

Division for Palestinian Rights
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine**
 Monthly media monitoring review
January 2009

Monthly highlights

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- Egypt and France put forward ceasefire initiative ([6 January](#))
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- Human Rights Council adopts resolution strongly condemning ongoing Israeli military operation in Gaza ([12 January](#))
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1

An Israeli air assault killed 49-year-old Nizar Ghayan, a high-ranking Hamas official in Gaza, along with nine women and 11 of his children, in the first major assassination since the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched "Operation Cast Lead". The death of Mr. Ghayan left dozens of people from neighbouring buildings injured and brought the body count on the Palestinian side to 425 people since the start of the Israeli military campaign. The number of wounded is now estimated at around 2,000. The IDF spokesman said that Mr. Ghayan's house had served as a weapons silo and a war room for Hamas. (*Haaretz*)

Hamas fired about a dozen rockets into Be'er Sheva and near Ashdod, resulting in no injuries. Gaza militants had been firing an average of at least 50 rockets at southern Israel throughout the day. Awaiting a decision by the political leadership, ground forces of the IDF were in the final stages of preparations for an invasion into Gaza, and the army had amassed the forces outside the Strip in formation for a rapid deployment in the area as soon as the order was given. (*Haaretz*)

The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the military wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said in a statement that the Brigades had fired 12 projectiles at the Israeli side of the Nahal Oz crossing, in northern Gaza, as well as the nearby Kibbutz Sa'd, Ashkelon, Sderot and a military gathering east of Juhr Ad-Dik. The Israeli side said two Israeli women were slightly hurt when projectiles landed in Ashkelon. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) struck a mosque in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, which was allegedly being used as a storehouse for a large number of Grad missiles, Qassam rockets and additional weaponry. The strike was said to have set off a series of secondary explosions and caused a large fire ignited by the ammunitions stockpiled inside the mosque. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said there was no need for a ceasefire on humanitarian grounds as more trucks containing aid were entering Gaza.

Speaking in Paris after talks with the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, she said Hamas had used the previous six-month truce, which had ended in mid-December, to re-arm. Hamas has said Israel must stop bombarding Gaza and lift its blockade of the territory before it would consider a ceasefire. (*BBC*)

A statement issued by the Greek Foreign Ministry said that two Hellenic Air Force aircraft, carrying 28 tons of humanitarian aid collected by the Foreign Ministry's Hellenic Aid for the population of the Gaza Strip, had taken off from Eleusina airport. The assistance included pharmaceuticals, medical aid and large quantities of blood to be delivered to the World Health Organization (WHO), which would then transfer it to the Gaza Strip. (www.mfa.gr)

2

Palestinian rockets resumed, with two salvoes of Grad rockets hitting Ashkelon. A home in the southern city sustained a direct hit and one person, in an adjacent house, suffered shrapnel wounds. (*Haaretz*)

On the seventh day of the military offensive in the Gaza Strip, IAF attacked dozens of Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, killing seven Palestinians, five of whom were minors, and wounding 12 others. IAF planes, in coordination with Shin Bet, bombed the home of senior Hamas activist Mohammed Matouk. IDF said that Mr. Matouk's home was being used by militants as a weapons storehouse and factory and that a smuggling tunnel had been dug underneath the building. Before dawn, IAF also hit 15 houses belonging to Hamas militants, Palestinians said. (*Haaretz*)

The Israeli military contacted Palestinian civilians in their homes located in various Gaza neighbourhoods to urge them to leave, because their home would shortly be shelled. Meanwhile, thousands of Israeli leaflets were found all over Gaza calling on Gazans to inform the Israeli military of the locations of rocket launchers in return for aid and assistance. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Following Friday prayers, Palestinians demonstrated in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Demonstrators in Hebron, Jericho, Nablus, Bethlehem and Ramallah, as well as the villages of Al-Ma'sara, Bil'in, Ni'lin, Jayous and Qalqiliya, reaffirmed their solidarity with Gaza and condemned the Israeli attacks. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli army allowed 250 Palestinians holding foreign passports to leave the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing near Beit Hanoun. Most of them held passports from the former Soviet Union and some European countries. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Two Palestinians, a man and a woman, were killed and 20 others injured in a strike by Israeli forces in central Gaza. Another Palestinian was killed when IAF targeted a civilian car in the Gaza Valley. Three others were injured in that attack. Ten persons were injured after a number of air strikes targeted the home of Imad A'gel, a senior leader of the armed wing of Hamas. Several businesses were struck, particularly in Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. Out of the 28 killed in Israeli air strikes since New Year's Eve, 16 were children, nine from the same family, and nine of the adults killed were women. Fifty-seven per cent of Palestinians killed so far in 2009 were children. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In a statement issued by the Chairperson of the coordinating committee for independent United Nations human rights experts (known as "special procedures"), Asma Jahangir said that the Committee was deeply alarmed at the continuing violence in Gaza. She called on all parties to immediately cease all actions that resulted in civilian casualties or put them at great risk. Both air strikes by Israeli Government forces and rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel were resulting in inexcusable loss of lives and placing the civilian populations in the affected areas in extreme danger.

(www.ohchr.org)

After briefing US President Bush on the deadly toll in the Gaza Strip, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the United States and its world allies were pushing hard for a durable and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, but no end to the violence was in sight. Both Mr. Bush and Ms. Rice had been working the telephones with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as officials from Arab States and European countries, in the hope of securing peace. At the White House, Ms. Rice told reporters, "Hamas has used Gaza as a launching pad for rockets against Israeli cities, and has contributed deeply to a very bad daily life for the Palestinian people in Gaza and to a humanitarian situation that we have all been trying to address" adding, "It is obvious that that ceasefire should take place as soon as possible, but we need a ceasefire that is durable and sustainable." (www.state.gov)

Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt and his counterparts, the Czech Republic's Karl Schwarzenberg and France's Bernard Kouchner, would be travelling to Cairo on 4 January for talks. The three ministers planned to continue to Jerusalem for discussions on 5 January, and subsequently to Ramallah to meet sections of the Palestinian leadership and to meet PA President Mahmoud Abbas in Amman on 6 January. (www.sweden.gov.se)

Protests against Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip were carried out shortly after Friday prayers in Tehran, Cairo, Amman and Damascus. Similar protests had been held every day daily since Israel had launched the bombing campaign on 27 December. Protests had also been held across the world. More than 2,000 Australian Muslims had gathered in a Sydney park for Friday prayers using a symbolic coffin. Up to 5,000 people had gathered in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. (*BBC, Haaretz*)

3

Israeli aircraft bombarded the Gaza Strip. More than 40 air raids were conducted. One missile hit a mosque in the northern town of Jabalya where more than 200 people were praying, medics and witnesses said. At least 10 bodies were pulled from the rubble of the mosque, including 2 children, aged 10 and 12, they said, and 50 others were wounded, 24 of them seriously. The American International School in northern Gaza was demolished and a guard there killed. Another air strike on Rafah, at the southern end of the Strip, killed four people. (*AFP, Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA)*)

Israeli ground forces entered the Gaza Strip. "The objective is to destroy the Hamas terror infrastructure in the area of operations" said Major Avital Leibovitch, a military spokesperson, confirming that incursions were under way. "We are going to take some of the launch areas used by Hamas." At least 17 people are killed and 130 injured when Israeli shells fell near a school and the main market in Gaza City, Palestinian health officials told the BBC. Hamas-run media reported the capture of two Israeli soldiers, but the Israeli army said it had no knowledge of the claim.

