

Division for Palestinian Rights  
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the  
 Question of Palestine**  
**Monthly media monitoring review**  
**January 2008**

**Monthly highlights**

- The Israeli-Palestinian Joint Economic Committee meets after a seven-year hiatus. ([2 January](#))
- PA President Abbas meets Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, instruct their teams to start negotiations on all final status issues. ([8 January](#))
- Secretary of State Rice says the US makes no distinction between settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, both are restricted by the Road Map. ([8 January](#))
- US President Bush meets Prime Minister Olmert in Jerusalem and PA President Abbas in Ramallah, outlines his vision of a future peace agreement. ([9-10 January](#))
- President Bush appoints Gen. William Fraser to monitor the Road Map implementation. ([10 January](#))
- Son of senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar among 19 Palestinians killed in Israeli operations in Gaza City. ([15 January](#))
- Israel closes all border crossings with the Gaza Strip used for the delivery of humanitarian aid. ([18 January](#))
- The Gaza Strip suffers a blackout after its only power plant was shut down for lack of fuel. ([21 January](#))
- Thousands of Palestinians cross into Egypt from the Gaza Strip through a border wall blown up by militants. ([23 January](#))
- Israel authorizes the construction of nearly 2,500 new housing units in settlements in East Jerusalem. ([23 January](#))
- Human Rights Council adopts a resolution on human rights violations caused by Israeli military incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. ([24 January](#))
- The European Commission announces the launching of PEGASE. ([28 January](#))

**I**

Israeli shelling in the central Gaza Strip killed a member of Hamas. (AFP)

Senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar said that his movement rejected the principle of holding early legislative elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. At a news conference in the Gaza Strip, he said, "Abu Mazen [Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas] didn't present any new initiative. He was repeating an earlier initiative that contains a resumption of the dialogue with preconditions.... we should first end all kinds of incitement, and use the mass media for rebuilding confidence and calling for national unity." (Xinhua)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that the methods of roadblocks had proved themselves and that there was no way to efficiently fight terrorism without actual daily control of the area. Speaking during a tour of the West Bank, the Israeli Defense Minister, nevertheless, promised that Israel was trying to make life easier for the Palestinians by opening roadblocks on the outskirts in the area. (Haaretz)

**2**

Israeli air strikes in the northern Gaza Strip killed seven Palestinian militants, Hamas' Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades said. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said that one of their activists had been killed in clashes with invading Israeli forces. An IDF spokeswoman said that there had been an operation in the northern Gaza Strip during which Israeli troops had returned fire after coming under attack before calling in air support. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency)

At a press conference with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, visiting PA President Abbas said: "When he arrives in the region, President Bush must speak clearly about eliminating all obstacles which are hindering negotiations and, that settlement activity is the main obstacle... It is impossible for negotiations to continue as long as settlements continue." He urged Hamas to adopt a positive position towards his latest dialogue initiative based on ending Hamas control in the Gaza Strip and holding early elections. "The initial reaction from Hamas was not encouraging, but we hope that reason will prevail to allow a positive response," he said. The talks between Mr. Mubarak and Mr. Abbas had also focused on Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, as well as the steering committee established to guide peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians after the Annapolis Conference. Mr. Abbas said that Egypt was exerting strenuous efforts to get Palestinian pilgrims back home. (AFP, Xinhua)

"Israel should honour its commitment to halting settlement building and expanding existing ones," Jordan's Prime Minister Nader Dahabi told a group of visiting US congressmen in Amman. "Settlements violate international legitimacy and the principles of peace," Mr. Dahabi was quoted as saying. (Petra News Agency)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that Israel would watch closely to see whether the PA would fulfil its promise to indict two suspects in the killing of two off-duty Israeli soldiers near Hebron, adding that, otherwise, the Israeli defense establishment would know how to get them. The suspects are members of Fatah and one of them belongs to the PA security services, Israeli officials told AFP. (AFP, Haaretz)

Prime Minister Olmert told *The Jerusalem Post* in an interview that if Israel had to "...deal with a reality of one State for two peoples... it could bring about the end of the existence of Israel as a Jewish State." He said, "The world that is friendly to Israel... speaks of Israel in terms of the 1967 borders. It speaks of the division of Jerusalem." President Bush "has already said 67 plus," he said, "and that's an amazing achievement for Israel." Thus, Mr. Olmert asserted, while the Road Map obligated Israel to stop all building in the settlements, including natural growth, the 2004 Bush letter "renders flexible to a degree the significance of what is written in the Road Map." He said he considered "Ma'aleh Adumim" to be "an indivisible part of Jerusalem and the State of Israel. I don't think when people are talking about settlements they are talking about 'Ma'aleh Adumim'." Mr. Olmert said that he was convinced, too, that PA President Abbas "has made the choice in his heart between clinging to the myth of the right of return" and the opportunity to establish a Palestinian State where all Palestinians, refugees included, would live. "It's a coincidence that is almost the hand of God," Mr. Olmert added, "that Bush is President of the United States, that Nicolas Sarkozy is the President of France, that Angela Merkel is the Chancellor of Germany, that Gordon Brown is the Prime Minister of England and that the Special Envoy to the Middle East is Tony Blair... What possible combination could be more comfortable for the State of Israel?" Asked to comment on Mr. Olmert's statements, a top PA official in Ramallah said, "Peace and settlements don't go together. If this is his policy, he can forget about finding a partner on the Palestinian side... These are all illegal

settlements that were built on occupied lands belonging to the Palestinian people," he said. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

The Israeli-Palestinian Joint Economic Committee, headed by Israeli Finance Ministry Director-General Yarom Ariav and PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, had convened for the first time after a seven-year hiatus, the Israeli Finance Ministry said. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

3

Israeli tanks and warplanes attacked a series of targets throughout the Gaza Strip, killing at least nine Palestinians. Three civilians were among those killed and more than 40 people were wounded, including five children. A 14-year-old boy was in critical condition. In one attack, an Israeli tank shell struck the home of a Hamas militant in the southern town of Khan Yunis, killing the man as well as his sister, mother and brother. Israeli aircraft attacked the homes of two militants killed in earlier fighting. Officials said that both structures were empty, but one of the air strikes in Gaza City wounded nine bystanders. The IDF said that the air strikes had targeted buildings used by militants, including one weapons storehouse, and had been in response to the firing of a rocket at Ashkelon earlier in the day. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

The IDF raided Nablus and imposed a curfew on the city centre. The army said that the troops had been searching for militants. Palestinian sources reported that at least 10 Palestinians had been wounded in clashes between IDF forces and local protestors. Soldiers opened fire as Palestinians threw Molotov cocktails and stones. A young Palestinian was shot and wounded by Israeli soldiers who raided the village of Far'un, south of Tulkarm. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*) Seven rockets were fired from the northern Gaza Strip at Sderot and Ashkelon. One rocket struck a home in Sderot where several people suffered from shock. Another landed near a hotel in Ashkelon. Islamic Jihad's Saraya Al-Quds Brigades and the Al-Nasser Salah ad-Din Brigades, the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for the rocket fire into Israel. "We are going to launch more strikes into the depth of the entity," they said in a joint statement. Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said that the rocket fired at Ashkelon was a "Katyusha" military-type weapon, which travelled about 17 km. (*AP, Ynetnews*)

IDF forces operating in Nablus found two pipes resembling Qassam rockets in the later stages of assembly in a laboratory there, military sources said. (*Ynetnews*) The Israeli National Security Council, in a report submitted to the Government, warned that Palestinian rockets might reach farther cities, such as Ashdod, Kiryat Gat and Ofakim, due to new technological developments. (*Ynetnews*)

"We consider what's going on in Gaza ... as a bloody Israeli message in which Israel shirks itself of any commitment before the arrival of President Bush to the region," said Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for PA President Abbas. "They are killing the spirit of the Annapolis Conference," he added. "The Palestinians have attacked a major Israeli city [Ashkelon] ... and thus have upped the ante," said Israeli Government spokesman David Baker. "Israel will not allow any cities to be attacked by Palestinian rocket fire." (*AP*)

Israel would seek to reach an understanding with President Bush during his forthcoming visit, Israeli Government sources said, which could serve as a basis for the work of the US Special Envoy for Middle East Security, Gen. James Jones. Israel wants to maintain effective military superiority in the West Bank during the final status talks, and ensure that it has the freedom to act against militant groups in the Gaza Strip. Israel would like the US to agree to a number of limitations on the future Palestinian State's sovereignty. Israel wants it to be completely demilitarized, and for Israel to be able to fly over Palestinian air space. Border crossings would be monitored by Israel. Israel is to propose the deployment of an international force in the West Bank and along the Salah al-Din ("Philadelphia") corridor, and would ask that an IDF "tripwire force" remain for an extended period in the Jordan Valley. Israel would also demand Palestinian agreement that in the case of an emergency Israel could deploy troops in "essential" areas of the West Bank. (*Haaretz*)

"There are big duties under way, including the negotiations that are expected in the coming months and the results of President Bush's visit to the region which are supposed to have positive effects on the peace process," PA Presidency spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said. He said that PA President Abbas would visit Saudi Arabia on 5 January after brief visits to Jordan and Egypt. Mr. Abbas' tour was part of the coordination with the Arab leaders ahead of President Bush's visit to the region. (*Xinhua*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan met with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert in Aqaba. The King warned that a stalled peace process threatened the region's future and its security and stability. He said that Jordan opposed "any settlement activity on Palestinian lands, urged Israel to halt unilateral activities that may obstruct progress in the negotiations and called for adopting serious and practical policies that reflect its stated desire for peace." The Israeli Prime Minister reiterated his pledge that Israel would cease building new settlements and refrain from expropriating land in the West Bank. (*AFP, Ynetnews*)

President Bush told *Reuters* in an interview: "I will talk about Israeli settlement expansion, about how that is, that can be... an impediment to success... The unauthorized outposts for example need to be dismantled, like the Israelis said they would do." (*Reuters*)

"The coup in the Gaza Strip is a temporary situation, which will come to an end regardless of all the conspiracies," former PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said during the celebrations in Ramallah of the 43rd anniversary of the establishment of Fatah. He called for an agreement on a date for new legislative and presidential elections. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Supreme Court refused to issue an injunction against fuel cuts to the Gaza Strip, saying that human rights groups had failed to prove that the Israeli measure would cause humanitarian harm. (*AP*)

