expelled from in 1948. "Those who abandon that right", one protester said, "should not be considered Palestinian". The event was organized by the local branch of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the northern Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency) "Not for sale," a 72-minute documentary reflecting the suffering of Palestinians expelled from their homeland after the 1948 Al-Nakba, was recently released. The documentary was based on two cases: one of them that of a child from Ash-Shati refugee camp, working after school on the street to support his 11-member family; the other case was that of a refugee from Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut, also working after school, as a mechanic with his father. (Ma'an News Agency) Pope Benedict XVI celebrated a mass in Nazareth, calling for peaceful coexistence between the Muslims and the Christians. (DPA) At least 15 armed Israeli settlers from "Kammel" ransacked and damaged three Palestinian homes in the village of Khirbit near Hebron. (IMEMC)

15

Pope Benedict XVI ended his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. "Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders", the Pope said on the tarmac of Tel Aviv airport before boarding the plane for Rome. "Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign independent homeland ... Let the two-State solution become a reality, not remain a dream", he said. (AP)

OCHA stated in a [report](#) that the basic right of many Palestinians to human dignity had continued to be undermined during the month of April. In the West Bank, over 100 Palestinians, including many children, had been displaced when their homes were demolished by the Israeli authorities for lack of permits, a more than two-fold increase in displacement compared to March 2009. The report indicated that hundreds of Palestinian homes had been raided and searched by the Israeli Army in the course of over 350 operations throughout the West Bank. (www.ochaopt.org)

16

The US was shortly expected to announce a new plan to jump-start the Middle East peace talks, Jordan's King Abdullah II told AFP in an interview. "And we hope that [Washington] will announce this plan as soon as possible, because lost time undermines the chances for peace", he said. (AFP) Fatah and Hamas had begun a new round of reconciliation talks in Cairo, the Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported. "We can discuss with Fatah all the options ... which do not contradict our national goals and the rights of our people, except the American card, which stresses recognition of the Zionist entity and the conditions of the Quartet", Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoumsaid in Gaza. "This is not open for discussion." (AFP) Egypt opened its borders with the Gaza Strip for two days to allow the departure of a number of Palestinians to Egypt for medical treatment, along with students and holders of foreign passports and residence permits, Hamas authorities said. (DPA)

King Abdullah II of Jordan has bestowed the Istiqlal Medal of the First Order on UNRWA in recognition of the Agency's 60 years of service to Palestine refugees. UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd received the award on the agency's behalf, following a meeting with King Abdullah II and Queen Rania. King Abdullah said that Jordan would continue its support for UNRWA, and noted that the Jordan Armed Forces field hospital in Gaza would continue to complement the work that UNRWA was doing. During the meeting, the King also emphasized the refugees' rights to return and compensation. (www.unrwa.org)

17

Palestinian militants attacked Israeli troops with two remote-controlled bombs north of the Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanoun, witnesses said. The army retaliated with tank fire without causing casualties, they said. Two groups, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad and the Palestine Liberation Front claimed responsibility. (AFP) Egyptian police recovered a body from the rubble of a collapsed tunnel used to smuggle goods into the Gaza Strip, a security official said. Earlier, police found 500 kg of explosives and a weapons cache near the border with the Gaza Strip, another security official told AFP. (AFP) The US and the EU were united in their demand that Israel and the Palestinians negotiate a two-State solution to their conflict, Henri Guaino, a senior advisor to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, said. "We are on exactly the same wavelength. The positions of Europe, France and the United States have never been so close," he said. (AFP)

Jordan's King Abdullah II urged the resumption of negotiations towards a two-State vision in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during a meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres, the Royal Court reported. The meeting was conducted on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum. "During today's meeting, Peres set forth his vision for regional economic development as a catalyst for the peace process", it also reported. (DPA)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu landed in Washington ahead of a meeting with US President Obama as aides minimized speculation that their differences over the Middle East peace process would cause conflict. The Prime Minister's National Security Adviser, Uzi Arad, told reporters in Washington: "We are confident that a sense of pragmatism and the desire for progress will drive the discussion and what will decide the issue are the practicalities of the matter and not the rhetoric."

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs had told reporters that the meeting would not be "as contentious" as some expected. (AP)

Hamas has rejected the idea of forming a joint Palestinian security force in the Gaza Strip that would not also operate in the West Bank. Salah al-Bardawil, spokesman for Hamas' parliamentary bloc, said any agreement on the formation of a new security force would have to apply to all the occupied territories. "There has been agreement in principle on the formation of a common force from the two factions to work in the Gaza Strip until the elections [which should be held] before next 5 January", senior Fatah official Nabil Sha'ath had been quoted as saying by the official Egyptian news agency MENA following talks in Cairo. (AFP)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak announced that he would deny Knesset members from the right-wing National Union faction permission to tour Palestinian areas in Hebron to protest the easing of restrictions on Palestinians. However, the Knesset members would be permitted to enter the Cave of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi). (Ynetnews)

18

A Palestinian taxi driver said that he had been brutally beaten by IDF soldiers at the entrance to Qalqilya. He was transferred to a hospital in moderate-to-serious condition. (Ynetnews)

Palestinian officials told Ma'an News Agency in Cairo that PA President Abbas would ask Prime Minister Fayyad to form the new PA Government as soon as possible, which could be completed as early as this evening. (Ma'an News Agency)