At least 32 missiles were fired into Israel from Gaza, targeting communities close to the border. Two Israelis were slightly wounded in the Eshkol region, while one woman was slightly injured in Sderot. A tank shell fired into northern Gaza killed 12 people, most of them civilians, Palestinian sources said. An Israeli missile hit a house in Shujaiya, killing a woman and four of her children, officials at Al-Shifa hospital told BBC. A senior Hamas military commander, Jihad Hamdan, was critically wounded in an air strike in the southern town of Khan Yunis. (*BBC, Reuters*)

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak signed an order "urgently calling up thousands of reserve soldiers" to join the Gaza fighting, his office said. IDF said the operations would last "many days" and warned Gaza residents against hiding "terrorists". Israeli tanks were reported around the northern towns of Beit Lahia and Jabalya. Witnesses said Hamas forces had responded with mortars and rockets. (*AFP*)

Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) opened a meeting on the Gaza violence. OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu told ministers gathered in Jeddah of the need for all parties "within and beyond Palestine to put aside political calculations and act toward stemming the bloodshed and enable the population of the Gaza Strip to at least maintain living conditions, however harsh they are. Therefore, we call strongly for an immediate ceasefire and for medical and humanitarian supplies to be allowed into the Gaza Strip through all crossings". At the end of the meeting, a final communiqué was issued condemning Israel's actions on Gaza. The meeting requested the international community, in particular the Security Council and the Quartet, to immediately end Israel's aggression in Gaza, secure a ceasefire, provide protection for Palestinians and compel Israel to lift its blockade. The meeting agreed for OIC to exert efforts in calling for an emergency special session of the General Assembly. (*AFP, www.kln.gov.my*)

In his weekly radio address, US President Bush called on Hamas "to turn away from terror, and to support legitimate Palestinian leaders working for peace". He rejected calls for a unilateral ceasefire that he said would allow Hamas to continue hitting Israel with rocket fire. He said the Israeli strikes were in self-defence. White House Deputy Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe earlier said the US had urged Israel to avoid civilian casualties in their military operations, whether they involve continued air assaults or a ground incursion. "Those will be decisions made by the Israelis," he said when asked if Israel would be justified in launching a ground assault. After briefing President Bush earlier, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

said Washington sought a "ceasefire that would not allow a re-establishment of the status quo ante where Hamas can continue to launch rockets out of Gaza". British Prime Minister Gordon Brown urged Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to halt military action, Mr. Brown's office said. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan flew to Saudi Arabia as his country engaged in shuttle diplomacy with Arab countries to help broker a ceasefire in the Middle East. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad urged his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, to put pressure on Israel for an end to the Gaza massacres. (AFP, AP, www.whitehouse.gov)

Israel's ground operation in Gaza was more "defensive than offensive," Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek said in his capacity as European Union President, according to his spokesman. That statement was later withdrawn and replaced with the following: "It is not surprising that the Israeli forces have launched land operations in the Gaza Strip. There were indications that Israel had been considering this step. But even the undisputable right of the State to defend itself does not allow actions which largely affect civilians. We call for the facilitation of humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, and in accordance with the position agreed by the European Union Foreign Ministers in Paris on 30 December 2008 we call for the establishment of a ceasefire". (AFP, www.eu2009.cz)

"France condemns the Israeli ground offensive against Gaza as it condemns the continuation of rocket firing," the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "This dangerous military escalation complicates efforts by the international community and in particular the European Union and France, the members of the Quartet and the States in the region to end the fighting, bring immediate aid to civilians and reach a permanent ceasefire", the statement said. (AFP, Reuters)

PA President Abbas condemned Israel for launching its ground operation against the Gaza Strip, his senior aide said. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said Israel's ground offensive into Gaza showed the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire, warning the military escalation would cause "alarm and dismay". (AFP)

Demonstrators hurled shoes at the iron gates outside the British Prime Minister's residence in London and waved Palestinian flags as tens of thousands protested Israel's bombardment of Gaza. Rallies were also held in other British cities, including Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, and across Europe in countries such as Germany and Turkey. Some 5,000 Turks protested in Ankara. In the Netherlands, thousands of people marched through Amsterdam, criticizing both the Israeli attacks and the Dutch Government's failure to condemn them. In Germany, more than 4,000 people demonstrated in Dusseldorf and some 5,000 demonstrated in Frankfurt. In Berlin, more than 7,000 people marched. Another 2,500 demonstrated in Salzburg, Austria, while scores protested peacefully in Madrid outside the Spanish Foreign Ministry. In the Swedish city of Uppsala, 1,200 marched to a church where a Muslim and Christian service was planned to commemorate the victims of the Israeli raids. In Cyprus, pro-Palestinian demonstrators clashed with police near the Israeli Embassy in Nicosia. In Paris police put the number of those marching through the French capital at more than 6,000, while the organizers estimated 25,000 took part. In Nice, police said there were 3,000 demonstrators while organizers claimed 5,000. Tens of thousands of Israeli Arabs demonstrated in the northern town of Sakhnin over Israel's offensive against Gaza. (AP)

Israeli authorities barred a Red Cross medical team from entering Gaza to help treat residents injured during a week of bombings. (AFP)

Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso pledged to provide \$10 million (about ¥900 million) in humanitarian aid to Palestinians amid concerns over rising civilian casualties from Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip, Japanese officials said. During a teleconference with PA President Abbas, Mr. Aso also called on the Palestinian leader to work towards realizing an early ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. (Kyodo)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned over the serious further escalation today in Gaza, including the launch of an Israeli ground operation into the Strip, use of heavy artillery and continued rocket fire.

"The Secretary-General has spoken with Prime Minister Olmert and conveyed his extreme concern and disappointment. He is convinced and alarmed that this escalation will inevitably increase the already heavy suffering of the affected civilian populations. He called for an immediate end to the ground operation, and asked that Israel do all possible to ensure the protection of civilians and that humanitarian assistance is able to reach those in need.

"Today's developments complicate the efforts of the Quartet and others to end the violence. The Secretary-General reiterates his call for an immediate cessation of all violence and urges regional and international partners to exert all possible influence to bring about an immediate end to the bloodshed and suffering."