4

Israeli troops killed two Hamas gunmen in clashes near Beit Hanoun, Hamas and local medical staff said. (*Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Israeli soldiers shot and wounded a Palestinian in Nablus, medical sources said, and also a 15-year-old Palestinian child near Hebron. (*Wafa*)

The IDF arrested 14 Palestinians in Nablus and Tulkarm, security sources said. (*Wafa*)

Four Qassam rockets landed in Sderot, one of which struck the yard of a home in the town, causing damage. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack. (*Ynetnews*)

PA Prime Minister Fayyad said in a statement: "These [Israeli military] operations destroy our efforts in the field of security, which started bearing fruit lately in a way that people felt the change." (*Reuters*)

"We are ready for a dialogue [with Fatah] without conditions. Our hands are extended and all matters should be put on the table including elections," Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said. He told a rally that Hamas had rejected a European offer for mediation with Israel to discuss a possible truce and that the Palestinian people had no choice other than resistance. (*Haaretz*)

"I hope and assess that, in the coming period, and thereafter, during the US President's visit to Israel and afterwards, real steps will be taken to remove those [unauthorized settlement] outposts," Israel's Vice Premier Haim Ramon told *Israel Radio*. (*Haaretz*)

"The Palestinian Authority rejects talk about a demilitarized Palestinian State," a senior PA official said. "Every day Israel sends yet another message that it does not want peace with its neighbours." (*The Jerusalem Post*)

French President Nicolas Sarkozy arrived in Aqaba for talks with Jordan's King Abdullah II, a Royal Palace statement said. Mr. Sarkozy's office in Paris said that the talks between the two leaders would focus on the situation in the Middle East and ways to push forward the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, as well as bilateral relations between Jordan and France. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

5

"Six or seven rockets were fired. One landed in Sderot, damaging some vehicles," an IDF spokesman said. (*AFP*)

Israeli forces killed five members of a family in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel's Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai said that he would be willing to release Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti in exchange for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. (*AP*)

PA President Abbas held talks with Saudi King Abdullah. The two leaders "examined the latest developments concerning the Palestinian question and the peace process in the aftermath of the Annapolis Conference," the news agency *SPA* reported. (*AFP*)

6

An Israeli aircraft targeted a rocket launch site in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, killing one of the two armed men spotted there, the IDF said. Palestinian officials said that the dead man was a member of the Popular Resistance Committees. One Hamas security man was killed late during the day by an Israeli strike in the same area and three other Palestinians were critically wounded, according to a Palestinian health official. (*AP*)

Five Palestinians were killed and five IDF soldiers were wounded during an IDF operation in the Bureij refugee camp in the centre of the Gaza Strip. Three Palestinians, including a woman and a 14-year-old boy, were killed when an Israeli artillery shell hit their house. (*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert told his Cabinet that the IDF had been ordered to step up its operation to halt the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip. However, *Haaretz* quoted an Israeli defense source as saying that the IDF was not planning a wide-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip, though it had stepped up its use of warplanes. (*Haaretz*)

"Negotiations for the release of Gilad Shalit are underway, but the release of [Marwan] Barghouti is not on the agenda," a senior official in Prime Minister Olmert's office told reporters on condition of anonymity. (AFP)

"We are planning a meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas on Tuesday to discuss negotiations and core issues," an Israeli official told AFP on condition of anonymity, adding that the meeting had not yet been finalized. (AFP)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that a special council would be formed to reconcile Hamas and Fatah. The council's role would be discussed in the next meeting of Foreign Ministers scheduled for 27 January, he said. "The Arab Ministers discussed three main issues at today's [Foreign Ministers] meeting," he told a press conference in Cairo. "The dangerous situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in light of the dangerous Israeli activities" was the first issue of concern, according to Mr. Moussa, who added that a second concern was the non-stop Israeli settlement activity. He added: "The third issue is a resolution calling on the Palestinian sides, Hamas and Fatah, to pursue internal dialogue, to stress national Palestinian unity and the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization." (Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA))

US Congressman Steve Israel met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheik. Mr. Israel said in a statement issued after the meeting. "I also thanked him for his commitment to dedicate \$23 million of the... funding the United States provides Egypt for the purchase and use of highly technical tunnel detection equipment." The congressman said that the US Army Corps of Engineers would train Egyptians to stop smuggling into the Gaza Strip. (AP)

The Gaza Strip's power plant will reduce electricity supplied to the population by eight hours a day, up to 12 hours in some areas, due to an Israeli Supreme Court's decision to uphold cuts in fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip, officials said. (Reuters)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh called on France to come to the aid of Palestinians, saying that its officials in the Gaza Strip were "prepared to cooperate with all international efforts to establish security and stability in the region." (AFP)

7

A Qassam rocket hit western Negev, landing in an open field. There were no injuries or damage in the incident. (Haaretz)

An IDF force manning a roadblock near Jenin opened fire on a group of approaching militants, killing one of them. Earlier, IDF troops had shot and killed two armed Palestinians who had approached the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing in the northern Gaza Strip. Islamic Jihad said that the two were its members, one of them a female suicide bomber who detonated herself near the border fence. (Haaretz)

Israeli forces arrested 11 Palestinians accused of being members of Hamas in Nablus, Palestinian security sources said. At least 30 Palestinian farmers were arrested by the IDF in Beit Lahiya, witnesses said, while Israeli bulldozers cleared a vast area of arable land. Local sources said that 14 Palestinians were arrested in Jenin. (AFP, Wafa)

Five Palestinians from the same family were injured when an Israeli plane fired a missile at their house in Gaza City. (BBC)

Israel will tell President Bush during his visit to the region this week that it is committed to acting "expeditiously" to dismantle unauthorized West Bank settlement outposts, a spokesman for Prime Minister Olmert said. PA President Abbas told reporters: "We wish for him first to ask the Israelis to stop the settlement building and ... guarantee once more the ending of the occupation that happened in 1967". He said that a future Palestine should be founded alongside Israel, with "Jerusalem as capital of the two States: East Jerusalem for Palestinians and West Jerusalem for the Israelis". (AP, Reuters)

The Israeli Defense Ministry wants to block the publication of a database containing full details about Israeli settlement and outpost construction in the West Bank, on the grounds that it would harm Israel's security and foreign relations, according to a court document AP obtained. "Israel won't release the list because it doesn't want to be embarrassed diplomatically," an Israeli Government official said, who spoke on condition of anonymity. According to Haaretz, the database shows extensive building had been carried out without permits in dozens of settlements and unauthorized settlement outposts. The Movement for Freedom of Information in Israel and Peace Now had petitioned a Tel Aviv court to have the database released. (AP, Haaretz)

Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams were due to meet later in the day to discuss the logistics of their negotiations. "I hope that we'll be able to announce before [President] Bush's arrival an agreement on the structural aspect of negotiations, such as who will discuss what," a senior Israeli said. (AFP)

The Israeli human rights group Yesh Din reported that Israeli military courts had often ignored the basic rules of due process in trials involving more than 150,000 Palestinians since the West Bank was occupied in 1967. (AFP)

8

Israeli troops seized two Hamas leaders in the West Bank, three days after they had been held and questioned by PA security forces. (Reuters)

Israeli soldiers had seized a Palestinian police officer and a member of Fatah in Ramallah, Israeli sources said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Ten top Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades militants, including their Nablus commander, surrendered their weapons to PA security forces in Nablus. The Governor of Nablus, Jamal Muhessein, said that the gunmen would stay in a PA security installation for three months. He said that all the men had signed a pledge to refrain from carrying out military activities against Israel and obey orders of the PA leadership. (Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post)

PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met on the eve of the visit by President Bush to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Prime Minister Olmert's spokesman Mark Regev said that the two leaders authorized their teams to conduct "direct and ongoing negotiations" on all the core issues. PA spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said: "We expect that President Bush will press Israel to freeze settlement activities and stress the end of the occupation of Palestinian land as preparation for the two-State solution". (AP, DPA, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Xinhua)

Haaretz reported that Israeli right-wing activists planned to build 60 new apartments in the settlement of "Ma'aleh Hazaytim" on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem's Old City, which already housed 51 families. The Jerusalem Municipality had approved the private initiative. Palestinians had requested its non-built-up area for the creation of a corridor between the eastern West Bank and the Old City Muslim quarter. (DPA, Haaretz)

A group of Palestinian entrepreneurs requested the establishment of an independent Palestinian entity to take charge of operating the crossings into the Gaza Strip.

Sa'id Abu Oof, a businessman, said that Israel was taking advantage of the crisis in the Gaza Strip to benefit Israeli traders. Jamal Al-Khudari, Head of the Popular Committee for Confronting the Siege on the Gaza Strip, said in a press conference that Israel had detained goods worth more than \$150 million. He also said that over 3,500 Palestinian factories had suffered losses, and about 60,000 workers had lost their jobs. (Ma'an News Agency)

"What has to happen in order for there to be a peaceful settlement of a long-standing dispute is there to be outlines of a State clearly defined," President Bush said at the White House before embarking on his Middle East visit. "So that at some point in time the Palestinians who agree that Israel ought to exist and agree that the State ought to live side-by-side with Israel in peace have something to be for..." I intend to work with our Arab friends and allies on this very issue and remind them about, one, the strategy and, two, the obligations they have to help this vision become a reality," he said. (DPA, Reuters)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told The Jerusalem Post that "the United States doesn't make a distinction" between settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and that the Road Map restrictions were on "settlement activity generally." "Har Homa is a settlement the United States has opposed from the very beginning," she added. (The Jerusalem Post)

PA Prime Minister Fayyad protested Israel's incursion into Nablus to Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak. "The Prime Minister considers this operation to be an unjustified aggression which can only be interpreted as an attempt by Israel to cloud the issue and avoid its political obligations under the false pretext of security," an official in Mr. Fayyad's office said. (AFP)

9

An Israeli strike in the northern Gaza Strip killed two Palestinians and injured four others, Palestinian security officials and medics said. The IDF said that it had attacked a Qassam rocket crew. (AP, Haaretz)

Israeli police said that 12 projectiles had been fired from the Gaza Strip, including seven that landed inside Israel. One rocket had hit a home in Sderot. No serious injuries were reported. (Haaretz)

For the first time since June 2007, three Arab Israeli doctors from the group "Physicians for Human Rights" entered the Gaza Strip to administer medical treatment to residents. (Haaretz)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said in a joint press conference with President Bush in Jerusalem: "We made clear that Jerusalem's status was different from that of other settlements... The President did not ask me for further commitments in addition to the ones I gave in Annapolis. Not everyone likes what we have to say about this, but we have made clear Jerusalem's status was different from that of the settlements... We will not discuss all these issues as part of negotiations." (<http://www.whitehouse.org>)