During a two-hour meeting with Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu at the White House, US President Obama said that Israel must take "difficult steps" towards peace. He said it was in the interest of every country, including the US, to "achieve a two-State solution in which Israelis and Palestinians are living side by side in peace and security". All parties must honour previous obligations that had been outlined in the Road Map, the President said, adding, "we have to make progress on settlements". Mr. Obama also added, "settlements have to be stopped". On his part, Mr. Netanyahu sidestepped the issue of Palestinian sovereignty, favouring a more limited form of self-government for Palestinians. While promising to resume peace talks immediately, Mr. Netanyahu said that any deal depended on the acceptance across the Arab world of Israel's right to exist. Mr. Obama told the Prime Minister that the US would soon present a new peace initiative to include Arab nations alongside Israel and the PA in peace negotiations. (Haaretz, www.timesonline.co.uk)

The Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, Saeb Erakat, welcomed in a statement US President Obama's unequivocal support for the establishment as an independent Palestinian State and his call for Israel to abide by its Road Map obligations, including a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity. He said, "Moving the Middle East peace process forward hinges on Israel implementing its obligations under existing agreements. Only a reversal in Israel's policies on the ground can restore credibility to the peace process." (www.nad-plo.org)

Saeb Erakat denied media reports that secret negotiations with Israel had resumed. He told Ma'an News Agency that contacts with the Israeli side were restricted to daily life issues. "President Abbas expressed the Palestinian political standpoint in a letter to US President Obama, to the EU and to the UN. He asserted to them that Israel's insistence on turning its back to previously signed agreements, and continuation of settlement activity means completely terminating any hope of resuming peace talks", Mr. Erakat said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel had moved ahead with a plan to expand a settlement in the West Bank, an official said, as Israeli contractors visited the site called "Maskiyot." David Elhayani, head of the Jordan Valley Regional Council that oversees "Maskiyot", confirmed to Reuters that he had published a tender last week for contractors to

launch infrastructure work for 20 homes at what was once a military base. "The [Israeli] Prime Minister is slapping [US President] Obama in the face by expanding the settlement under the false pretence of natural growth", said Kadima lawmaker Shlomo Molla. (*Reuters, Ynetnews*)

In a statement, the French Foreign Ministry reiterated its condemnation of the Israeli decision to expand the "Maskiyot" settlement in the northern Jordan Valley. The statement continued: "This decision is in breach of Israel's commitments, particularly those made under the Road Map. The settlement issue is one of the main obstacles to peace". (<http://ambafrance-us.org>)

19

Two Palestinians were injured when IDF soldiers fired at them in Hebron, causing moderate injuries, Palestinian security sources said. Meanwhile, Israeli troops arrested nine Palestinians in different cities of the West Bank including Hebron, Bethlehem and Ramallah. (*Wafa*) Israeli warplanes bombed a Hamas security outpost and tunnels by the Gaza border with Egypt, after a rocket fired from Gaza damaged a home in the southern Israeli town of Sderot, causing no injury. Palestinian medics said a woman in Gaza had suffered moderate wounds from one of several air strikes against tunnels. Another raid targeted a Hamas outpost near a border fence with Israel, a Hamas source said. An Israeli military spokesman confirmed the air raids, saying Israel had targeted four border tunnels and two sites in Gaza where weapons were produced, in response to rocket and mortar fire aimed at Israel from Gaza. (*Reuters*) Israeli soldiers shot and injured two Palestinians in the village of Al-Ramadin who were attempting to cross into Israel to go to work. Israeli troops also seized five Palestinians during overnight raids in the Hebron area. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

PA President Abbas swore in a new Government comprised mainly of members of Fatah without representation of Hamas. Salam Fayyad would retain his position as Prime Minister. In Gaza, Hamas official Mushir al-Masri rejected the new Cabinet, saying, "This Government is illegal, unconstitutional". Mr. Abbas has said the new Government would step down if a power-sharing deal was reached. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

The official spokesman of the PA Presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, said, "We are encouraged by the statements and the attitude of US President Obama and by his commitment to a Palestinian State." Hamas' spokesperson in Gaza, Fawzi Barhoum, said that his group was disappointed in US President Obama's position during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the White House. "The goal of [President] Obama's stance during the meeting with Netanyahu is to mislead global public opinion and to ensure the continuation of Israel's existence as a racist State", Mr. Barhoum was quoted as saying by Israel's *Army Radio*. (*Haaretz*)

After Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu met with members of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Committee's Chairman, Senator John Kerry, told reporters: "I re-emphasized to the Prime Minister the importance of Israel moving forward especially in respect to the settlements issue. ... We also emphasized that this is not a one way street and the burden is not only on Israel to take all the steps." (*AFP*)

PA Intelligence Chief Majed Faraj said Hamas had rejected an Egyptian proposal for a joint Gaza security force with Fatah during recent talks. Mr. Faraj also said Hamas refused to accept to Gaza of PA officials who had fled the Hamas takeover in June 2007. He said that Hamas wanted to enter the West Bank but rejected any role for Fatah in ruling the Gaza Strip. He explained that there was also a disagreement on electoral reform, where Fatah suggested that 85 per cent of the Palestinian Legislative Council would be elected through proportional representation and 15 per cent by individual constituencies, while Hamas wanted a 60/40 and Egypt a 75/25 percentage ratio. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

During a meeting of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin said that there would be no chance of engaging in a peace process while Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip, adding that the group had maintained quiet in Gaza in order to rebuild its strength. He also said that Egypt was making significant efforts and progress in order to thwart smuggling from Sinai to the Gaza Strip. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli settlers from the "Gilad" outpost set fire to large areas of wheat fields and olive groves in the villages of Jit and Far'ata east of Qalqilya before fire fighters arrived and extinguished the blaze. Local residents said Israeli soldiers also attacked farmers, leaving many of them bruised. IDF soldiers also seized 15-year-old Murad Yamin. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Dani Dayan, chairman of the settlers' umbrella organization Yesha shrugged off US President Obama's call for Israel to halt settlement building in the occupied West Bank, saying Palestinians needed to "halt terror first". He said, "The Israeli electorate set a clear line for this Government ... we have strong support in the new Knesset and the things we hear among politicians certainly encourage us that if Netanyahu [halts settlement building] the Knesset will stand at our side".