(UN press release SG/SM/12033)

The Security Council held a special meeting on the situation in the Gaza Strip but failed to issue a statement. Libyan Permanent Representative Giadalla Ettalhi said: "Unfortunately, the delegation of the United States has a clear position that is against any product or outcome from this meeting".

US Deputy Permanent Representative Alejandro Wolff said the United States was seeking a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza "that means no more rocket attacks, no more smuggling bombs ... We shared our view on the root cause ... that is, Hamas continues the rocket attacks and violence", Mr. Wolff said. "We were not able to come to an agreement today". The Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, John Sawers, said the Security Council should focus less time on placing blame for the violence on Gaza and "focus on what the Council can do". (AFP, www.cnn.com)

4

Thousands of Israeli troops backed by tanks battled Hamas fighters near Gaza City. Clashes were also reported around the northern towns of Beit Lahia, Beit Hanoun and Jabalya. Witnesses said that Israel controlled Salaheddine Road, the main highway along the length of the Gaza, cutting the territory in half. Medics said 70 Palestinians had died since Israeli troops entered Gaza. Israel said one soldier had been killed by a mortar shell in the Gaza Strip and 49 had been wounded. Some 45 rockets were fired into Israel, wounding 3 people. (AFP, Haaretz)

European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana would be travelling to the Middle East from 4 to 6 January 2009 in order to discuss the extremely serious situation in Gaza and in southern Israel with the leaders in the region as part of the European Union's efforts to secure a ceasefire and to facilitate humanitarian relief for the victims of the conflict, his office announced. Mr. Solana would be travelling with the European Union delegation, led by the Czech Presidency, to Egypt, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Jordan. (www.consilium.europa.eu)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"In light of the deepening crisis in Gaza, I recalled my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, to brief me in New York on the situation on the ground as well as diplomatic efforts under way. I also convened a meeting of my senior advisers as part of the ongoing response of the United Nations to all aspects of the crisis.

"I believe the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, has a central role to play in bringing a speedy end to the conflict. I regret that the Security Council has not been able to reach a consensus, including during its emergency session held yesterday evening, in order to bring about an end to the violence. I will be working actively with members of the Council and other key players, in particular Arab leaders who I am seeing tomorrow at United Nations Headquarters, to facilitate the emergence of a consensus.

"Meanwhile I remain extremely concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation on the ground. We are in close contact with the Israeli authorities to press them to open not only the Kerem Shalom crossing, but also Karni and Nahal Oz, to allow in, particularly, wheat grain and fuel for the power plant, as well as other essential supplies.

"Given the crucial juncture at which we have arrived in the search for a ceasefire, I appeal to all members of the international community to display the unity and commitment required to bring this escalating crisis to an end."

(UN press release SG/SM/12035)

5

An Israeli attack killed three Palestinians at the Asma Elementary School run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza City. The victims were among hundreds of Palestinians who had taken shelter in the school, fleeing their homes in Beit Lahia in northern Gaza. The school was clearly marked as a United Nations installation. The three killed were identified as Husein Mahmoud Abed Al Malek Al Sultan, aged 24, Abed Samir Ali Al Sultan, 19, and Rawhi Jamal Ramadan Al Sultan, 25. UNRWA said in a press release that it strongly protested these killings to the Israeli authorities and was calling for an immediate and impartial investigation. *(UNRWA press release)*

Israeli troops had partially surrounded Gaza City and Hamas had been hit hard, Defence Minister Ehud Barak said. Israeli soldiers and Hamas militants fought gun battles in the streets of Gaza City. Fifty Palestinians, including 12 children, were killed in the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip during the day, the head of the territory's emergency services told AFP. Palestinian rockets continued to land, with about 30 striking various locations in Israel, including one which struck a kindergarten, which was empty at the time, in the port city of Ashdod, about 30 kms north of the Gaza Strip. The military wing of Hamas threatened to target Tel Aviv and the Dimona nuclear site with rockets. *(AFP, AP, BBC, Ma'an News Agency)*

Israel's Prime Minister Olmert rejected telephone pleas from French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to halt the Gaza offensive. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni rejected European Union calls for an immediate ceasefire after talks with a ministerial delegation led by Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg. The European Union delegation, which also includes French and Swedish Ministers Bernard Kouchner and Carl Bildt, and the European Union Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, earlier held talks in Sharm el-Sheikh with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. In a telephone conversation with PA President Abbas, Russian President Medvedev called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The Russian Middle East Envoy, Alexander Saltanov, also held talks with Mr. Abbas. Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, whose country held the European Union Presidency, said he had a plan whose goal was to at least suspend fighting in Gaza following Israel's assault. French President Sarkozy held talks in Sharm el-Sheikh with President Mubarak which focused on Egyptian efforts to reach a ceasefire. The French leader was due later to hold talks with Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, who is then expected to head to the United Nations to plead for a ceasefire. The Pope called on both sides to end the fighting. The Emir of Qatar called on fellow Arab leaders to hold an extraordinary summit in support of Gaza. Mauritania said it had withdrawn its ambassador to Israel for consultations.

The European Commission called on Israel to respect international law and allow access to people "suffering and dying" in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip. Turkey's Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, following talks with his Syrian counterpart said his country favoured a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas ensured by international monitors, adding that Turkey was willing to contribute to such a mission. Hamas said it would send a delegation to Egypt, expected later that day, to discuss ceasefire proposals. *(AFP, AP, Haaretz, RIAN)*

US President Bush voiced his deep concern about the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, saying he believed there would be a ceasefire to end the conflict between Israel and Palestinian Hamas militants. He told reporters in the White House that he understood Israel's "desire to protect itself" from the rocket attacks by Hamas. He said any ceasefire had to ensure Hamas militants could not continue firing rockets at Israel. US Vice President Dick Cheney had said that Israel had not sought US approval before the ground invasion. *(AFP, AP, Xinhua)*

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy urging him, as France presided over by Security Council for the month, to give Israel "freedom to act" against Hamas and other militants firing rockets from Gaza. *(DPA)*

PA President Abbas met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Karel Schwarzenberg, in Ramallah. President Sarkozy reiterated the European Union's condemnation of the Israeli ground offensive on the Gaza Strip and said that France wanted an immediate ceasefire to end the "dramatic" humanitarian situation in Gaza. The meeting and press conference were attended by European Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana. *(WFAA)*

Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev instructed Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and Minister for Emergency Situations Sergey Shoigu to urgently look into the issue of how to offer additional humanitarian aid to the Palestinian Authority. *(www.kremlin.ru)*

Ambulances and medical workers in Gaza were facing increasing difficulty in reaching the wounded. Some medics were being killed and a "humanitarian breathing space" was vital to ensure that food and medical supplies reached those in need as Israel's offensive entered its tenth day, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Maxwell Gaylard, told a news briefing. "Large numbers of people, including many children, are hungry; they are cold, they are without ready access to medical facilities, they are without access to electricity and running water, above all they are terrified. That, by any measure, is a humanitarian crisis", he said. Mr. Gaylard said Palestinian deaths had reached 500 and were rising and that some 2,500 had been injured in the Israeli offensive. "Electricity and communications are down over much of the Strip both on account of lack of fuel and damage to critical infrastructure. Over a million people are currently without power, and over a quarter million without running water, some for up to six days," he added. *(UN News Centre)*