The US "is not looking for big deliverables out of a trip of this sort," President Bush's National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley told reporters. He described as "very encouraging" an agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas to start negotiations on the key issues of the conflict. "That's one

of the things the President wanted to accomplish on this trip," Mr. Hadley said. "I think it's helped that he was going." Mr. Bush "will hear from the parties...And I think he will say some words that are encouraging to the process, but I don't think you're going to see him jumping into the middle of negotiations," Mr. Hadley said. (AFP)

"I come with high hopes," President Bush said upon arrival in Israel. "And the role of the United States will be to foster a vision of peace. The role of the Israeli leadership and the Palestinian leadership is going to do the hard work necessary to define a vision... The alliance between our two nations helps guarantee Israel's security as a Jewish State." "The next 12 months will be a moment of truth," Israel's President Shimon Peres told Mr. Bush at the arrival ceremony. "It must not yield just words." "You are our strongest and most trusted ally in the battle against terrorism and fundamentalism and a staunch supporter of our quest for peace and stability," Prime Minister Olmert said. After his meeting with President Peres, Mr. Bush was expected to meet Mr. Olmert for joint talks with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, which would touch upon negotiations with the PA as well as Israel's security needs. (AP, Haaretz)

A senior PA official told *The Jerusalem Post*: "Before we talk about deploying foreign troops in the West Bank, we must talk about the need to halt construction in the settlements and remove the Israeli checkpoints. In any case, we are opposed to the presence of non-Palestinian security forces in the Palestinian territories."

*The Jerusalem Post* reported that US Special Envoy for Middle East Security James Jones had been assigned the task of preparing a plan to secure the area after an Israeli withdrawal and before the PA can take over full security control. (The Jerusalem Post)

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem said in an interview: "We are ready to restart peace negotiations on the Syrian peace track and are not opposed to progress along the Palestinian track... We do not wish for a military solution for Israel." (AFP)

The Israeli State informed the High Court of Justice that the Palestinian owner of a disputed building in Hebron was undoubtedly in possession of the property when settlers took it over in March 2007. (The Jerusalem Post)

10

Israeli settlers attempted to seize a plot of Palestinian land in Hebron to establish a new outpost near the Israeli settlement of "Kiryat Arba". Local sources said that the settlers had occupied land belonging to Mahmoud Jabir and had begun erecting tents. (Ma'an News Agency)

US President Bush arrived in Ramallah where he held a joint [press conference](#) after meeting with PA President Abbas. He said that "Swiss cheese is not going to work when it comes to the outline of a State and I mean that." When a journalist suggested to President Bush to ask Israel to accept UN resolutions, President Bush replied: "I am asking Israel to negotiate in good faith with an elected leader of the Palestinian Authority to come up with a permanent solution that – look, the UN deal didn't work in the past." PA President Abbas said: "The settlement for us is considered an obstacle for negotiations, and we have spoken more than once with Prime Minister Olmert, very frankly. And we also spoke in this meeting with President Bush, and consequently, the President understood this issue. And we have heard the statements given by the Secretary of State, Dr. Rice, and she has – her point of view regarding settlements was very positive." (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>)

In his [statement](#) made in Jerusalem, Mr. Bush said: "There should be an end to the occupation that began in 1967. The agreement must establish Palestine as a homeland for the Palestinian people, just as Israel is a homeland for the Jewish people. These negotiations must ensure that Israel has secure, recognized, and defensible borders. And they must ensure that the State of Palestine is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent ... While territory is an issue for both parties to decide, I believe that any peace agreement between them will require mutually agreed adjustments to the armistice lines of 1949 to reflect current realities and to ensure that a Palestinian State is viable and contiguous. I believe we need to look to the establishment of a Palestinian State and new international mechanisms, including compensation, to resolve the refugee issue." He also said, "I reaffirm to each leader that implementation of any agreement is subject to implementation of the Road Map. Neither party should undertake any activity that contravenes Road Map obligations or prejudices final status negotiations. On the Israeli side that includes ending settlement expansion and removing unauthorized outposts. On the Palestinian side that includes confronting terrorism and dismantling terrorist infrastructure... Security is fundamental. No agreement and no Palestinian State will be born of terror. I reaffirm America's steadfast commitment to Israel's security." (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>)

President Bush named Lt. Gen. William Fraser III to help monitor the Road Map commitments. Gen. Fraser had served as Assistant to the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Haaretz, Reuters, Xinhua)

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd told AFP in Cairo that the growing isolation of the Gaza Strip was helping extremists. "What you are seeing in Gaza, and even more so since June, is that people from the extremes are taking over more than those who appear ready to compromise, as a result of the isolation... People have been saying that since the beginning of the intifada that it can't get worse but for seven and a half years it's been getting worse ... We are seeing evidence of stunting of children, their growth is slowing, because our ration is only sixty-one per cent of what people should have and that has to be supplemented." She also said, "People living for seven and half years just on flour, oil, lentils, a bit of milk powder and sugar – that is not a sufficient diet for a healthy person ... there is no fertilizer and they can't take the food from the field to the city because people don't have any money for fuel or even a donkey cart ... Schools students used to do really well but now a large percentage are failing very basic subjects and it's obviously attributable to the conflict and trauma." (AFP)

B'Nai B'rith International issued the result of a survey of Israelis indicating strong support for an undivided Jerusalem and strong opposition to the withdrawal to 1967 borders. Sixty-eight per cent of Israelis felt that Jerusalem should remain the undivided capital of Israel while 29 per cent favoured it being divided and becoming the capital of both States. Sixty-six percent of Israelis opposed withdrawal, while 26 per cent supported a return to the 1967 borders. (<http://www.bnaibrith.org>)

12

Israeli warplanes killed two Hamas members and wounded at least six other Palestinians in the southern Gaza Strip. Twelve Palestinians were injured and four detained in Hebron after Israeli settlers invaded a Palestinian home. (Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

13

Israeli warplanes killed three Palestinian militants and seriously injured another two in the Gaza Strip. Earlier in the day, eight mortar shells had fallen on the Israeli village of Netiv Ha'asara without causing casualties, according to an Israeli military spokesman. (AFP, DPA, Ma'an News Agency)

The Israeli Government informed the High Court of Justice: "After completing its staff work, which started before the petitioners filed their urgent requests to the High Court, and without any connection to them, the Minister of Defense gave his approval today to increase, for the time being and temporarily, the amount of industrial diesel [fuel] to the Gaza Strip to 2.2 million litres per week, similar to the amount supplied before the sanctions went into effect." "The idea is to give them an increased amount of fuel so they can quickly fill their tankers and when they are full, then cut the supplies," a Defense official told *The Jerusalem Post*. (BBC, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency)

Canadian Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier met with Palestinian leaders in Ramallah. The Foreign Minister pledged \$300 million in new aid to the Palestinians, to be allocated over the next five years, according to a statement by the Canadian Government. The Foreign Minister said that the aid would support Palestinian efforts to "promote balance and to combat hatred and the incitement of violence ... the aid is not unconditional. We will need to see demonstrable progress in negotiations on both sides, as well as progress in Palestinian reforms... We are doing this because we want Israel to be able to live in peace and security with its neighbours." (AP, Haaretz)

Prime Minister Olmert declared that it was "a disgrace" that dozens of unauthorized settlements were standing four years after Israel had promised to dismantle them.

The Yesha Settlers' Council issued a statement warning the Prime Minister not to forcefully evict the settlers. (AP, Haaretz)

PA President Abbas told a meeting of the Palestine Central Council: "The idea of offering us a State with temporary borders is totally rejected, and [we] will keep rejecting them." The President also said that "we agreed with President Bush to work on three major tracks ... The first track is the peace negotiations on permanent status issues ... the second is the implementation of the first phase of the road map and the third is the track of economy and security." (Xinhua)

According to a Shin Bet report, roughly 1,000 Palestinians had been killed in various Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip in the previous two years. Minister of Public Security Abraham Dichter told the Israeli Security Cabinet's weekly meeting that about five per cent of the militants in the Gaza Strip had been killed and that the total number of militants operating in the Strip had been estimated at some 20,000. The Minister called on the Israeli Government to change the method of action so that the attrition warfare against Sderot and the Gaza Strip vicinity would cease. (Xinhua)

Egyptian security forces discovered a number of explosive devices in a tunnel in northern Rafah. (AFP, DPA)

Israeli security personnel had thwarted an attempt to smuggle two tons of a chemical that could be used to manufacture explosives and rockets from Israel into the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing, the Israel Airports Authority said. The substance had been disguised as humanitarian aid. (Haaretz)

The PA Intelligence Service said that it had discovered a bag containing 16 kg of explosives and a home-made rocket ready to be launched in Nablus. "What has been seized... was a simple home-made explosive device, and not a projectile," the Governor of Nablus said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said that for the time being he opposed a broad IDF offensive in the Gaza Strip. The Prime Minister said he "very much recommends that we do not get ourselves embroiled in operations and in paying prices that are disproportionate to the constraints we are dealing with." (Haaretz, Xinhua)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and the Head of the Palestinian Negotiating Team, Ahmed Qureia, held a round of talks on final status issues in Jerusalem. "It was an exploratory session, and we exchanged our views on how to approach the core issues," said Mr. Qureia. The negotiators agreed to meet on an approximately weekly basis to continue the negotiations, away from the media spotlight, Israeli officials said. Prime Minister Olmert told the Knesset: "We reached a joint understanding that the different issues must not be separated, and that each sub-issue should not have a subcommittee... We preferred that the team heads – Livni and Abu Ala [Qureia] would be directly responsible for the discussion of all issues, and would be able to bring in relevant experts to each discussion." (AP, Reuters, Ynetnews)

The Palestine Central Council concluded its two-day meeting in Ramallah by calling on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to stop the Israeli aggression in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and urging the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution in opposition to Israel's attacks. The Council welcomed the call by PA President Abbas to resume dialogue with Hamas, "turning a new page in intra-Palestinian relations." It also called on Hamas to respond positively and relinquish control of the Gaza Strip as a step towards dialogue. The Council also called for reactivating the PLO's institutions, reaffirming the role of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It also stated its rejection of "opposition conspiracies," including the Hamas-organized conference scheduled to begin on 23 January in Damascus. The Council also reaffirmed the decision taken in July 2007 to speed up the formation of a comprehensive Palestinian committee comprising the PLO's Executive Committee, the PA and the Palestinian political factions. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim announced that he had accepted Palestinian citizenship. "I accept this citizenship because it symbolizes the everlasting bond between the Israeli and Palestinian people," *The Jerusalem Post* quoted him saying after a concert in Ramallah. (AFP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters)