(*Reuters*)

At its [meeting](#), the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People unanimously adopted a statement on the situation in Occupied East Jerusalem, expressing its utmost concern about "illegal and provocative Israeli policies" and other measures in the city, including destruction of Palestinian homes and imposition of restrictions on movement. In the statement, the Committee reiterated that Israel must refrain from any activities that changed the legal, demographic and cultural character and status of the city, "the capital of a future Palestinian State". Further in the statement, the Committee said the question of Jerusalem was a key aspect of the question of Palestine and one of the six core issues for the permanent status negotiations. While calling on Israel to refrain from its illegal activities, the Committee said Israel must "scrupulously abide by its obligations as an occupying Power, including [its obligations under] the Fourth Geneva Convention". Stressing its strong belief that actions purporting to change or alter East Jerusalem's status or character were provocative and predetermined the outcome of permanent status negotiations, the Committee called on the Security Council to live up to its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations by upholding its own resolutions that continued to go unimplemented. (*UN News Centre, UN press release GA/PAL/1125*)

20

A 23-year-old Palestinian was moderately injured by Israeli gunfire in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Six Palestinians were arrested during Israeli raids in the West Bank. (*IMEMC*)

Official Palestinian Authority sources told *Ynet* that following the visit of Jordan's King Abdullah II to Washington, as well as other visits to the US capital, they had been given the impression that any new American peace plan would call for establishing a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The source stressed that the US official had also assured them the new plan would include halting all settlement construction, as well as setting a clear timetable for the realization of the two-State solution and a commitment that the permanent peace agreement would be negotiated according to the understanding set by the Arab Peace Initiative.

(*Ynetnews*)

Israeli Vice-Prime Minister Silvan Shalom said the new Israeli Government would not give up East Jerusalem to the Palestinians. "Jerusalem is protected under the policy of the current Government and previous Governments ... Jerusalem will not be divided", he told a special session of the Knesset commemorating the anniversary of what Israel celebrates as the "reunification" of Jerusalem. (*DPA*)

Armed Israeli settlers attacked with batons and rifle butts Palestinian farmers while they were working on their land located between Nablus and Qalqilya.

(*IMEMC*)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak promised to remove unauthorized settlers' outposts. "If not through dialogue, we will do it with quick and aggressive law enforcement", Mr. Barak told a settler leaders' meeting in Tel Aviv. (*DPA*)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was briefed in Geneva by the head of the fact-finding mission on the recent Gaza conflict, appointed by the Human Rights Council, Justice Richard Goldstone of South Africa. Mr. Ban reiterated his support for the work of the mission and said he hoped the mission's work would proceed smoothly, with cooperation from the concerned parties and send a positive message to the international community about accountability. (www.unog.ch)

Members of the fact-finding mission on the recent Gaza conflict, appointed by the Human Rights Council, said they hoped to visit Gaza and southern Israel in early June and hold public hearings on whether war crimes had been committed in the recent conflict. Richard Goldstone, who heads the four-member team, said Israel had not yet officially responded to the fact-finding mission's request to enter the country to investigate its invasion of Gaza. But the team was prepared to enter the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing in Egypt, a "second choice," Mr. Goldstone said. "We are intent on doing our fact-finding mission, taking account of all relevant factors and allegations by all parties ... We have to complete our field work by the end of June," he said. "One decision we have taken is we will have a number of days of public hearings. If we can [have them] in the region, so much the better, and if necessary we will have them in Geneva," he added. (*Reuters*)

21

Two undercover Israeli soldiers and a PA officer were injured in an overnight shootout in Qalqilya. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli military sources reported the detention of six Palestinians from the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli extremists smashed dozens of storefront windows and lights on several streets as well as a Palestinian-owned vehicle in East Jerusalem, while police looked on

and did not intervene. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces seized three Palestinians, including two teenage girls, near the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron. One woman reportedly threw a knife at Israeli border police. Another woman allegedly tried to stab a soldier at a checkpoint in Bir Zeit, according to news reports. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

France welcomed the new Government formed by President Abbas and expressed the wish to swiftly work with it. The statement recalled France's full confidence in President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad for restarting peace negotiations with Israel without delay, complying with the commitments made under the Road Map and implementing the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. (www.diplomatie.gouv.fr)

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said Israeli settlements could not be blamed for the difficulties in the peace process, adding that the US and Israel "agree on the goals, so the disagreements are tactical". He also expressed disappointment with the PA leadership for its demand that the International Criminal Court investigate possible war crimes during the conflict in Gaza. Kadima member of the Knesset Yohanan Plesner said Mr. Liberman's "permissive attitude towards outposts harms any chance of a diplomatic process". (*Ynetnews*)

Britain's Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, said in a wide-ranging speech at Oxford's Centre for Islamic Studies: "Lines drawn on maps by colonial powers were succeeded, amongst other things, by the failure – it has to be said not just ours – to establish two States in Palestine." Turning to the Palestinian issue, he said that "it remains an issue that stirs up an acute sense of injustice and resentment. We need – all of us, in our own ways – to act soon, very soon, to prevent a fatal and final blow to the scope for compromise." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

At the 14th Anglican Consultative Council Meeting held in Jamaica earlier this month, a resolution on the Middle East was passed, staking out a position based on international law, a rejection of violence as a means of conflict resolution, and opposition to Israel's occupation and colonization of the Palestinian territories. It also called for a two-State solution and lamented the fact that Israeli policies in the West Bank "have created severe hardship for many Palestinians" which is "experienced as a physical form of apartheid". (www.guardian.co.uk)