"Those who are compelled to flee the Gaza Strip should be able to do so and to find safety and security in other countries according to international law," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres said in a statement. "I thus urge that all borders and access routes concerned should be kept open and safe, and Palestinians endeavouring to leave Gaza should not be prevented from doing so", he added. "It is absolutely imperative that the immediate delivery of humanitarian access to the civilian victims of this conflict be facilitated, including access from Egypt and Israel", he said. *(AFP)*

Israel cancelled arrangements to allow the first foreign reporters into Gaza. "Israel has never restricted media access like this before, and it should be ashamed," said Ethan Bronner, *The New York Times* bureau chief in Jerusalem. "It's betraying the principles by which it claims to live."

(AP)

Riyad Malki, PA Foreign Minister said he had travelled to United Nations Headquarters in New York at the request of PA President Abbas "to prepare a draft resolution that will be presented to the Security Council as soon as possible". "President [Abbas] will be arriving hopefully

tomorrow", and he would meet with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to voice his concerns with the escalation of the current Gaza conflict, he said, adding that the Security Council hopefully would convene an open session on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The draft resolution would include the Council's serious concerns at the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and would call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an end to the siege and the opening of the crossings, he said. The Arab Foreign Ministers would be meeting with the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amre Moussa, before their joint meeting with Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and would also meet representatives of "each and every member" of the Security Council, he said. (*Xinhua*)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Amre Moussa and other Arab Foreign Ministers of the League Follow-up Committee. After the meeting, a press encounter took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York. (*UN News Centre*)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres said in a statement that civilians wishing to leave Gaza had to be allowed to do so, and reminded neighbouring States of their responsibility to provide access to safety for those fleeing the ongoing violence. (*UNHCR press release*)

6

Israeli forces killed at least 42 Palestinians, including children, at an UNRWA school housing displaced people in the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, medical officials said. Initial reports said the school was destroyed, collapsing on top of Palestinians who had taken shelter inside from Israeli air and ground forces attacks. In addition to the dead, several dozen people were wounded, the officials said. UNRWA said it had handed over the Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates of all United Nations installations throughout the Gaza Strip to the Israeli military. The school was clearly marked as a United Nations facility. John Ging, UNRWA's top official, said, "There's nowhere safe in Gaza. Everyone here is terrorized and traumatized" adding, "I am appealing to political leaders here and in the region and the world to get their act together and stop this." (*Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

An Israeli soldier was killed in a gun battle with Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, raising the death toll of Israeli troops to six since the Israeli ground incursion began on 3 January. Four soldiers, from a combined unit of the elite Golani and Combat Engineering troops, were wounded in the morning encounter in the northern part of Gaza City, reported a local news service. Earlier in the day, the Israeli army announced that three elite soldiers and one paratroop officer respectively had been killed in two incidents in northern Gaza overnight. Ten Israelis had been killed since Israel launched "Operation Cast Lead" against Gaza on 27 December. The other four had died in rocket attacks by Gazan militants before the ground offensive. (*Xinhua*)

IAF warplanes struck a building in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip in which Ayman Sayam, the head of Hamas' rocket division, was staying. It was not immediately clear whether Mr. Sayam was hit in the attack. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli troops detained five Palestinians near Bethlehem and 22 others in the Hebron area. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Palestinian medical officials reported that 10 Palestinians had been killed when a shell fired by an Israeli ship hit their house on the Gaza shore. Officials in Gaza said at least 20 people had been killed in shelling up and down the Gaza Strip. Only two of the dead could be immediately confirmed to have been militants. (*Haaretz*)

Egypt's President Mubarak said during a joint press conference with French President Sarkozy in Cairo: "Egypt has been pursuing active efforts since the first day of the hostilities, and today I am putting forward an initiative specifically designed to contain the situation, based on the following elements:

"1. Israel and the Palestinian factions shall agree to an immediate ceasefire for a specified period to allow the opening of corridors for aid to the inhabitants of the Strip and to allow Egypt to pursue efforts towards a complete and permanent ceasefire.

"2. Egypt calls on Israel and the Palestinian sides to meet immediately to conclude arrangements and guarantees to prevent a repetition of the present escalation. The causes of that escalation, including the question of securing the borders, should be addressed to allow for the reopening of border crossings and the lifting of the blockade. Egypt is prepared to take part in these discussions along with the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and with the European Union and the other members of the Quartet.

"3. Egypt renews its call on the Palestinian National Authority and all Palestinian factions to respond to Egyptian efforts to bring about Palestinian reconciliation, which is indispensable for overcoming the challenges facing the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause both in the current critical situation and in the future." (*UN document S/2009/14*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's office said, "In order to prevent a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has decided ... to establish a humanitarian corridor in the Strip to assist the population. This would entail opening of geographic areas for certain periods of time during which the population would be able to equip itself and receive the assistance." (www.pmo.gov.il)

Israel said that an initial army investigation showed mortar fire may have come from an UNRWA school in Gaza where dozens of people were killed in an Israeli strike. Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev said, "The initial findings... are that there was hostile fire at one of our units from the United Nations facility. Our unit responded. Then there were explosions out of proportion to the ordnance we used" he said, adding, "and then you can only speculate as to why. We are still investigating." (*AFP*)

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, at least 631 Palestinians had been killed and more than 2,700 wounded since Israel began its attacks on the Gaza Strip. (*Reuters*)

In a press release, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights said that 599 Palestinians had been killed since the beginning of the Israeli operations on the Gaza Strip, including 133 children, 33 women and 6 medical workers. For the past three days, more than 90 per cent of the casualties had been unarmed civilians, including a large number of children. (*Wafa*)

IDF entered the Arroub refugee camp in Hebron, arresting 16 Palestinians. (*Wafa*)

Israel's Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip would continue until Hamas had completely stopped rocket attacks against Israel and a mechanism had been put in place to guarantee that the rocket fire would not resume and that no new weapons were smuggled into Gaza in the future. Mr. Olmert told a European Union delegation in Jerusalem that Israel would not settle for a temporary solution. (*DPA*)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh issued a statement vowing Hamas would not surrender to the Israeli ground troops operating in the Strip. "The ground aggression on the Gaza Strip is proof that the occupation has failed to force the population of the Gaza Strip to surrender" he said in the statement sent to reporters. The people of Gaza may not have tanks and warplanes, he said, but they had the strength, the will, the patience and the ability to survive under severe conditions. (*DPA*)