## 15

IDF troops killed 19 Palestinians in ground and air operations in Gaza City. At least 14 were members of armed groups, officials said, including a son of senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar. One of the civilian fatalities was a 65-year-old man, they said. Some 50 Palestinians were wounded in the fighting, among them an 8-year-old boy who was seriously hurt, medical officials said. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Wafa)

A Palestinian sniper fired into Israel and killed a volunteer from Ecuador, who was working in a field near the Gaza Strip border fence, Kibbutz Ein Hashlosa's security chief said. Hamas' military wing claimed responsibility. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Palestinians fired a Grad rocket at Ashkelon. There were no injuries reported. Four Israelis, including an 8-year-old child, were injured in a Qassam attack on Sderot. Hamas claimed responsibility. (Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Israeli settlers from the "Beit Hadassah" outpost in the centre of Hebron had thrown a Molotov cocktail into a Palestinian home, the owner said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel had begun constructing apartments in the East Jerusalem settlement of "Ma'aleh Hazaytim" in the city's Ras al-Amud neighbourhood, according to an AFP correspondent who visited the area. "We are building 66 new apartments in three buildings," said the manager of the construction site. "We have all the necessary papers and authorization for the construction work." Israeli settler activists ascribe great significance to construction in Ras al-Amud because it would make it harder to create a Palestinian territorial corridor between the West Bank and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. (AFP, Haaretz)

The right-wing Elad settlement organization is refusing to vacate a building in the Jerusalem Peace Forest that had been promised to an organization for the disabled. (Haaretz)

"There was a massacre today against our people, and we say to the world that our people will not remain silent against such crimes," PA President Abbas said. The PA Government said in a statement that Israel's "ugly crimes were a slap in the face" to efforts by President Bush and the international community to resume peacemaking that would lead to the creation of a Palestinian State. PA Information Minister Riyad Malki said that the Government would call on the US, the EU and the UN to put international pressure on Israel to stop its violent attack against the residents of the Gaza Strip. He also demanded an international force to enter the Gaza Strip to protect the Palestinians from Israeli attacks. Israel's President Shimon Peres said that as long as Gaza Strip militants continued to fire rockets into Israel, "we are left without a choice but to answer and stop it". "This crime is the fruit of US President George Bush's visit to the region," Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar told reporters. (DPA, Haaretz, Wafa)

"The negotiations are still in their beginning," PA President Abbas told reporters in Ramallah after the latest meeting of the Israeli and Palestinian negotiation teams.

"If the desire and the true intentions among the Israeli side became available, then we would be able to make peace this year," Mr. Abbas said. Palestinian negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo said that the negotiations were "a long and complicated political struggle where the results can't easily come." (Xinhua)

The United States clarified to Israel during President Bush's visit that it disapproved of all building in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including in the large settlement blocks, a senior Western diplomat said. The diplomat added that Israel and the US differed on their interpretation of the letter President Bush had sent to former Prime Minister Sharon in April 2004. According to the diplomat, Mr. Bush was steadfast in his objection to building in West Bank settlements and East Jerusalem. "The American Government also opposes construction due to the natural growth of the present settlers", he said. He added, however, that if progress is made on the border issues it may help to resolve the settlement issue. The diplomat also said that the US supported the opening of the Gaza Strip crossings, especially Al-Muntar (Kam), by manning them with forces subordinate to PA Prime Minister Fayyad. (Haaretz)

## 16

Israeli forces killed senior Saraya Al-Quds leader Walid Al-Ubaidy, wounded two militants, and arrested another two in a gun battle near Jenin. Mr. Al-Ubaidy had been on Israel's "wanted" list since 2002. (AFP, DPA, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

Palestinian militants fired some 40 rockets at southern Israel. A house in Sderot was damaged and several people were treated for shock. Islamic Jihad took responsibility for the attack. (Haaretz)

An Israeli helicopter fired missiles at a car in the central Gaza Strip killing three Palestinians from the same family, including a 13-year-old boy, and injuring five others, two of whom were in serious condition. IDF spokesperson Maj. Avital Leibovich acknowledged that the family's vehicle had been "unintentionally hit ... an investigation has been opened." In another incident, Hamas said that an IDF missile strike had destroyed a car, killing its two occupants and wounding at least three others. The IDF confirmed the strike and said that the vehicle had been carrying a load of weapons. At a press conference in Gaza City, a senior health official said that there was a shortage of coffins in the Gaza Strip, and the ongoing Israeli aggression would result in a humanitarian disaster because of the lack of medicines and medical equipment. (AFP, AP, DPA, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews)

Eleven Israeli families had moved into the "Ir David" settlement in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem, an official from the Elad organization, which had been actively involved in buying houses and moving Israeli families, said. The settlement, where 60 families had already settled, is centred in the "City of David" archaeological site, where Israeli archaeologists claimed to have uncovered ruins of Jerusalem as it existed at the time of the Kingdom of Israel. (AFP)

IDF troops evacuated two makeshift settlement outposts near Nablus. (Haaretz)

PA Prime Minister Fayyad condemned "the heinous massacre committed by the occupation army in the Gaza Strip... the criminal acts, which are the continuation of the bloody cycle of violence, are unjustifiable and have cultivated more hatred and hostility. They are contrary to all international norms and laws," the Prime Minister said. He also sent condolences to all the families of those killed, including Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Zahhar. Palestinians in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip observed a general strike. (AP, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Xinhua)

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said in a press conference with President Bush in Sharm el-Sheikh: "The Palestinian question is the core of problems and conflicts in the Middle East, and it is the entry to contain the crisis and tension in the region, and the best means to face what's going on in the world, and in our region – I mean by that, the escalation of violence, extremism and terrorism" (Haaretz)

The Libyan Ministry for Foreign Communication and International Cooperation issued a statement condemning the Israeli raids in the Gaza Strip. The statement said that the massacres committed by the Israeli forces violated international law and the Charter of the United Nations. (Xinhua)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal told a news conference: "If the enemy believes that its actions will cause us to waive our demands, it is wrong ...

What you are committing will deprive you of anything you are betting on. There will be no exchange involving [IDF soldier] Gilad Shalit, no calm or nothing of this sort." (*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews*)

According to a recent Shin Bet report, Israeli forces had killed 810 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in 2006 and 2007, and an estimated 200 of those killed were not clearly linked to militant organizations. However, an investigation by *Haaretz* showed that the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces during those two years stood at 816, and that 360 of them were civilians not affiliated with any armed organizations. Data from B'Tselem showed that 152 of the casualties were under the age of 18, and 48 under the age of 14. (*Haaretz*)

The Jordanian Representative to the PA, Yahya Al-Karala, announced that a second group of 21 Gaza Strip patients suffering from life-threatening diseases was scheduled to leave for Jordan via the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing on 17 January for medical treatment. In early January, the first group of 21 patients had arrived in Jordan. (*Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua*)

17

An Israeli air strike killed Raed Abu al-Foul, a commander in the Popular Resistance Committees, and his wife as they drove in the northern Gaza Strip. Three other Palestinians were wounded, with one in critical condition. (*AFP, AP, DPA, Ma'an News Agency, Haaretz, Reuters, Ynetnews, Xinhua*)

Palestinian militants fired at least 32 rockets and 2 mortar shells at southern Israel. No injuries were reported. One of the rockets hit Sderot, causing damage to a house. (*DPA, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

Egyptian authorities found 20 mortars, 80 kg of explosives and a bomb in the Sinai, ready to be transported to the Gaza Strip, an official said. (*AFP*)

A number of Palestinians were injured in Hebron after clashes erupted between Palestinian youths and IDF soldiers in the city centre. Palestinian medical sources said that Hazim Badir, an *AFP* photojournalist, had also been injured. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Three Palestinians, among them a mother and her son, were killed in an IDF strike in the northern Gaza Strip. They were hit by missiles fired from Israeli aircraft. (*Haaretz, Reuters, Ynetnews*)

Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered the IDF to move forward with planning a large-scale ground operation in the Gaza Strip, but stressed that no such operation had yet been authorized. He also decided to tighten economic sanctions on the Gaza Strip by reducing the amount of fuel allowed in; cargo trucks bringing humanitarian supplies would undergo stricter inspections. In addition, Mr. Barak said that the IDF would "deepen" its military operations against the rocket-launching crews. "It won't be simple; it won't happen this weekend, but we will stop the rocket fire on Sderot," he said. (*Haaretz*)

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, official spokesman of the PA Presidency, told *AFP*: "The Israeli raids and military escalations aim to deliver a blow to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations." He called on the US, "the major sponsor of the Middle East peace process, for an immediate contribution, in order to contain the situation and stop more deterioration." Yasser Abed Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the PLO, said: "Israel does not stick to the negotiations and the political process... instead Israel wants to destroy the talks." Saeb Erakat, Head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, said that negotiations with Israel were impossible as long as the IDF continued its raids on the Gaza Strip. Fatah spokesman Ahmed Abdel Rahman told *Voice of Palestine* radio: "There is an international insistence on the negotiations so the Palestinians can open the Israeli aggressions, including the settlements, for discussions". Prime Minister Olmert told a business conference: "We will continue to fight Islamic Jihad, Hamas and all their allies without compromise, without concessions and without mercy."

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in Moscow: "Israel is obligated to give its citizens a response to the daily attacks coming from the Gaza Strip." Israeli Vice-Premier Haim Ramon told *Israel Radio*: "The military and economic pressure as well as the international isolation of the Gaza Strip will end up producing results... It has to be clear that sooner or later we will hit all those who fire the rockets." Defense Minister Ehud Barak, while touring the Gaza Strip border fence accompanied by army commanders, said: "The IDF will continue its ongoing operations and expand it in order to target Qassam launchers, until the rocket fire stops." (*AFP, Haaretz, Reuters, Wafa, Xinhua*)

The following statement was issued by the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned at the current escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel, as well as in the West Bank. He is troubled by the heavy bloodshed, particularly the killing and injuring of civilians on both sides and the potential for further casualties, unless the situation is de-escalated. The Secretary-General calls for an immediate cessation of Palestinian sniper and rocket attacks into Israel, and for maximum restraint on the part of the Israel Defense Forces. He reminds all parties of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law and not to endanger civilians.