Some 200 East Jerusalem residents and human rights activists gathered outside the Old City's Damascus Gate in protest at Jerusalem Day, a national holiday in Israel. The protestors carried Palestinian flags and signs that read: "Jerusalem – not a celebration for everyone", "Wake up from the fantasy of unification" and "Building in the West – demolishing in the East". (*Ynetnews*)

Knesset members of Israel's ruling right-wing coalition presented a bill aimed at blocking any concession to Palestinians on the status of Jerusalem. The projected legislation would require any change in the city's boundaries to have the backing of a majority of 80 of the 120 Knesset members, as compared with 61 at present. The members said the aim is to "guarantee the unity of the city". (*AFP*)

Israeli official Yakir Segev, appointed by Mayor Nir Barkat to oversee East Jerusalem, said in an interview that treating Arab residents more fairly would strengthen Israeli claims to all of the city, and that he was seeking ways to legalize thousands of unlicensed Arab homes vulnerable to demolition. "All the policies we are facing ... show that they want to limit the number of Palestinians", responded Ahmed Rweidi, an adviser to PA President Abbas. (*AP*)

Israeli police broke up an unauthorized settler outpost, "Maoz Esther", near Ramallah, bulldozing makeshift cabins, police said. Israeli right-wing activists said masked people hurled stones at Palestinian vehicles near Hawara and a number of other areas in the West Bank in revenge for the evacuation of the outpost. (*Reuters, Ynetnews*)

Israeli authorities at the Erez crossing denied entry to a delegation of 17 Canadians from Quebec, representing civil society groups on an educational and solidarity mission to the Gaza Strip. The group included representatives from Palestinian and Jewish peace groups as well as the Fédération des femmes du Québec, a Quebec teachers' union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated: "We want to see a stop to settlement construction – additions, natural growth, any kind of settlement activity". The Israeli Embassy in Washington stated that Israel would stand by its pledge not to establish new settlements but that this clearly did not include construction of housing to accommodate natural increases. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli settlers, backed by the army, uprooted olive trees belonging to Palestinian farmers in Salfit, in the northern West Bank. The army pronounced the area a closed military zone and told the farmers that they were not allowed back on their land. (*IMEMC*)

A team of experts from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has completed [fieldwork](#) in the Gaza Strip as part of a post-conflict environmental assessment mandated by decision 25/12 of the UNEP Governing Council. Sites visited included residential areas, schools, industrial areas, sewage facilities, landfills and the coastline, where a detailed sampling of water and sediments, bio-indicators, asbestos and waste water was conducted. Samples will be sent to an independent international laboratory for analysis. Findings will be published in a final UNEP report to be released during the summer of 2009. (www.unep.org)
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During an exchange of fire near the Kerem Shalom crossing, Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinians who they claimed had been trying to plant a bomb near the heavily fortified border fence. According to the IDF, an improvised explosive device, two rifles and hand grenades were found on the bodies. (*AP, BBC, IMEMC, The Independent, Al-Jazeera, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

Only hours after the killing of two Palestinians near the Kerem Shalom crossing, Palestinian militants detonated a bomb near an IDF patrol's jeep on Israel's border with the Gaza Strip. There were no Israeli casualties in the incident. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency*)

Numerous Palestinians and one IDF soldier were injured during the weekly protest against the separation wall. Eight protesters were injured, one of whom critically, by tear gas inhalation in Ni'lin. Dozens of Palestinian protesters sustained bruises after being attacked by the Israeli army during the protest against the separation wall in Al-Ma'sara village near Bethlehem. (*Haaretz, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

Israeli warships fired machine guns at Palestinian fishermen in the Sudaniyya area off the northern Gaza City coast. No casualties were reported. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

France accused the Prime Minister of Israel of prejudicing the outcome of the Middle East peace process by declaring that Jerusalem would forever be Israel's undivided capital. A Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that the Road Map called on both parties to negotiate an agreement on Jerusalem. He said: "In France's eyes, Jerusalem should, within the framework of a negotiated peace deal, become the capital of two States". (*AFP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

It was revealed in a letter dated 12 May 2009, signed by the Deputy Director at the Israeli Ministry of the Environment and addressed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Israeli Central Command, that five IDF bases and fuel stations in the West Bank areas near Jerusalem, Ramallah and Hebron had been a major source of contamination of land and water sources due to the poor handling of diesel fuel and oil. The Ministry promised to provide a full report with photographs of the affected areas and urged the IDF to rectify the situation. (www.irinnews.org)

Israel indicated that it would partially open the Kerem Shalom crossing in the southern Gaza Strip for an expected 50 to 58 truckloads of supplies of humanitarian goods before the weekend closure. The Nahal Oz and Karmi crossings remained closed. Israel's liaison office announced that the Nahal Oz fuel transfer crossing would be closed and would be replaced within a month by a new terminal located 30 km to the south, near the Kerem Shalom crossing. Palestinian gas station owners stated that the move would "add to the fuel companies' suffering and raise shipment costs". (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli security forces had demolished a minor settlement outpost but within hours, settlers were reported to be rebuilding it. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said that troops and police had evicted settlers staying in seven metal huts and had removed the structures. There was no violent resistance and no arrests were made. (*Al-Jazeera*)

Dozens of Israeli settlers from the "Yitzhar" settlement located south of Nablus set fire to bales of harvested barley in a large field owned by a Nablus family. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A Palestinian and an Israeli soldier were injured after a group of settlers assaulted Palestinian youths who had tried to remove a tent that had been set up in the Al-Buweirah area east of Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