Irish Foreign Minister Micheál Martin condemned the Israeli air and artillery strikes on United Nations run schools in the Gaza Strip. "I am appalled by these indiscriminate attacks by Israeli forces which have resulted in so many civilian fatalities, including of children, who were simply sheltering from the conflict taking place around them. The death and suffering, as well as the humanitarian deprivation, now being inflicted on the people of Gaza as a result of the continuation of the Israeli 'Operation Cast Lead', cannot be justified in any way and must now be brought to an immediate end" Mr. Martin said. "I again would like to make the strongest appeal for an immediate cessation of all violence in and from Gaza and for the

putting in place of an effective and sustainable ceasefire and the facilitation of urgent humanitarian access. Ireland will continue to work closely with our European Union and international partners to achieve the earliest diplomatic resolution of this crisis" he added. (www.foreignaffairs.gov.ie)

Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht "expressed horror and dismay at the dramatic rise in the number of victims of Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip," according to his office. "Minister De Gucht unreservedly supports the efforts being made by the European Union to bring about a lasting ceasefire and come to the aid of the civilian population whose situation is becoming more intolerable by the day. As previously announced, Belgium has also decided to make extra efforts to relieve the suffering of the people of Gaza by providing humanitarian aid" it said. (www.diplomatie.be)

French President Nicolas Sarkozy met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus where he urged him to exert pressure on Hamas to end rocket attacks on Israel. He called on the Syrian Arab Republic to "convince Hamas to choose the voice of reason and the path of peace and reconciliation". Speaking to reporters at a joint press conference, Mr. Sarkozy said "Pressure should be exerted on all parties involved, including Hamas, in order for the guns to fall silent and peace to return" adding, "President Bashar al-Assad can play a major role in this. Syria must help us to convince Hamas to choose the voice of reason and peace". President Al-Assad agreed with Mr. Sarkozy on the need for a quick resolution to the "humanitarian tragedy" and for a ceasefire, Israeli withdrawal and the lifting of Gaza's siege. He said, "What is happening is a war crime" referring to the Israeli ground and air assault on Gaza, adding that Israel would not be able to finish off Hamas. Mr. Sarkozy later returned to Egypt for fresh talks with his Egyptian counterpart, Hosni Mubarak. (AFP, AP, DPA)

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he was "hopeful" an immediate ceasefire in Gaza could be agreed on, but warned that the Middle East was facing its "darkest moment yet". He said, "It obviously depends on what we do on the crossings [into Gaza], what we do on the tunnels [from Egypt into Gaza], what we do about the supply and trafficking in arms and what security we can give to both the Palestinian people and Israeli people". (AFP)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would be holding talks at the United Nations in New York in a bid to broker a sustainable ceasefire as soon as possible to end the crisis in Gaza. Ms. Rice was planning to hold several separate meetings with PA President Abbas and Arab and European Foreign Ministers to lobby for a three-tiered US truce proposal and would then attend a United Nations Security Council meeting on Gaza, said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. In addition to Mr. Abbas, Secretary Rice would meet with Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, as well as her British and French counterparts, David Miliband and Bernard Kouchner. Meetings with Arab officials were expected on 7 January. League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa and the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco planned meetings with envoys from other Arab States, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Security Council members. (AP, www.state.gov)

US President-elect Barack Obama expressed deep concern about the loss of civilian lives in the Gaza Strip and in Israel. Speaking after Israeli tank shells killed more than 40 Palestinians at an UNRWA school, Mr. Obama said he would adhere to the principle that only US President George W. Bush would speak for American foreign policy at this time, but said he would have plenty more to say after his 20 January inauguration. (Reuters)

A Hamas delegation from Damascus was in Cairo to discuss an Egyptian-proposed ceasefire with Israel. The delegation, headed by Emad al-Alami and Mohammed Nasr, met with Egypt's Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman, the MENA News Agency reported. (AFP)

At a forum on relations between the Gulf region and the United States, Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal said in a message directed at US President-elect Barak Obama, "The Bush administration has left you [with] a disgusting legacy and a reckless position towards the massacres and bloodshed of innocents in Gaza" adding, "enough is enough, today we are all Palestinians and we seek martyrdom for God and for Palestine, following those who died in Gaza". Prince Turki Al-Faisal was a former Saudi Ambassador to the United States. (AFP)

Israeli President Shimon Peres criticized European efforts to seek a halt to the Gaza conflict insisting that Israel was not worried about its international image, his office said. "Europe must open its eyes. We are not in the business of public relations or improving our image. We are fighting against terror, and we have every right to defend our citizens" he told European Union External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferraro-Waldner, who had said that "Israel's image is being destroyed" because of its refusal to listen to international appeals for a ceasefire. (AFP)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair said the key to ending the violence in Gaza was ensuring weapons smuggling to Hamas was halted. Mr. Blair says that stopping Hamas' rocket supply would be a "very significant advance in terms of Israel's security". He said that would allow Israel to halt its 11-day offensive and relieve the suffering of Gaza's civilians. (AP)

The Jordanian Government announced plans to establish a humanitarian corridor running from Jordan to Gaza with the coordination of the European Union, after a series of meetings between the King of Jordan, senior officials and a European Union troika delegation. (www.mfa.gov.jo)

The Brazilian Foreign Ministry said that a Brazilian Air Force plane would leave on 9 January with 14 tons of food and medicine for the people in the Gaza Strip. The plane was expected to arrive in Jordan on 11 January and the food and medicine would be transported to Gaza by the United Nations and Jordanian charity organizations. (Xinhua)

In Geneva, the Director of Operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Pierre Krähenbühl, described the situation of civilian in Gaza as intolerable and called on the parties to the conflict to make it possible for ICRC and the Palestine Red Crescent Society to reach people in need. (www.icrc.org)

France had approved €3 million in emergency aid to help Palestinians cope with the humanitarian impact of Israel's military offensive in Gaza, the French Foreign Ministry said. (AFP)

The following statement was issued by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"In the past day, three schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have been hit by nearby Israeli military strikes. A substantial number of civilians have been killed, particularly in the third strike, and many more have been injured. I am awaiting full confirmation of the details of these incidents.

"These, and over 20 other schools, are serving as temporary shelters to over 15,000 Palestinians whose homes have been destroyed or who are fleeing the violence. They are seeking sanctuary in UNRWA schools because they have no other place to go and are not able to flee the Gaza Strip.

"In another incident, seven United Nations staff were injured, three seriously, together with three patients, when a strike on a neighbouring building caused substantial collateral damage to an UNRWA health centre.

"The locations of all United Nations facilities have been communicated to the Israeli authorities and are known to the Israeli army. After earlier strikes, the Israeli Government was warned that its operations were endangering United Nations compounds. I am deeply dismayed

that despite these repeated efforts, today's tragedies have ensued. These attacks by Israeli military forces which endanger United Nations facilities acting as places of refuge are totally unacceptable and must not be repeated. Equally unacceptable are any actions by militants which endanger the Palestinian civilian population.