(*UN press release SG/SM/11378*)

Jordan's Lower House of Parliament condemned the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinians and said that it was a dangerous escalation which contravened the principles and resolutions of international legitimacy. The Parliament urged the international community to immediately intervene. (*Petra, Wafa, Xinhua*)

The Head of the Palestinian negotiating team, Ahmed Qureia, said in an interview with *Al-Arabiya TV* that the Israeli military operations were affecting peace negotiations. He did not elaborate. (*AP*)

PA Minister for Planning and Labour Samir Abdullah said that international donors had pledged \$7.7 billion in aid to the Palestinians over the next three years, more than initially reported. He also said that \$1.7 billion would be used to fund development projects. Forty per cent would be spent on the Gaza Strip. Officials at the Paris Donors' Conference had initially estimated pledges totalled \$7.4 billion, but a subsequent audit showed another \$300 million had been pledged. (*Reuters*)

Hamas spokesman Abu Obeida said: "I can say that [captured IDF soldier] Gilad Shalit is safe and we have no intention of hurting him, because we know that his release will bring about the release of many Palestinian prisoners... At this stage, we are in favour of freezing contacts [over the prisoner exchange] because it is impossible to continue to hold contacts as long as Israel continues its aggression." (*Haaretz*)

18

An IDF undercover unit killed Ahmad Sanakreh, a senior operative of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the West Bank. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades confirmed that one of its members had been killed in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus. Four other Palestinians were wounded in the operation. (*AP, DPA, Haaretz, Ynetnews*)

A Palestinian woman was killed and 46 people were injured, including women and children, three of them seriously, in an Israeli air strike on a vacant office in the Gaza Strip. The building was completely destroyed as a missile hit a wedding party in front of the building. An IDF spokeswoman confirmed the strike, and said that it had targeted "a Hamas headquarters", and was part of Israel's campaign against the constant firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. (*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post*)

Two Palestinians were killed and two others injured in an Israeli air strike in Jabalya, in the northern Gaza Strip. An IDF spokeswoman confirmed the air strike and said that it had been aimed at a Qassam cell firing at Israel. (*AFP, AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews*)

Israeli soldiers at a military checkpoint near the Israeli settlement of "Ma'aleh Adumim" arrested a Palestinian youth accused of attempting to stab an Israeli soldier. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

More than 30 Qassam rockets were fired at Israel. One of the rockets fell 40 metres from a kindergarten in Sderot. Rocket hits were also reported near Kibbutz Zikim and the Sufa crossing and a rocket started a fire in Kibbutz Netiv Ha'asarah. No injuries were reported. Israeli Government spokesman David Baker said that Israel "will act decisively and with vigour to bring these rocket attacks to an end." (*AP, Haaretz, Ynetnews*)

The general commander of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the West Bank, Abu Uday, said in a statement: "We will not stand idly by while witnessing massacres of our people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. We will respond to these massacres and we give the green light to all our brigades." Mr. Uday said that the ceasefire had been abandoned as the Israeli forces "have not stopped killing our people and destroying our institutions and our cities for a single day." "If the bloodshed in Gaza and the West Bank does not stop, there will be similar bloodshed in ... Tel Aviv," Hamas spokesman Hamad al-Rukeb said in a statement. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel closed all border crossings with the Gaza Strip. No goods or persons were allowed to enter or leave the Gaza Strip, except for so-called "humanitarian cases" that must receive approval in advance from Defense Minister Ehud Barak, a ministry spokesman said. Director of UNRWA operations in the Gaza Strip John Ging said that Israel had informed his office that the crossings would be closed for a few days. On a regular working day, an average of 120 trucks of food and humanitarian supplies enter the Gaza Strip, Mr. Ging added. (*AP, AFP, DPA, Reuters*)

The Head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, Saeb Erakat, said that the Israeli decision to close Gaza Strip crossings would not bring a cessation of the rocket fire. "Violence and military solutions and collective punishment will breed violence and more hatred ... and it will not provide peace and security," Mr. Erakat said. (*AP*)



Israel's Defense Ministry spokesman Shlomo Dror said: "It is inconceivable that we are opening the crossings for the Palestinians and risking our people's lives... This is a signal to Hamas that it needs to contemplate if it wants to continue with this situation." Mr. Dror said: "It's unacceptable that people in Sderot are living in fear every day and people in the Gaza Strip are living life as usual." Mr. Dror added that the people in the Gaza Strip had enough food so that no one would go hungry and gave assurance that there will not be a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The crossings were routinely closed Saturdays, and may not be reopened if the rocket fire continued, Mr. Dror said. (AP)

The following statement was issued by the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General appeals urgently for an immediate end to the violence now engulfing Gaza and affecting communities in southern Israel. He repeats his earlier calls for an immediate cessation of Palestinian sniper and rocket attacks into Israel, and for maximum restraint on the part of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). He reminds the parties, once again, of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law and not to endanger civilians.

Of particular concern today, in addition to the upsurge in violence, is the decision by Israel to close the crossing points in between Gaza and Israel used for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Such action cuts off the population from much-needed fuel supplies used to pump water and generate electricity to homes and hospitals. If this situation endures, the closure will also cause further shortages of food, medical and relief items in the Gaza Strip. The Secretary-General calls on Israel to refrain from actions that will harm the well-being of the general civilian population in Gaza.

The Secretary-General expresses his deep concern that the hostilities taking place on the ground will undermine the hopes for peace generated by the political process begun at Annapolis.

(UN press release SG/SM/11380)

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes told the press that along with the Secretary-General, he would urge the Government of Israel to review its decision as soon as possible and to ease the access restrictions on the Gaza Strip it had put in place. The Palestinians were urged to end all sniper and rocket attacks against Israel, and the IDF to exercise maximum restraint in their response. Stressing that the UN understood Israel's security problems and the need to respond to them, he said collective punishment of the people of the Gaza Strip was not the appropriate way to do so. (UN News Centre)

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, John Dugard, said in a statement: "The killing of some 40 Palestinians in Gaza in the past week, the targeting of a Government office near a wedding party venue with what must have been foreseen loss of life and injury to many civilians, and the closure of all crossings into Gaza raise very serious questions about Israel's respect for international law and its commitment to the peace process. Recent action violates the strict prohibition on collective punishment contained in the Fourth Geneva Convention. It also violates one of the basic principles of international humanitarian law that military action must distinguish between military targets and civilian targets. Israel must have known about the wedding party in Gaza near to the interior ministry when it launched missiles at the ministry building. Those responsible for such cowardly action are guilty of serious war crimes and should be prosecuted and punished for their crimes. The United States and other States which attended the Annapolis Conference are under both a legal and a moral obligation to compel Israel to cease its actions against Gaza and to restore confidence in the peace process, ensure respect for international law and protect civilian life." (<http://www.unhchr.ch>)

Christopher Gunness, a spokesman for UNRWA, said: "This [closure of Gaza Strip crossings] can only lead to the deterioration of an already dire situation... It is imperative that these crossings are opened so that the situation does not deteriorate further, inflicting further misery on one and half million people", Mr. Gunness told AFP. (AFP)

19

Israeli forces backed by tanks and bulldozers entered the Gaza Strip and searched homes in the town of Jabalya. Hamas gunmen exchanged fire with the troops, two were killed by Israeli aircraft. The IDF said troops had captured four armed Hamas men in the raid. Israeli forces also arrested six Palestinians in the West Bank, PA security sources said. Four detainees, including three teenagers, were arrested in Jenin, the other two in Bethlehem. (AP, Xinhua)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad appealed for international protection for the Gaza Strip: "The international community must intervene to stop the Israeli aggression and offer international protection to our people who are facing the tyranny of occupation," Mr. Fayyad said. He criticized the firing of rockets into Israel, but said that the rocket attacks cannot be compared to the shedding of Palestinian blood. (AFP)

Lebanon and Syria called for an emergency Arab League summit to discuss the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa condemned Israel's continued attacks against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. (AP)

20

Two Palestinian militants were killed in two separate air strikes in Gaza City, Palestinian security sources said. Ahmad Abu Sharia, a top Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades commander, was hit by a missile as he walked in the street, said the IDF. Two other Palestinians were wounded in the same attack. The target of the earlier strike was a cart loaded with rockets near the border fence; one Palestinian was killed and several more wounded in the strike. (AFP, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

PA President Abbas called on Israel to "lift its blockade of Gaza immediately and allow the entry of fuel to facilitate the lives of the innocent and enable the proper functioning of hospitals which are facing a crisis that is putting lives at risk," his spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said. "If Israel does not lift the blockade in the next few hours, we are going to raise the issue with the UN Security Council," Mr. Abu Rudeineh added. (AFP, AP, BBC, The Jerusalem Post)

Jordan's King Abdullah II told Israel and Palestinians that the moment must be seized to press ahead in peacemaking, even as the dire situation in the Gaza Strip deteriorated even further. He condemned what he called Israel's "military violations" in Gaza. (AP, Xinhua)

Hamas said that it had fired over 200 home-made weapons, including 160 Qassam rockets, into southern Israel in six days as part of its response to an Israeli offensive into the Gaza Strip. (AP, Xinhua)

During an Israeli Cabinet meeting, Public Security Minister Abraham Dichter said that the Government was not doing enough to stop the rockets. "Not to curb or reduce it but to stop it, whatever the cost for the Palestinians," he demanded. Opposing his view, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that Israeli anti-rockets tactics would not change. (DPA, The Jerusalem Post)

The number of Israeli settlers living in the West Bank excluding East Jerusalem rose by 5.1 per cent last year, figures released by the Israeli Interior Ministry showed.