CodePink, an anti-war women's group from the San Francisco Bay area, would be heading to the Gaza Strip with playground equipment, school supplies and toys for the children worth \$15,000. This would be their second trip this year. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

23

A young Palestinian was shot by Israeli soldiers at the Shave Shomron checkpoint west of Nablus. He was taken to Nablus hospital where his leg had to be amputated. (IMEMC)

Syrian President Bashar Assad called Israel the "major obstacle" to peace in the Middle East and warned that a failure of negotiations would open the way for more resistance in occupied lands. (The Jerusalem Post)

24

A Palestinian youth was shot and wounded in the head by a rubber-coated bullet fired by the Israeli army near a military roadblock at the eastern entrance to the Tammoun village near Tubas in the West Bank. The army said that the youth had thrown stones at the soldiers manning the roadblock. (IMEMC)

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman ruled out a withdrawal to 1967 borders at a meeting of the Israeli Cabinet. "A return to the borders of 1967 today, as we are being pressured to do, would not end the conflict, would not guarantee peace or security. It would simply move the conflict to within the 1967 borders." (www.albawaba.com)

The Israeli Cabinet voted in favour of a draft law to ban yearly Al-Nakba commemorations. Since 1948, Palestinians have been marking the establishment of the State of Israel as Nakba (catastrophe). According to the draft law, anyone participating in the commemoration of 15 May 1948 could face a three-year prison sentence. The proposal was submitted by the right-wing Yisrael Beiteniu party led by Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman. (www.albawaba.com, The National) A State Department spokesman said that "Jerusalem is a final status issue. Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to resolve its status during negotiations. We will support their efforts to reach agreements on all final status issues." (Haaretz)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in Damascus while attending a Foreign Ministers' meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. He said that talks with Hamas were "needed" to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. Mr. Lavrov said that the meeting "was the first very important step on the way to overcoming the present stagnation in the negotiations process". The following day, Mr. Lavrov stated that Hamas was following a more realistic path after Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip, adding that "we noticed a more realistic evaluation of the situation, the responsibility that Hamas feels not just for what happens in Gaza but for the fate of the entire Palestinian people". He had urged Hamas to agree to a formal truce with Israel, noting that since the end of the war in mid-January, there had been less rocket and mortar fire from Gaza into Israel. (Al-Jazeera, Haaretz)

It was reported that following heavy pressure from the United States to permanently open the crossings to the Gaza Strip for food, medication and other goods, the Israel security cabinet would convene the following day to discuss the issue. On 18 May, US President Obama had prodded Israel to ease restrictions on allowing construction materials into Gaza, to enable rebuilding there after Israel's offensive in December and January. (Haaretz)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu rejected US calls to impose a freeze on all settlement activity in the West Bank. "We do not intend to build any new settlements, but it wouldn't be fair to ban construction to meet the needs of natural growth or for there to be an outright construction ban", he told his Cabinet. Mr. Netanyahu's spokesman, Mark Regev, said that the fate of existing settlements should be decided in negotiations with the Palestinians. "In the interim period, we have to allow normal life in those communities to continue." It was indicated that Mr. Netanyahu would seek to extend an informal agreement reached between his predecessor and former US President Bush on the issue of West Bank settlement construction and use it as the basis for negotiations with the Obama Government in Washington. (AP, BBC, Haaretz)

During a Cabinet meeting, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman stated that the dismantling of outposts should come in the framework of the Road Map, adding that the plan might have to be re-examined. He said that "removing outposts should be part of an overall policy and cannot be patchwork. The correct outline is the Road Map, which we might have to re-adopt in all its stages. And if it is necessary within the framework of the Road Map to remove outposts, we will do so." It was reported that most of the ministers criticized the idea of dismantling any settlements, including outposts. (www.albawaba.com)

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Israeli Air Force planes dropped pamphlets over the Gaza Strip warning residents to stay away from the border with Israel. Pamphlets in Arabic warned Gazans to stay out of areas 300 to 500 metres from the electric border fence, saying they risked being shot. Leaflets included maps showing areas where the Palestinians were not allowed access. Israeli sources reported that the restricted areas extended from the north to the south of the Gaza Strip. The IDF had no comment, although it had scattered similar warning pamphlets in the past. (AP, Haaretz, IMEMC)

The Israeli army shot and wounded three Palestinians aged between 15 and 16 with live ammunition during clashes with Israeli forces that had invaded the Nur Shams refugee camp near Tulkarem. (IMEMC)

The Israeli army held up the Mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, at the Qalandiya checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah, because he had refused to answer questions or allow his belongings to be searched by Israeli officers. The Efta council of muftis condemned the incident as a "dangerous and disrespectful action against all religious men". (Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli army arrested a Palestinian near the "Gush Etzion" settlement in the vicinity of Bethlehem. According to the army, the man was transporting three "Molotov cocktails" in his car. At least eight "wanted" Palestinians were arrested in Nablus, Qalqiliya, Hebron and Ramallah. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency) PA President Abbas said that he would focus on Israel's refusal to stop the building of settlements during talks with US President Obama. He ruled out restarting peace talks until Israel committed itself to the creation of a Palestinian State and halted the expansion of its settlements. "We are aware of Mr. Netanyahu's positions and I'm not going to engage on this subject through the media. This is one of the main issues I'll take with me to Washington", Mr. Abbas told reporters. (Haaretz, IMEMC, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