"Today's events underscore the dangers inherent in the continuation and escalation of this conflict. I call once again for an immediate ceasefire."

(UN press release SG/SM/12037)

United Nations Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Max Gaylard demanded an investigation into deadly strikes near UNRWA schools and into other civilian deaths in the Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip. His statement was issued before the third Israeli attack near a school. Earlier, two people died when an artillery shell hit just outside a school in Khan Yunis. "Well before the current fighting, the United Nations had given to the Israeli authorities the GPS coordinates of all its installations in Gaza" Mr. Gaylard said in a statement. *(AFP)*

The Security Council met on the crisis in Gaza. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that as the conflict had escalated, he had repeatedly condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and the excessive use of force by Israel and had called for an immediate end to the violence. He warned that if the appeals went unheeded, civilians would inevitably be killed in large numbers. He said immediate humanitarian measures, including the opening of crossings for humanitarian assistance, must be ensured, and a viable international mechanism would be required to that end. Mr. Ban also said he intended to travel the following week to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as regional capitals. PA President Abbas and Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Gabriela Shalev, also addressed the Council, as did 14 ministers for foreign affairs and other representatives. *(UN News Centre, UN press release SC/9563)*

The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Koïchiro Matsuura, welcomed a call by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned of Qatar to protect schools in the Gaza Strip, saying schools should in no way be involved in military conflict. Sheikha Mozah is the Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, and Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education to UNESCO. In a letter addressed to the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, she urged that a number of educational institutions should be allocated for the creation of safety zones in Gaza to offer special protection to schoolchildren.

(UNESCO press release)

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Israel's military scaled back attacks in Gaza for three hours to allow food and fuel to reach besieged Palestinians. Israeli military spokesman Peter Lerner said the "recess in offensive operations" was aimed at allowing in supplies and fuel, and would last from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. local time. He said similar lulls in the coming days would be considered. Mr. Lerner said that even during the pause, "for every attack against the army, there will be a response." *(AP)*

Israel resumed its Gaza offensive, bombing heavily around suspected smuggling tunnels near the border with Egypt after a three-hour lull to allow in humanitarian aid. Palestinians reported more than 20 air strikes around Gaza City before dawn and said that one person was killed and 10 wounded in the attacks. Three members of the Islamic Jihad were killed and two others wounded in an air strike later in the morning. As part of the overnight operations, IAF warplanes, in coordination with the Shin Bet security service, attacked the homes of a Hamas militant said to be responsible for rocket fire from southern Gaza and a commander of Hamas' Khan Yunis unit. IAF attacked some 40 targets in the Gaza Strip early in the day, among them 15 tunnels. Israeli strikes killed 29 Palestinians, including at least 22 civilians, medics said. In one incident, a family of four was killed in an air strike on their car. *(AP, Haaretz)*

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired at least 13 rockets into southern Israel. In Be'er Sheva, some structures were slightly damaged but there were no casualties. *(Haaretz)*

Medics said that almost a third of the 689 Palestinians killed in Israel's Gaza offensive were children, with most killed since the start of the ground offensive. A total of 220 children had been killed since the beginning of the operation on 27 December, according to Gaza emergency services chief, Moawiya Hassanein. *(AFP)*

Concerning the previous day's Israeli strike on an UNRWA school in the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza, UNRWA spokesman Christopher Gunness said, "Following an initial investigation, we are 99.9 per cent sure that there were no militants or militant activities in the school and the school compound ... We are calling for an independent investigation to establish the facts ... If the rules of war had been broken, those found guilty must be brought to justice." *(AFP)*

Israeli troops assaulted and seized a 19-year-old Palestinian in Hebron, accusing him of holding a knife. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that Israel and the Palestinian Authority had accepted the Egyptian-French plan for Gaza. "[President Sarkozy] strongly welcomes the acceptance by Israel and the Palestinian Authority of the French-Egyptian plan presented yesterday by [Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak," according to a statement issued upon his return from the Middle East. The statement did not give details of the plan.

Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev said Israel could accept the proposal if it halted "hostile fire" from Gaza and included measures to prevent Hamas from rearming. A Hamas delegate who attended the previous day's talks with Egypt's intelligence chief said Hamas representatives would go back to the Syrian Arab Republic and discuss Mr. Mubarak's proposals. *(AP)*

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's office issued the following statement: "Israel is working to improve the security reality in the south of the country. Israel thanks Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and French President Nicolas Sarkozy for their efforts to advance a solution for halting terrorist actions from Gaza and the smuggling of war material into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. Israel views as positive the dialogue between Egyptian and Israeli officials in order to advance these issues." *(www.pmo.gov.il)*

A senior Israeli defence official said a senior aide to Defence Minister Ehud Barak, Amos Gilad, would go to Cairo on 8 January and meet with Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman to discuss an Egyptian proposal to end the conflict in Gaza. *(AFP)*

A Middle Eastern diplomat said in Ankara that Turkey would be given the task of constructing an international force for Gaza, but did not say what role the force would play. *(AP)*

The European Union Presidency, held by the Czech Republic, issued the following statement:

"The Presidency of the European Union is deeply concerned by the increasing number of civilian casualties and the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are profoundly disturbed by the loss of civilian life at a school in Jabalya that resulted from Israeli military action. We continue to call on both sides to immediately implement a comprehensive ceasefire to ease the suffering of civilians in both Israel and Gaza.

We call on Israel to open a humanitarian corridor in Gaza and allow humanitarian organizations free access to the territory. There is a dire need in Gaza for basic supplies, including food, medicines, water and electricity. We recall the responsibility of those who, by indiscriminately firing rockets into Israel, including from the densely populated areas of Gaza, began this tragic conflict. *(www.eu2009.cz)*

At a press conference Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra said "It is clear that Hamas started the fighting and this is clear that it is to blame for the conflict. However, we need to remain aware of the suffering of all the citizens of Gaza, who are under direct fire and in a difficult situation, as well as the outrage of all the Arab States, particularly the States in the region." *(Ma'an News Agency)*

Russia's top Middle East envoy, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov, met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and exiled Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus in a bid to bring an end to the conflict in Gaza, officials said. The talks between Mr. Al-Assad and Mr. Saltanov centred on "the efforts being deployed to halt the Israeli aggression" on the Gaza Strip and for a "withdrawal of the Israeli occupation troops and the lifting of the blockade," Syria's official Sana news agency reported. The two also underlined the need for "the international community to act promptly to persuade Israel to end its aggression immediately, to lift the closures and open the border crossings (between Gaza and Israel) permanently" Sana added. The statement from Moscow also said concerning the meeting with Mr. Mashaal: "In the talks, the Russian side emphasized the need for a political-diplomatic solution ... Khaled Mashaal expressed his readiness to take part in such a solution to the conflict. But he added that the imposition of capitulatory conditions by Israel was unacceptable." (AFP)