The settler population increased to 282,362 in January 2008, compared to 268,163 in January 2007 and 253,371 in the first month of 2006. (AFP, Ynetnews)

21

The Gaza Strip suffered a blackout after its only power plant shut down. "We have had to close the power plant for want of fuel," its director, Rafiq Mliha, told reporters, warning of "very serious consequences for residents, but also for the operation of hospitals and water treatment plants." Mr. Mliha said he had no information on when Israel might allow in the fuel to enable the power station to resume generating electricity. Health official Moaiya Hassanain warned that the fuel cut-off would cause a health catastrophe. "We have the choice to either cut electricity on babies in the maternity ward or heart surgery patients or stop operating rooms," he said. Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Arye Mekel said that Hamas had created an artificial emergency, though the Gaza Strip continued to receive 75 per cent of its normal electricity supplies. Four hours after the blackout, Hamas said that five patients had died because of the lack of electricity in hospitals. Residents in the Gaza Strip marched in a candlelight parade to protest against the Israeli blockade. (AFP, AP, BBC, DPA, Haaretz, Ma'an, Xinhua, Ynetnews)

An emergency meeting of the Arab League Council convened in Cairo to discuss the continued Israeli raids and siege on the Gaza Strip. The meeting at the level of permanent delegates is taking place at the joint request of the League and the PA, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ahmed ben Heli said. The meeting, to be attended by Secretary-General Amr Moussa, would cover the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and Israel's continued attacks in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, said Mr. ben Heli. (AFP, Xinhua)

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, in separate telephone conversations, urged Israel's Prime Minister Olmert and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak to end measures aimed at tightening the blockade of the Gaza Strip, end Israel's military escalation and stop measures that target the Palestinian people in the territory. Syria's Foreign Ministry demanded "an immediate end to the collective punishment and Israeli crimes," saying Israel was violating "the simplest rules of human rights," while Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora described the developments as a serious escalation of Israel's "racial discrimination and blatant human rights violations against Palestinians, under the pretext of confronting Hamas." Mr. Siniora said, "It is the duty of the Security Council, the United States, the European Union and the Arab League to act immediately to stop the Israeli offensive, and to denounce Israel." In Kuwait, the Foreign Ministry said it had asked the permanent members

of the UN Security Council to pressure Israel to lift the Gaza Strip siege, *Kuwait News Agency* said. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for an emergency meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. (AFP, AP, DPA, Xinhua)

The EU criticized Israel for punishing all of Gaza's 1.5 million inhabitants and urged it to restart fuel supplies and open border crossings. "I have made clear that I am against this collective punishment of the people of Gaza," European Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner said in a statement. Saying it "strongly deplored" the blockade imposed four days ago, the French Foreign Ministry expressed concern at the humanitarian impact in Gaza. "The measures taken amount to collective punishment of the entire civilian population, which is already very affected," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pascale Andreani. France "calls for the reopening of transit points and the immediate resumption of fuel to allow the electrical power station to run again" said Ms. Andreani. The German Government repeated its condemnation of the targeting of Israeli territory by missiles launched from the Gaza Strip. "We have made very clear that in particular the missiles from the Gaza Strip must come to an end," Foreign Ministry spokesman Martin Jaeger said. "It cannot be allowed that the lives of the people in Israel are continually threatened in a terrorist fashion from Gaza". (AFP, AP, DPA, The Guardian)

UNRWA spokesman Christopher Gunness said: "Because of a shortage of nylon for plastic bags and fuel for vehicles and generators, on Wednesday or Thursday, we are going to have to suspend our food distribution programme to 860,000 people in Gaza if the present situation continues." (The Guardian)

Oxfam said that the Gaza Strip's water and sewage systems were hours away from shutting down as supply of fuel for critical pumps had ran out. "The risk to public health of a breakdown of the water and sanitation system is real and a massive cause for concern. Cutting off water to civilians is both immoral and illegal, no matter what the provocation may be," said Oxfam's Director Barbara Stocking. (Ma'an News Agency)

22

Israeli special forces shot and killed a Hamas militant in clashes near the Sufa crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip, Palestinian medics and Hamas' armed wing said. The IDF could not immediately comment on the incident, in which medics said two other people had been wounded. (AFP)

A 20-year-old Hamas militant, Mahmud al-Qirim, died of wounds he had sustained in an Israeli air strike on the southern Gaza Strip on 19 January, according to Palestinian medical sources. (AFP)

The Israeli army arrested 15 Palestinians during an incursion into Nablus. (Ma'an News Agency)

At least 20 Qassam and mortar rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip at the southern Israeli town of Sderot and western Negev. (Haaretz)

For one day Israel resumed fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip's main power plant. The plant's director, Derar Abu Sissi, said that one of its turbines powered up as the fuel arrived, restoring electricity to some areas of the Gaza Strip. Israel said that it would allow 500,000 litres of generator diesel, as well as some cooking gas, food and medicine, though restrictions on car petrol remained. UNRWA spokesman Christopher Gunness said that the agency brought seven trucks of rice into the Gaza Strip. (AFP, AP, Financial Times, Reuters)

A senior Israeli official told AFP that Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak had decided, in a meeting last week, to order the IDF to destroy "Hamas power symbols". The official also said, "We have begun targeting ministries, police stations, army and government buildings that are used by Hamas in Gaza in order to weaken the regime there." (AFP)

Egyptian forces managed to close the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt after clashes with Palestinians trying to force their way through.

Nine Egyptian force members were injured in the clashes. Sources said that the situation in the border crossing was now under control and that the border was shut again. (AP, Xinhua)

United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe [briefed](#) the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, during a meeting on the humanitarian situation of the Gaza Strip convened at the request of the Group of Arab States. Expressing concern over the "extremely fragile" humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, Mr. Pascoe strongly urged Israel to allow regular and unimpeded delivery of fuel and basic necessities to the Palestinian area. He condemned the escalation of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza by Hamas militants into Israel in recent days. While acknowledging Israel's security concerns in the wake of those attacks, he said, "Israel must reconsider and cease its policy of pressuring the civilian population of Gaza for the unacceptable actions of militants. Collective penalties are prohibited under international law." (UN News Centre, UN press release SC/9232)

The [2008 Consolidated Humanitarian Appeal](#) for the Occupied Palestinian Territory showed that there had been a 6 per cent rise in the number of barriers in the West Bank, and some 10,000 families in enclaves west of the West Bank separation barrier had been cut off from vital health and education services and from family and social networks. The Consolidated Appeal by 12 UN agencies and 28 NGOs, including 15 international ones, operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, aimed to raise \$462 million for the Palestinian population. About a third of the money would be used for rebuilding the Palestinian economy, a third for food aid, 9 per cent for water and sanitation, 8 per cent for health and the rest for other projects. The report states that the number of roadblocks had in fact gone up in 2007 from 528 to 563. These fixed physical obstacles were augmented by some 560 flying checkpoints. The report adds that 49 per cent of Palestinian households in the West Bank and 79 per cent in the Gaza Strip live in poverty. (AP, DPA, Haaretz)

The White House said that Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip was an act of self-defence against Palestinian rocket attacks. US Government spokeswoman Dana Perino said: "One of the reasons that Israel has taken this action is that because it was sustaining upwards of 150 rockets falling on its territory a day, and so Israel is defending itself ... But I will also point to what Prime Minister Olmert said, which is that they will not allow a humanitarian crisis to develop in Gaza ... The Palestinians are clearly seeing there is a choice they can make, which is to live under the near-humanitarian crisis that they have in Gaza, or the possibility of a Palestinian State." (AFP)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said upon arriving in Berlin: "Ultimately, Hamas is to blame for this circumstance because if they were more responsible toward the international community, then Gaza would be connected to the outside world rather than cut off ... But that said, nobody wants innocent Gazans to suffer, so we have spoken to the Israelis about the importance of not allowing a humanitarian crisis to unfold there." (AFP)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner warned that neither the blockade nor the air and ground strikes of the past weeks would bring Israel security from militant rocket fire. "I have made clear that I am against this collective punishment of the people of Gaza ... Only a credible political agreement this year can turn Palestinians away from violence." (AFP, Financial Times)

Israeli President Shimon Peres, speaking ahead of the emergency Security Council session on the situation in the Gaza Strip said: "The equation is simple: once Hamas stops the madness, Israel's operations in the Strip will be halted ... The responsibility for the situation in Gaza lies unequivocally on Hamas' shoulders." (Haaretz)

PA President Abbas said: "We insist that negotiations continue, and that we reach a solution this year that will satisfy our people and our national demands." (AP, Ma'an News Agency)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad met British Foreign Secretary David Miliband in London. "In Gaza, life has become completely unbearable, and that situation should not be allowed to continue ... We need a process that is seen as credible, leading to a resolution of this long-standing conflict ... Negotiations clearly can proceed even under the very difficult situation that we have right now." the PA Prime Minister said before a meeting with Prime Minister Gordon Brown. (AP)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) issued a press release warning that Gaza's hospitals had been pooling their fuel to maintain life-saving services such as surgery and intensive care units. "There is a major risk of a total collapse of all infrastructure ... Deliveries of essential humanitarian goods must be secured in the long run to prevent more hardship and to avoid the collapse of the already fragile infrastructure ... Humanitarian aid alone cannot help contain the crisis ... What is needed are political steps to ensure that enough imports are allowed into Gaza and make life bearable," said ICRC spokeswoman Dorothea Krimitsas. (AFP, AP)

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to discuss the crisis in the Gaza Strip. (AP)

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi condemned the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the closing of all border crossings with Israel. "The Palestinians have the right of access to food, fuel and medicine. The inhumane action by the Israelis would make the living conditions of the Palestinians even more unbearable ... The blockade has exacerbated the already worsening humanitarian crisis in the area and this will cause a humanitarian catastrophe." (AP)

Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen said during his speech at the Herzliya Conference: "Once Israel withdraws to the agreed borders, there can be no security vacuum in the previously occupied territories. The best way to guarantee this would be to deploy a strong international force after a peace agreement has been signed. The United States will be indispensable to ensuring Israel's security. But others can also help. For my part, I can promise that I would do my utmost to



ensure a Dutch contribution to such an international force, led, for instance, by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), once it has been mandated.” (Xinhua, <http://www.minbuza.nl>)

The co-chairs of the Paris Donors’ Conference, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Quartet Representative Tony Blair, said in a statement that total pledges had reached \$7.7 billion (€5.31 billion) over three years, and called for “further efforts” from donors.

The co-chairs said that there had been “some improvement” in the Palestinian economy since the conference held on 17 December, but said that further efforts by all parties were required. (AP)

23

IDF troops killed a Hamas militant during a military operation in the southern Gaza Strip, Hamas sources said. Hamas and Gaza Strip residents said that Israeli troops had exchanged fire with Hamas militants near a border crossing in the southern Gaza Strip and that Israeli tanks had crossed into the territory after the clash.