Members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference concluded their thirty-sixth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Damascus. During the three-day meeting, they criticized Israel but said that they were open to better ties if Israel took steps towards a "just and comprehensive" Middle East peace deal, adding that "we must not reward Israel for its crimes". They stated that "it should be affirmed that any progress on ties must be linked to how much the Israeli position represents a commitment to a just and comprehensive peace that guarantees the restoration of rights and occupied land". (Reuters, www.oic-oci.org)

A United States congressional delegation said in Jerusalem that it was "sceptical" that Prime Minister Netanyahu's Government would be able to move forward the peace process with the Palestinians. The five-person delegation from the Subcommittee on the Middle East posed tough questions to Israeli representatives on construction in West Bank settlements and protested Israel's intention to continue building to accommodate "natural growth". They also expressed great concern over the siege of Gaza, noting that the civilian population was suffering greatly from a lack of food and medicine. (Haaretz)

France's President Nicolas Sarkozy said that establishing an independent Palestinian State was a "legitimate right", adding that "no one would think seriously about peace in the Middle East without giving the Palestinians a State. They have been persevering for years. It is their legitimate right." Mr. Sarkozy added that Israel must stop settlement construction activity in the West Bank "as it hinders peace" in the region". (www.albawaba.com, Ma'an News Agency)

Three Israeli ministers belonging to the Labour party declared their intention to appeal the approval by a ministerial panel of a law to ban ceremonies marking Israel's Independence Day as a "Nakba" or catastrophe. They stated that "this law would increase the isolationism and alienation in society and will strengthen the extremist minority among Israeli Arabs". (Haaretz)

Israeli opposition leader Tzipi Livni called the Road Map "bad" for Israel, in the wake of Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman's repeated statements in support of the plan. Ms. Livni said that Israel should rather opt for the Annapolis parameters launched in 2007 which stipulate direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. (Haaretz)

A 12-month-old Palestinian infant with a serious heart condition, Muhammad Rami Ibrahim Nofal, died at Gaza's Khan Yunis hospital as a result of for lack of a permit to receive medical treatment abroad. His death brought to 337 the number of Palestinians who have died as a result of the closure of the Gaza Strip. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

The newly appointed PA Minister for Jerusalem Affairs, Hatem Abdel Khader, released a statement noting that he favoured transferring control of the Temple Mount

(Al Haram Al Sharif) to the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference. (Haaretz)

It was reported that some 200 American and dozens of European solidarity activists were expected to arrive in June to hold a major sit-in on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing. The activists would erect a large tent where they would stay protesting against the closure of the Rafah crossing by Egypt and demand that it be opened permanently "in order to ease the Gazan people's suffering". (Ma'an News Agency)

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The Israeli Navy seized two Palestinian fishermen from a small boat off the coast of the southern Gaza Strip. Witnesses also said that Israeli navy boats had fired on Palestinian fishing boats in the Rafah harbour, causing no injuries. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli army seized six "wanted" Palestinians during overnight raids in Ramallah, Hebron and Bethlehem. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum indicated that Hamas would not commit to any agreements reached by PA President Abbas during his forthcoming meeting with US President Obama, scheduled to take place on 28 May, "because the division is not resolved. Abbas couldn't solve it ... he failed to unite Palestinians".

(IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Vice Premier Moshe Ya'alon ruled out the creation of any "Palestinian entity" at a conference at the Knesset entitled "Alternatives to the Two-State Outlook."

He said efforts to find a solution to the conflict must stop. The best that could be done now was to manage the conflict, rather than solve it, by encouraging reforms and economic development in the area under the Palestinian Authority. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh issued a call for further dialogue with Fatah, blaming "external intervention" for an impasse in talks. He said that the talks with Fatah had reached "a good point" and that their success was necessary. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Government of Jordan lodged a strongly-worded protest with Israel over discussion in the Knesset proposing Jordan as a homeland for Palestinians. The Foreign Minister of Jordan, Nasser Judeh, summoned Israeli Ambassador Yaakov Rosen to inform him of Jordan's absolute rejection of the Knesset proposal and demanded that he provide clarifications. During the Knesset discussion, a number of parliamentarians had said that Israel should annex parts of the West Bank, turning over Palestinian population centres to Jordanian jurisdiction. The Minister reiterated Jordan's attitude which supports the establishment of "an independent and viable Palestinian State on the Palestinian national soil in accordance with the two-State solution which should be based on relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative", which "represents a supreme strategic interest for Jordan". (AFP, AP, DPA, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

It was reported that an IDF soldier accused of looting a home in the Gaza Strip during the Israeli offensive in December 2008 and January 2009 had returned the stolen money to its owner, along with a letter of apology. The Givati Brigade soldier confessed to stealing a credit card from the man's home and withdrawing NIS 1,600 in cash from that account upon his return to Israel. The Palestinian lodged a complaint and the soldier was arrested. The soldier returned the cash through his lawyer, with an additional NIS 20 in interest. (Haaretz)

Israeli authorities decided to open all three border terminals between Israel and the Gaza Strip, Kerem Shalom, Nahal Oz and Karni, for trucks carrying aid for the commercial and agricultural sectors, limited quantities of cooking gas and industrial diesel, as well as wheat and feed. (Ma'an News Agency)

Twenty-two aid workers, who had been stranded on the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip for two days, had been allowed into Gaza with medical equipment.