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the Netherlands, backed by Denmark, had undertaken a diplomatic initiative to expedite a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza. The Netherlands and Denmark were proposing a European mission to closely monitor the border between Egypt and Gaza, it said, adding that Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen and his Danish counterpart Per Stig Møller had written to the European Union Presidency to announce their initiative. (Reuters, www.minbuza.nl)

Japanese Foreign Ministry officials said Japan and Italy had agreed to cooperate in calling for a truce in Gaza and coordinate humanitarian assistance efforts among the Group of Eight (G8) nations. Italy had assumed the rotating G8 presidency from Japan for 2009. Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini and his Japanese counterpart Hirofumi Nakasone expressed grave concern about the deteriorating situation and affirmed the importance of urging both the Israelis and Palestinians to implement an immediate and sustainable ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the officials said. They also expressed support for efforts in the Security Council to broker a solution and reaffirmed their pledges to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinians. (Kyodo)

Humanitarian agencies said Egypt had drawn up contingency plans to deal with a sudden influx of thousands of Palestinian refugees fleeing the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip. "The Egyptian Government, supported by national and international humanitarian bodies, is preparing in case of necessity", said the head of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, Mamduh Gabr, adding that it was up to the Egyptian Government to decide on opening the border. (AFP)

Finland's Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Paavo Väyrynen decided to provide €500,000 in humanitarian aid to support work done by the ICRC to assist victims of the crisis in the Gaza Strip. (www.formin.finland.fi)

Danish Minister for Development Cooperation Ulla Tørnæs said, "The dramatic escalation of the conflict in Gaza has seriously aggravated the already fragile humanitarian situation in the region. I have therefore decided that Denmark is to provide assistance amounting to Danish Kroner 20 million [\$3.6 million] to the UNRWA. This contribution will help to cover the most urgent needs for food, shelter and financial help in the coming months." (www.um.dk)

Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon said Canada would give \$3 million to United Nations relief efforts and another \$1 million to the Red Cross to help Palestinians caught up in the fighting. (AP)

The World Bank said data collected by the Gaza Coastal Municipal Water Utility and the Palestinian Water Authority on the current Gaza Strip water and sanitation situation indicated a severe public health threat to the population of Gaza, including severe potable water shortages and escalating failure of sewage systems, and potential threat to the structural integrity of the Beit Lahiya sewage lake, which could cause massive drowning. (AFP, www.worldbank.org)

The Security Council resumed the previous day's debate on events in the Gaza Strip. The speakers included the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. (UN press release SC/9565)

The United Nations Human Rights Council said it would hold a special session on 9 January on the situation in the Gaza Strip at the request of Islamic and developing countries, as well as the Russian Federation. (Reuters)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) expressed its deep concern over the rising humanitarian impact of the escalating conflict situation in Gaza. Even before the turmoil of recent days, Gaza had the highest unemployment rate in the world. (www.ilo.org)

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) issued a press release which said the three-hour ceasefire provided a limited opportunity to release some life-saving supplies for delivery to families in Gaza, including 560 family water kits and 5 health kits. Many Palestinians had fled their homes, seeking shelter with friends or relatives or in schools. Over a million Gazans, approximately 75 per cent, did not have electricity. (www.unicef.org)

WHO issued a statement that said health services in Gaza, already depleted and fragile, were on the point of collapse if steps to support and protect them were not taken immediately. WHO called for immediate improvement in the situation to make humanitarian health services accessible for the local people. (www.who.int)

The World Food Programme (WFP) said it had delivered wheat flour to 30 Gaza bakeries, enabling them to bake bread for civilians who were finding it increasingly difficult to access food. (www.wfp.org)

At a press conference at United Nations Headquarters, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry said, "After several days of Security Council meetings and active diplomacy in the region, it seems that the elements for a way out of this crisis are rapidly emerging. But more work needs to be done quickly to flesh out the package and secure the buy-in of crucial players". He added "Clearly, a return to the status quo ante cannot be an option." (UN News Centre)

UNRWA Director for Gaza operations John Ging said that the three-hour lull in the fighting was a major event. It was the first time in 12 days that people could move around. People were in the streets everywhere, carrying containers of water, food and other essentials. He described how he was impressed by the stoicism of Gaza residents and how they still looked to the United Nations with hope. (UN News Centre)

A convoy contracted by the United Nations transporting food through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing was fired at. One UNRWA-contracted worker was killed and two injured. Later, a United Nations convoy of two armoured vehicles escorted an ambulance through Gaza City to recover the body of a local staff member during the scheduled humanitarian ceasefire. The vehicles were targeted by three rounds of small arms fire.

One armoured vehicle was hit. Two international staff were in the vehicle, but no casualties were reported. UNRWA spokesperson Adnan Abu Hasna said the United Nations had coordinated the convoy with Israel and the vehicle was marked with a United Nations flag and insignia when it was shot in northern Gaza. The Israeli army said it was investigating. UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness said, "The United Nations is suspending its aid operations in Gaza until we can get safety and security guarantees for our staff." (AP, BBC, CNN, www.ochaopt.org)

A Palestinian television cameraman, Ehab Al Waheedy, his mother and his Moroccan wife, Rukaya Abu al-i-Naja, were killed during a shelling of the Tal al-Hawa neighbourhood, south of Gaza City. The same day, Palestinian reporter Basel Farraj, who had been wounded in an Israeli air strike on Gaza on 27 December 2008, died of his wounds. He had worked as a reporter for the Algerian television channel ANTV and for the Palestinian Broadcast Corporation, PBC. Palestinian sources said that IAF had also struck a compound that housed the offices of television stations covering the fighting. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Three Israeli soldiers were killed in the Gaza Strip. Also, three soldiers were injured in northern Gaza. One sustained moderate wounds while the other two were slightly injured. Five Israeli soldiers had been wounded in overnight fighting in Gaza. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

The spokesperson for UNRWA stated that IDF had admitted that there was no Palestinian gunfire emanating from inside an UNRWA school in Gaza that had been shelled by an IDF tank. Dozens of Palestinians were killed in the shelling. (Haaretz)

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired a barrage of at least 25 rockets and mortar shells at the western Negev, leaving four people wounded. At least five rockets fired by Gaza militants had struck southern Israel overnight. Two of the rockets had exploded in open fields near Be'er Sheva, another two had fallen near Ashkelon and a fifth had struck the Eshkol region. (Haaretz)

An IDF soldier was killed and another slightly wounded when their unit was hit with an anti-tank missile while on patrol in the former settlement of "Netzarim" in the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat reported that 50 bodies were recovered from the rubble of houses hit in the Gaza Strip. The total number of fatalities was now 758, of whom 257 (34 per cent) were children and 56 (7.4 per cent) were women. Of the 3,100 injuries, 1,080 (34.8 per cent) were children and 452 (14.6 per cent) were women. The danger to medical staff and the difficulty of extracting the injured from collapsed buildings made proper evacuation and estimation of casualties difficult. (www.ochaopt.org)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said Israel had not yet achieved all of its goals in its offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. "The decision about how we make sure that the quiet in the South remains is still before us, and IDF has still not been asked to carry out everything that is necessary to achieve this." Speaking to Israeli troops at the Tze'elim training base, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said "The operation in Gaza is continuing." (Haaretz)