An army spokeswoman confirmed that infantry and special forces had entered the territory, conducting an arrest operation between Khan Yunis and the Sufa crossing. (AP, Haaretz, Reuters)

A 50-year-old Palestinian, Ismail Ahmad al-Attar, was killed by Israeli gunfire as he worked in his fields in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, near the border with Israel, Palestinian medics said. The Israeli military said that it had no information about the incident. (AFP)

A Palestinian civilian wounded in an Israeli military raid on Nablus earlier this month had died, his family said. The man, 35-year-old Ahmad Abu Hantash, had been shot by troops on 4 January as he walked to a mosque, said his brother. He had not been armed and was not affiliated with any militant group, he added. (AP)

Israeli forces arrested 13 “wanted” Palestinians throughout the West Bank. (Ma’an News Agency)

Tens of thousands of Palestinians forced their way into Egypt from the Gaza Strip through a border wall blown up by militants and stocked up on food and fuel in short supply due to the Israeli blockade. Egyptian border guards took no action. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said that he had ordered his troops to allow the Palestinians to cross into Egypt from the Gaza Strip because they were starving. (AP, Reuters)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh called for “an urgent speedy meeting” with Fatah and with the Egyptian Government to work out a new shared arrangement for Gaza Strip border crossings. “We do not want to control everything; we are part of the Palestinian people,” Mr. Haniyeh said. But the call was swiftly denounced by the PA. (Reuters)

Jerusalem city officials said that Israel had authorized the construction of nearly 2,500 new housing units in settlements in East Jerusalem. Spokesman Gidi Shmerling said that the city authorities had “obtained all the necessary authorizations for the building of 8,000 new housing units in Jerusalem.” According to a list of the units authorized, 2,461 of them were in East Jerusalem. Construction was due to begin shortly in the “Ramot,” “Pisgat Ze’ev,” “Armon Haratsiv” and “Har Homa” settlements. (AFP)

The UN Human Rights Council opened its sixth special session on human rights violations emanating from Israeli military incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the recent ones in occupied Gaza and the West Bank town of Nablus. In her [address](#), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said that the recent flaring up of conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had been paralleled by an escalation of human rights violations. The right to life was imperilled for all in the region. This was the case for those living in Israel, particularly in the area of Sderot and Ashkelon. This was also the case for Palestinians, in particular those living in the Gaza Strip who, in addition, were systematically deprived of the enjoyment of almost all their human rights and basic needs. (<http://www.ohchr.org>)

The Israeli State Prosecutor’s Office informed the High Court that the evacuation of the West Bank outpost of “Migron”, located near the settlement of “Ofra”, would be completed by the middle of summer, saying that if peaceful means failed, force would be used to evacuate the outpost. The Yesha Council, however, called on settlers to “meet any evacuation attempt with fierce objection.” Defending settlements “is our moral right and duty,” according to a Council leaflet.

(Ynetnews.com)

24

The Saraya Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for launching three projectiles at the Israeli town of Sderot, north of the Gaza Strip. Israeli media confirmed that three projectiles had landed in Sderot – one inside the town and one on the outskirts of the city. (Ma’an News Agency)

Witnesses said that dozens of Israeli soldiers invaded the West Bank village of Deir Stiyah, near the city of Salfit, transforming the home of 33-year-old Netham Ismail Al-Khatib into a military barracks. (Ma’an News Agency)

Two Palestinians, disguised as Israeli soldiers, infiltrated a religious seminary in the settlement of “Kfar Etzion” near Jerusalem and stabbed three students before being shot dead, Israeli police said. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack. Israeli and PA security officials said that the two Palestinians had recently been released from an Israeli prison after serving time for criminal violations. (AP, DPA, Haaretz, Reuters)

Palestinian gunmen opened fire at Israelis outside the Shu’fat refugee camp on the outskirts of Jerusalem, killing a border police officer and seriously wounding a female officer, police said. An organization called Return and Struggles Brigades claiming affiliation with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades took responsibility for the attack. The checkpoint served as a pedestrian crossing between the refugee camp and the “Pisgat Ze’ev” settlement in East Jerusalem. (AP, DPA, Haaretz)

At least four Hamas members had been killed by two Israeli air strikes in Rafah, Israeli and Palestinian officials said. A fifth Palestinian later died of his wounds.

An Israeli military spokesperson confirmed the air strikes on cars carrying members of the Hamas armed wing, the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, adding that a senior commander, identified as Mohammed Abu Hard, who was involved in rocket attacks at Israel, had been among the targets. (DPA, Haaretz)

At its sixth Special Session, the Human Rights Council adopted a [resolution](#) on human rights violations emanating from Israeli military attacks and incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The resolution was adopted with 30 votes in favour, 1 against, with 15 abstentions. The draft resolution had been submitted the previous day before by Pakistan, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Syrian Arab Republic, on behalf of the Group of Arab States. (<http://www.unhchr.ch>)

For the second consecutive day, thousands of Palestinians crossed into Egypt, taking advantage of holes blasted in the concrete and metal fence on the Egypt-Gaza Strip border and shopped for essential foodstuffs and other products made scarce by the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip. Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak told a conference at the police academy that he was sparing no efforts to avert a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip resulting from an Israeli blockade. “Egypt would not accept conditions that would lead to the starvation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip,” he said. Hamas had refused to take direct responsibility for the breaches in the border. (DPA)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that Egypt must ensure the security of its border with the Gaza Strip. She said, “I understand it’s a difficult situation for them. But it is an international border. It needs to be protected and I believe that Egypt understands the importance of doing that.” She added, “This problem has come first and foremost out of the security situation created by Hamas in Gaza and their unwillingness to stop – and I’m quite certain they could if they wished – the rocket fire against Israel.” (Haaretz)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said, “If the PA security could be as effective as that of Jordan, Egypt, or even Syria, we would consider alleviating the situation significantly.” He added, “We’re not promising anything.” PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said, “We must seriously consider Israel’s security concerns. We are committed to non-violence and to solving the conflict by peaceful means.” (Haaretz)

UNRWA Representative of the Commissioner-General Peter Ford urged Arab Gulf countries to provide about \$9.8 million (€6.7 million) in aid for the Gaza Strip. The aid would be used to buy food, medicine and other supplies for Palestinians, especially children and pregnant women suffering under an Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. It would also fund fuel for hospitals and cash assistance to the needy, he said. (AP)

Israel had completely frozen all new construction in West Bank settlements, despite recent comments by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that Israel would treat construction in the major settlement blocks differently from building in most settlements. Mr. Olmert had categorically denied approval for all new construction tenders, including in the so-called consensus settlement blocks, which Israel intends to keep in any future peace accord with the Palestinians. The freeze also applied to the construction of public institutions, including schools and kindergartens. (Haaretz)

The World Food Programme (WFP) [said](#) that there was a “serious food crisis in the Gaza Strip as a result of the seven-month economic blockade.” WFP said that its access to the territory had become restricted by new Israeli measures and border closures. It said that three-quarters of the population of more than 1.3 million Palestinians were relying on food aid. (<http://www.wfp.org>)

During a telephone conversation with President Bush, Jordan's King Abdullah II said that Israel must refrain from unilateral actions, including the imposition of an economic siege and escalation of military operations against the Palestinian people. These policies, he said, threatened to undermine efforts made over the past weeks and months to advance the peace process. (*Media & Communication Directorate - Royal Hashemite Court*)

In the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said that Israel was taking steps destined towards destroying the peace process, particularly with regard to its policy on the West Bank settlements. He said that he hoped that President Bush's declaration regarding a possible peace agreement by 2009 would turn into an American commitment. (*Haaretz*)

25

Israeli soldiers shot dead a 17-year-old Palestinian during clashes near Hebron in the West Bank, Palestinian security officials reported. They said that the youth was among a group of Palestinians throwing stones at an Israeli force that had entered the village of Beit Ummar. (*DPA*)

Hamas militants used a bulldozer to open a new passage in the Gaza Strip's breached border fence with Egypt, as Egyptians tried to close off the area. Earlier, Egyptian border guards with riot shields formed human chains in an attempt to hinder the flow of Gazans into Egypt and gradually reseal the breached border. At other points, Palestinians continued to cross into the Sinai, heading towards the Egyptian town of Rafah and El Arish on the peninsula's northern coast. Egyptian security forces had set up roadblocks keeping Palestinians from reaching Cairo. Gazans, however, expressed their appreciation to Egyptian President Mubarak for allowing them to cross into Egypt, albeit in a limited way. Some 600 Palestinians, who had been stranded on the Egyptian side for nearly eight months, crossed through the breach during the past two days. (*Haaretz, Xinhua*)

Egyptian Doctors' Syndicate sent a convoy of urgent relief supplies to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The shipment, including 40 tons of meat and other foodstuff, as well as six tons of medicine, had been delivered to the Gaza Strip, according to Abdel Qader Hegazi, Secretary-General of the Syndicate. In addition, a four-truck convoy carrying some 200 tons of wheat, rice and foodstuff reached the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. (*MENA News Agency, Xinhua*)

Israeli police limited Palestinians' access to East Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, fearing violent protest against Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. Police spokesperson Micky Rosenfeld said that males under the age of 40 were barred from attending weekly Muslim prayers at the site. "This is part of our precautions in light of the events in Gaza this week," said Police Chief Aharon Franco. In Ramallah, PA police were also out in force to prevent unauthorized protest over the Gaza Strip situation. (*AP*)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered a state of alert for soldiers serving at the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip. *Israel Army Radio* said that Mr. Barak had ordered soldiers to use "the strongest means" to disperse any demonstrators to prevent any attempt by Hamas to incite people to storm the border. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert was scheduled to meet PA President Abbas on 27 January to discuss events in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Olmert's office said that arrangements had not yet been finalized. (*AP*)

UN aid officials reported that WFP would be unable to provide a full ration to 10,000 Palestinians on 27 January, after all three crossings for goods from Israel into the Gaza Strip had been closed earlier in the day. Fuel reserves were also expected to run out on that day, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (*UN News Centre*)

26

Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit announced that at least 38 Egyptian security personnel had been hospitalized, including some in critical condition, due to incidents with Palestinians on the Gaza Strip border. (*AP*)

A Palestinian stabbed an Israeli policeman at the northern edge of Jerusalem, moderately wounding him. Officers shot the attacker, wounding him in the leg, a police spokesman said. (*AP*)

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said that Egypt would invite a number of Hamas and PA leaders to Cairo for separate talks to discuss the Gaza Strip border situation, the *MENA* news agency reported. The talks would tackle the operation of the Rafah crossing in compliance with the rules that had been governing the crossing before Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Mr. Aboul Gheit said. (*Xinhua*)

Human Rights Watch said, "This week's Gaza-Egypt border breach temporarily eased the humanitarian impact of Israel's blockade, but Israel as the occupying power remains responsible for the well-being of Gaza's 1.4 million residents." The organization also called upon Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip to stop their indiscriminate rocket attacks into populated areas in Israel in violation of international humanitarian law, adding that the attacks had wounded 82 Israeli civilians in the past six months. "Israel's rightful self-defence against unlawful rocket attacks does not justify a blockade that denies civilians the food, fuel and medicine needed to survive, a policy amounting to collective punishment," said Joe Stork, acting director of Human Rights Watch Middle East Division. ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org))

27

Israel air force planes attacked a convoy of Hamas armoured vehicles in the Gaza Strip, wounding four militants. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces seized three Palestinian teenagers in Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert pledged that he would not allow a humanitarian crisis to develop in Gaza Strip during a meeting with PA President Abbas at his official residence in Jerusalem. Mr. Abbas suggested taking over the Palestinian side of the Gaza Strip crossings. (*AP, Haaretz*)

Egypt's *MENA* news agency reported that the Egyptian Somaya Abul-Enein Charity had sent a convoy of some 50 tons of food and medicine to the Palestinians suffering a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. (*Xinhua*)

28

A 17-year-old Palestinian from the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, Qusay Al-Afandi, died from bullets wounds sustained in clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian youths. An Israeli military spokesperson said that the forces responded to "rioting Palestinians" by shooting at their lower bodies. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces arrested four Palestinians near Nablus. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian witnesses said that the Israeli authorities demolished part of a house owned by a Palestinian family located in the northern part of East Jerusalem for being built without a permit. (*IMEMC News*)

The number of Palestinians crossing into Egypt from the Gaza Strip decreased as security forces tried to seal the border blown up by militants six days before.