The 160-member group called Hope for Gaza Convoy had been waiting to deliver 25 ambulances, a kidney dialysis machine, wheelchairs and more than 47,000 dollars-worth of medicine paid for with money raised by charities and donations. (IMEMC, The Jerusalem Post)

More than 20 Israeli settlers attacked with clubs four Palestinian shepherds who were herding their sheep in the vicinity of the "Ma'on" and "Beit Yatir" settlements, east of Yatta village, near Hebron. The Israeli army did not attempt to intervene. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

An Israeli settler attacked a Palestinian woman near the Tappuah (Za'atara) checkpoint south of the city of Nablus in the West Bank. According to Palestinian security sources, the settler stopped his car near the checkpoint, got out and beat Thamina Khalil Abed Al-Hak, an Al-Quds University student, aged 21, from Qusra village south of Nablus. She was subsequently treated at the Yasser Arafat Hospital and reported to be in stable condition. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli officials said that Israel would dismantle 26 settlement outposts in the West Bank in the next few weeks if the US dropped its objections to continued building in existing, Government-sanctioned settlements under the pretext of natural growth. Defense Minister Ehud Barak will bring the new proposal to senior American officials during his visit to Washington during the coming week. The same day, chief Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qureia stated that the demand for a complete settlement freeze would be the main issue during the forthcoming talks that the Palestinian Authority President would have in Washington on 28 May. "Any attempt to manoeuvre on the implementation of the Road Map regarding settlement activities is unacceptable. What does a peace process mean when settlements are continuing on the Palestinian territories? What we want is to immediately dismantle all settlement outposts and to stop what is called the natural growth in the settlements, and to stop all settlement activities." (AP, The Guardian, IMEMC)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak stated that the United States must be told that Iran's nuclear programme and outpost activity in the West Bank were two unrelated issues. On 24 May he had indicated that Israel would remove 22 outposts, preferably through negotiations, but had provided no timeline. On 23 May, Deputy Defence Minister Matan Vilnai said that Israel's removal of about two dozen settler outposts in the West Bank had become a "central issue" for the current Government. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters, Ynetnews)

A Palestinian prisoner from Jenin, who had been released after serving a 12-year prison term, had been deported by Israel to Gaza, in violation of international law. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

An Israeli military tribunal sitting in the settlement of "Ofra" rejected a petition to release three Hamas lawmakers, Nizar Ramadan, Azzam Salhab and Ayman Daraghmah from prison, instead placing them under six months' administrative detention. The three were seized by Israeli forces on 19 March. (Ma'an News Agency)

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The Israeli Navy seized four Palestinian fishermen off the Gaza coast, the Palestinian-International Campaign against the Siege said. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli military said it had detained 11 Palestinians during overnight raids in the West Bank, bringing the total to 22 in the last three days. (Ma'an News Agency)

A Palestinian armed group, Jaysh Al-Umma (Army of the Nation), said that Hamas security forces had arrested seven of its members who were on a "Jihad mission" against Israeli forces in the southern Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli President Shimon Peres met in Jerusalem with a US congressional mission, led by Senator Robert Casey, chairman of the Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia. Mr. Peres told the senators Israel would be willing to pay a price for peace, including that of evacuating West Bank settlements and outposts. The Israeli Government, he added, intended to reignite the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. "It is a difficult path, but we cannot make the difficulties the centre of the peace process", he said. (Ynetnews)

Prime Minister Netanyahu, speaking in the Knesset, said that Israel was bound by agreements signed by previous Governments. He praised President Obama's push to revise the original Arab Peace Initiative in order to facilitate a regional agreement that would allow normalization between Israel and the entire Arab world. The Prime Minister, however, reiterated his insistence on "economic peace" and the need to first focus on "changing the situation on the ground." He urged Arab countries to make immediate moves towards normalizing ties with Israel and said he would offer "concrete" steps towards peace with the Palestinians. (AP, The Jerusalem Post)

During a press availability with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit in Washington, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "With respect to settlements, the President was very clear when Prime Minister Netanyahu was here. He wants to see a stop to settlements – not some settlements, not outposts, not natural growth exceptions. We think it is in the best interests of the effort that we are engaged in that settlement expansion ceases." She also said, "We are going to be putting forward very specific proposals to the Israelis and the Palestinians ... We've also been reaching out to Governments of Arab nations asking what they could be expected to do as we move forward to build confidence and to create a good atmosphere for decisions to be made. But I'm not going to negotiate in public. We are making a very concerted effort." (AP, www.state.gov)

The Jerusalem municipality issued orders to demolish 17 Palestinian homes in different parts of East Jerusalem under the pretext that they had been constructed without a permit. (IMEMC)

Newly-appointed PA Minister of Social Affairs Majida Al-Masri ordered a ministry-wide boycott of Israeli products as her first decision in her new role. The decision specifies that Palestinian products must have the priority, but if a certain product is unavailable, priority goes to Arab countries, then foreign equivalents. Israeli products are to be boycotted altogether. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli security forces evacuated two unauthorized outposts near Hebron, the "Federman Farm" and "Givat Avichai", also known as Hill 18. (The Jerusalem Post)

Prime Minister Netanyahu dispatched a team of confidants to London for talks with US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell that were expected to focus on Iran and the looming clash over settlement construction. Headed by Intelligence Services Minister Dan Meridor, the team included National Security Adviser Uzi Arad, and Mr. Netanyahu's aid, Yitzhak Molcho, who is in charge of the Palestinian diplomatic file inside the Prime Minister's Office. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israel decided to release the deputy mayor of Nablus, Mahdi Shaker Al-Hanbali, after holding him without trial for two years. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

28

Israeli troops killed a 45-year-old commander of Hamas' armed wing, Abdel al-Majid Dudin, pursued for allegedly organizing deadly suicide bombings inside Israel, in a shootout with soldiers and police in the village of Deir al-Assel al-Tahta, south-west of Hebron. Abu Obeida, the spokesman of the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades (armed wing of Hamas), said that Hamas fighters could retaliate, at any time or place, for the IDF killing. (*AFP, Haaretz*)

The Israeli military said it had detained 12 Palestinians in overnight raids in the West Bank. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

US President Obama held talks at the White House with PA President Abbas. After the talks, Mr. Obama said the two leaders had discussed ways to advance peace in the Middle East and reaffirm the core principles, reiterating his belief in a two-State solution. He said he had reiterated to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu during his recent visit the obligations contained in the Road Map, which were to help advance the interests of Israel, the Palestinian people and the United States. On the Israeli side, those obligations included stopping settlements and ensuring that there was a viable potential Palestinian State. On the Palestinian side, it was important to continue working with US Security Coordinator General Dayton, because Israel had to have some confidence that security in the West Bank was in place in order to advance the process and to work to reduce anti-Israeli incitement. (www.whitehouse.gov)

The Saudi daily newspaper *Okaz* said Egypt would invite PA President Abbas and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal to Cairo to sign a deal establishing a Palestinian national unity Government in early July. Hamas spokesman in Gaza, Fawzi Barhoum, denied that a date had been set. "The talks are still in progress and still face many obstacles", Mr. Barhoum said. (*DPA*)

Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev said that Israel would press ahead with settlement construction in the West Bank despite a previous-day reminder from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that all settlements and outposts must stop. He noted that Israel had pledged to build no new settlements and to remove unauthorized outposts. "The fate of existing settlements will be determined in peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians", he said. (*Haaretz*)

In its annual report, Amnesty International stated, concerning the Gaza conflict: "Israeli forces repeatedly breached the laws of war, including by carrying out direct attacks on civilians and civilian buildings, and attacks targeting Palestinian militants that caused a disproportionate toll among civilians ... This latest round of bloodletting again underscored the high degree of insecurity in the region and the failure of military forces, on both sides, to abide by the basic requirements of distinction and proportionality that are fundamental to the principles of international humanitarian law. It underlined also the continuing failure of the two sides, and of the international community, to resolve the long, bitter conflict, to bring peace, justice and security to the region, and to enable all people in the region to live in the dignity that is their human right." (*AFP, DPA, www.amnesty.org*)

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In an interview with *The Washington Post*, PA President Abbas said that he "will wait for Hamas to accept international commitments" and "will wait for Israel to freeze settlements", adding, "until then, in the West Bank we have a good reality ... the people are living a normal life". He said the US should tell the Israelis, "you have to comply with the conditions". (*The Washington Post*)

Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, said in a statement that Palestinians were encouraged by the commitment that US President Obama and his Administration had shown to Middle East peace. "Resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is central to regional stability and peace", Mr. Erakat said, adding, "the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, and a just resolution to the Palestinian refugee issue in accordance with UN resolution 194, will create a more secure and stable Middle East". (*Haaretz*)

Hamas spokesman in Gaza Fawzi Barhoum said the summit between President Obama and President Abbas would result only in putting "more pressure on Abbas ... to make more compromises on Palestinian rights and requirements". (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Fifteen Jordanian lawmakers of the National Democratic bloc in the lower house of Parliament urged the Government in a statement to sever diplomatic ties with Israel in protest against the debate in the Knesset regarding Jordan as an "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians. The group considered last week's discussion in the Knesset a violation of the peace treaty, which Jordan had concluded with Israel in 1994. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli soldiers injured four Palestinians, including the PA Minister of Social Affairs, Majeda Al-Masri, at a weekly anti-wall march in the northern West Bank village of Bil'in. After Friday prayers, demonstrators marched through the village towards the wall. As the protestors arrived at the wall, they were greeted with a barrage of stun grenades, tear gas and rubber-coated bullets from the Israeli soldiers. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a letter from Palestinian detainees inside Israeli prisons, the prisoners expressed their gratitude to PA President Abbas for making their plight a priority. The prisoners also called on Palestinian leaders to work toward a unity Government to solve the division between Hamas and Fatah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

United Nations Office at Geneva spokesman Rolando Gomez said that the independent fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict headed by Justice Richard Goldstone was leaving over the weekend and would be in the region next week. In response to another question, he said Justice Goldstone had said that he had written repeatedly to the Israeli Government and hoped to receive a positive response. (www.unog.ch)

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In a joint statement sent to reporters after a meeting of political leaders from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other factions, the groups said they would reject any international agreement PA President Abbas might strike "on behalf of our people that would target our people's rights under the guise of peace." They warned against the "US illusion of a new settlement under the slogan of a 'two-State solution'". (*DPA*)

31

In Qalqilya, Mohammed Samman, a leader of Hamas' military wing, and his assistant, Mohammed Yassin, were killed, along with a Hamas supporter who owned the house they were holed up in and three Palestinian policemen, following an eight-hour gun battle with PA police and paramilitary reinforcements from the Presidential Guard, National Security Force and Preventive Security Service. (*AP*)

"The Israeli side should honour their commitments, including the cessation of all forms of settlements whether it is natural growth or anything else", PA President Abbas told reporters after a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II on his way back home from Washington. "The Americans realize this and have urged the Israelis to carry it out as one of the steps to be taken for going back to the negotiations that should be conducted on the basis of the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative", he added. He denied as "baseless" reports that the US wanted to introduce changes into the initiative. (*DPA*)

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu appointed Hagai Hadas, a former commander in the Mossad, as Special Representative on the Return of the Abducted IDF Soldier Gilad Shalit. (*AFP, www.pmo.gov.il*)

Discussing next month's "Beyond Sports Summit" in London, Quartet Representative Tony Blair told *The Observer* that the event would recognize sporting projects that improved the lives of communities and promoted peacemaking. He cited a project that was bringing together thousands of Israeli and Palestinian youngsters who played basketball, letting them see each other as human beings and not "the enemy". (observer.guardian.co.uk)