Egyptian security forces erected barbed wire along one crossing in the divided border town of Rafah as Hamas militants stood nearby, although hundreds of Palestinians managed to cross through other breaches. Shops in Rafah were running out of stocks after Egypt began preventing trucks from coming from Cairo to border towns, where the authorities had imposed a security cordon to prevent Palestinians from travelling further. (*AFP*)

In a statement issued at the end of their meeting in Cairo, Arab Foreign Ministers said that Israel, as an occupying Power, was fully responsible for the deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories and should immediately stop all its continued aggressions against the civilians and end the blockade and the collective punishment policy. They urged the Security Council to "shoulder its responsibility to stop [the Israeli] aggression and lift the siege on Gaza and protect its people and their rights in accordance with the international law." The ministers also welcomed the Palestinian Authority's readiness to take on the responsibility of all the crossing points in the Gaza Strip. (*AP*)

The Council of the European Union adopted [conclusions](#) on the Middle East peace process which said that settlement building anywhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was illegal under international law, including both East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Council expressed deep concern about recent events in Gaza and the grave disturbances at the border between Gaza and Egypt. It condemned the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory and all other activities which are contrary to international law and endanger civilians. The Council calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations to Gaza. The EU expressed its readiness to consider resuming its monitoring mission at Rafah. (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>)

In his State of the Union address, US President Bush, said, "... Palestinians have elected a president who recognizes that confronting terror is essential to achieving a state where his people can live in dignity and at peace with Israel. Israelis have leaders who recognize that a peaceful, democratic Palestinian State will be a source of lasting security. This month in Ramallah and Jerusalem, I assured leaders from both sides that America will do, and I will do, everything we can to help them achieve a peace agreement that defines a Palestinian State by the end of this year. The time has come for a Holy Land where a democratic Israel and a democratic Palestine live side-by-side in peace." (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>)

In her remarks after meeting with Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith in Washington, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the United States supported "the concept of a Palestinian Authority presence to begin to introduce some order to that border. There would be many details that would have to be worked out, and I can't comment on any specific detail because this is obviously a very complex – would be a very complex operation in itself. But we've said that in concept, it should be supported and that parties should look to see if that might be one way to handle the situation." (<http://www.state.gov>)

The European Commission announced that it would launch on 1 February the Palestinian European Aid Management mechanism (PEGASE), a new instrument to channel EU and international assistance as a contribution to the building of a Palestinian State and as a follow-up to the current Temporary International Mechanism (TIM). "PEGASE will run for the next three years. Based on the Reform and Development Plan of the Palestinian Authority, it will channel assistance to four key areas: governance, social development, economic and private sector development, and public infrastructure," the Commission said. Officials said they expected overall European aid to continue at the current level of about €1 billion (\$1.47 billion) a year over the next three years. (AP, <http://europa.eu>)

29

Two Palestinian militants were killed and two others were wounded in a gun battle with an Israeli force in the town of Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip, according to medics and residents of the town. (Xinhua)

Israeli forces bombed parts of the Al-Shejaeya neighbourhood in the eastern part of Gaza City. No injuries were reported. (Wafa)

The IDF said that it had arrested 17 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency, <http://dover.idfi/>)

Egyptian border guards began repairing another section of the destroyed Gaza Strip border wall, slowing Palestinians from entering Egypt. Cold and rainy weather had also discouraged travellers. Two large border breaches remained open – including the section the guards were repairing. Egypt also deployed several dozen riot police, armed with shields and batons, at the two remaining openings. Other riot police blocked Rafah's main road and ordered Palestinian cars to head back to the Gaza Strip. (AP, Haaretz)

Israeli officials said that Israel did not plan to block PA President Abbas from assuming control of the Gaza Strip border crossing with Egypt if he reached an agreement to do so with Cairo. "If all of them want it, we will not be the ones that will undermine it. So it will happen," an official familiar with the deliberations said. "Given that we see Abbas as the legitimate force and we don't want to weaken him, we have no reason to prevent it." But the official stressed that Israel had not agreed to give Mr. Abbas control over Gaza's border crossings with Israel, citing security concerns. Mr. Abbas had proposed taking over all of the crossings. (Haaretz)

In Ramallah, US Air Force Lt.-Gen. William M. Fraser held talks with PA President Abbas in his first working meeting with the Palestinian leadership since being named as the head of the trilateral monitoring mechanism on Phase I of the Road Map. The previous day, Lt.-Gen. Fraser had met in Jerusalem with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak. (AP)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Egyptian counterpart, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, urged the normalization of the Gaza Strip-Egypt border and an improvement in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The two ministers, who discussed the situation by telephone, called for Palestinian unity. (Xinhua)

PA President Abbas met with Egyptian President Mubarak to discuss an official reopening of the Rafah border crossing. After the meeting, Mr. Abbas told the press that he was ruling out talks with Hamas unless it met several conditions, including previous Gaza Strip border arrangements that had been agreed by the PA, Egypt, Israel, US and the EU. Earlier, Mr. Abbas had reiterated the PA's resolve to take control of the border crossings. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri urged Egypt to keep the Rafah border crossing open, rejecting any international presence on crossings between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. (AFP, AP, DPA, Haaretz)

Israel's High Court backed the Israeli Government's decision to reduce fuel and electricity supplies to the Gaza Strip. Israel would continue to supply some fuel and electricity, and the judges said that those supplies would "fulfil the vital humanitarian needs of the Gaza Strip at this time." The Court said that Israel was "required to act against terror organizations in accordance with the norms of international law and abstain from deliberately harming the civilian population located in the Gaza Strip." (AP, Haaretz, Reuters, Ynetnews)

30

Five Palestinian militants carrying explosives belts and reportedly planning a suicide attack against Israel were apprehended by Egyptian authorities recently, the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram* reported. (Haaretz)

Qatar announced that it would offer \$5.5 million in emergency aid to the Gaza Strip for basic medical supplies, food, and for repairing the damaged sewage system. Rashid Al-Hindi, an official in the Qatari Red Crescent, was quoted as saying that, in response to the calls for relief by Gaza Strip hospitals, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, had decided to offer the aid package. (Ma'an News Agency)

UN Under-Secretary-General Lynn B. Pascoe [briefed](#) the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. He said that continued efforts to progress along the Annapolis track had been overshadowed by an intensification of violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, combined with periods of total closure of the Gaza Strip and increased humanitarian suffering and human rights violations. (UN News Centre)

31

Israeli troops shot dead Mahmoud al-Daalsah, 20, a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, in an exchange of fire with Israeli soldiers near the town of Rafah. A military spokesman said, "The combatant was killed when he approached the security barrier". (AFP, AP, DPA, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews)

Egyptian border guards moved to prevent all car traffic from entering the country from the Gaza Strip, but still allowed hundreds of Palestinians in on foot. (AP) The Yemin Yehuda Association began building 200 housing units in the "Shimon Hatzaddik" settlement, in the heart of East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarra neighbourhood.

The organization intended to demolish the homes of dozens of Palestinian families who lived there. If the plan were completed, it would cut the Old City off from the Palestinian neighbourhoods in northern Jerusalem. Knesset member Benny Elon (National Union – National Religious Party), who supported the initiative, said that it was designed to create a Jewish continuum surrounding the Old City where there currently was a massive Palestinian majority. Mr. Elon said that this could be done by declaring open areas to be national parks and placing State property back-to-back with lands under Jewish ownership. (Haaretz)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and Quartet representative Tony Blair were to travel to the Middle East next week to work out a solution for better access to the Gaza Strip, European Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner said. Ms. Ferrero-Waldner said that the Quartet was following up the suggestion by PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to hand over border controls to the PA. (DPA, Haaretz)

A Hamas delegation led by Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal proposed joint Palestinian-Egyptian control of the Rafah crossing during talks in Cairo. The delegation proposed removing the EU observers. Other conditions included that the Palestinian role should be determined by an agreement between Hamas and the PA. Hamas also said that it opposed Israel's veto power to close the crossing, and further proposed that the entry into and out of the Gaza Strip through the crossing should not only be limited to Palestinians carrying PA identification cards. (<http://www.aljazeera.net>)

UNRWA spokesman Matthias Burchard said that exceptionally cold weather was making life more difficult for the 1.5 million people living in the Gaza Strip and facing extreme hardship as a result of border closures. According to UNRWA, there were 161 truckloads of food waiting at the Israeli port of Ashdod. Up to 12 trucks had been turned away at the Kerem Shalom crossing. Mr. Burchard described the situation in the West Bank as "equally grim." (DPA)

Israel would deliver thousands of doses of vaccines for cattle and avian-borne diseases to the Gaza Strip because of fear that the recent breach of Gaza's border with Egypt would bring a wave of diseases to the area. (Haaretz)

Hundreds of Palestinian students, patients, workers and businessmen continued a sit-in for a ninth day in front of the Egyptian Interior Ministry's offices in the Sinai region. They were demanding that Egyptian authorities let them pass to the international airport in Cairo, so that they could fly to their destinations abroad. (Ma'an News Agency)