A Palestinian man was shot dead after allegedly attempting to set fire to a petrol station in the settlement of "Mishor Adumim" in the central West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency)

Dozens of Palestinian women suffered tear gas inhalation at a demonstration in Bil'in in support of the people in the Gaza Strip. When the group of women and children reached the Israeli separation wall, soldiers fired tear gas at the crowd, injuring dozens. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli soldiers fired on and seriously wounded a 12-year-old boy during clashes that erupted at a rally held at the Fawwar refugee camp near Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas said he hoped a rocket salvo into northern Israel from Lebanon was an "isolated incident" and noted that no Palestinian groups had claimed responsibility. (AFP)

The Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009) with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (United States). The resolution called, inter alia, for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza; called for the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance; welcomed the initiatives aimed at creating and opening humanitarian corridors and other mechanisms for the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid; called on Member States to support international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza, including through urgently needed additional contributions to UNRWA and through the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee; condemned all violence and hostilities directed against civilians and all acts of terrorism; called upon Member States to intensify efforts to provide arrangements and guarantees in Gaza in order to sustain a durable ceasefire and calm, including to prevent trafficking in arms and ammunition and to ensure the sustained reopening of the crossing points; welcomed tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, including in support of the mediation efforts of Egypt and the League of Arab States consistent with Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), called for renewed and urgent efforts by the parties and the international community to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, lived side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), and recalled the importance of the Arab peace initiative. (UN News Centre)

After the Security Council vote, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained the abstention by her country by saying that the United States wanted to see the outcome of the Egyptian initiative first, but had allowed the resolution to go forward because it was a step in the right direction. (www.un.org)

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said he was aiming for a ceasefire within 72 hours after President Hosni Mubarak had floated a truce plan two days earlier. "We want to reach at least the first two points of the initiative, a ceasefire for a short period of time (15 days), and opening the border crossing", Mr. Aboul Gheit said. The plan also included a renewed call for Palestinian reconciliation talks under Egyptian mediation. However, Palestinian groups, including Hamas, saw no valid basis for a solution to the crisis, according to Khaled Abdel-Majid, spokesperson for the Palestinian groups in Damascus. (AP, AFP)

Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and PA President Abbas gave their backing to the Franco-Egyptian plan for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, calling for an immediate ceasefire at a joint press conference in Madrid. Mr. Abbas will proceed to Cairo to push for the plan despite the reservations of Hamas. (DPA)

The Netherlands, backed by Denmark, had undertaken a diplomatic initiative to expedite a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza. Both were proposing a European mission to closely monitor the border between Gaza and Egypt. Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen and his Danish counterpart Per Stig Møller had written to the European Union to announce their initiative. (www.minbuza.nl, www.euronews.net)

At a joint press conference in Paris, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged quick action to halt the violence in Gaza. Mr. Sarkozy said any time lost would play into the hands of those who wanted war. He added, "Our analysis is identical. The weapons must go quiet. The escalation must stop. Israel must obtain security guarantees and leave Gaza." (AFP)

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said, "You cannot stop the smuggling without ending the isolation policy." He said Israel's policy of isolating the Gaza Strip "is in itself not morally defensible, but it is also not politically possible to stop the smuggling because of the extremely strong incitement to smuggle that is baked into the isolation policy." He added, "The lesson to be learned is that if you isolate a group of people, they will try to dig their

way out.” (AFP)

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said any resolution to be passed by the United Nations General Assembly in a planned emergency special session needed to ensure that Israel was forced out of the Gaza Strip. He added that the US should not oppose any resolution that would touch on Israel. Mr. Badawi also said if a resolution on a ceasefire was passed, then Israel had to withdraw from Gaza and not just set a condition for Hamas to stop its rocket attacks on Israel. (Xinhua)

Hamas spokesperson Taher Nunu said Hamas would not at the current stage challenge the term as President of PA President Abbas, which ended at midnight. He said the top priority was now to deal with Israel's assault on Hamas targets in Gaza and to seek Palestinian unity. (AP)

Pope Benedict XVI said a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip was indispensable for restoring acceptable living conditions to the population, calling for peace talks and “the rejection of hatred, acts of provocation and the use of arms.” He also said, “It is very important that ... leaders emerge who can decisively carry forward this process and guide their people towards the difficult yet indispensable reconciliation.” (AP)

ICRC accused Israel of failing to fulfil its obligations to help wounded civilians in Gaza. ICRC had found four weak and scared children beside their mothers' bodies in houses hit by shelling in Zeitoun. ICRC also said Israel was delaying access by ambulances to the Gaza Strip and demanded it grant safe access for Palestinian Red Crescent ambulances to return to evacuate more wounded. ICRC said it believed Israel had breached international humanitarian law. (Haaretz)

In a statement, Amnesty International accused both sides of using civilians as human shields. “Israeli soldiers have entered and taken up positions in a number of Palestinian homes, forcing families to stay in the ground floor room while they use the rest of their house as a military base and sniper position” the statement said. While Palestinian families have reported that in some cases Palestinian gunmen agreed to leave areas near civilian homes without firing at Israeli forces “in other cases, they have refused residents' requests and only left after firing” the statement said. (BBC)

Belgian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Bart Ouvry said Belgium was seeking support for a European Union mission to evacuate wounded children from the Gaza Strip. He said Belgium might consider sending its own mission if it failed to get the backing of other European Union countries at a meeting of European Union ambassadors scheduled for the following day in Brussels. (Reuters)

The Al-Bureij Association for Social Rehabilitation received a portion of Turkey's overall commitment of food aid for the Bureij refugee camp in Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

The following is a statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Gaza:

“The Secretary-General condemns the Israeli Defense Forces firing on a United Nations aid convoy in Gaza, the killing of two UNRWA contract workers and the injuring of another. Since the conflict began 13 days ago, four UNRWA local staff had been killed. The United Nations is in close touch with the Israeli authorities on full investigation of this and other incidents, and about the need for urgent measures to avoid them in the future.

“The Secretary-General calls once again for an immediate ceasefire in order to facilitate full and unhindered humanitarian access and to allow aid workers to work in safety to reach persons in need. UNRWA has been forced to suspend food distribution as it cannot guarantee the safety of its staff. The inability of the United Nations to provide assistance in this worsening humanitarian crisis is unacceptable.” (UN News Centre)

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The Israeli army continued its offensive on the Gaza Strip despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) calling for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, killing 29 Palestinians less than 12 hours after the resolution's adoption. Among the dead were seven members of the Salha family from Beit Lahia, including a mother and three of her children; a Ukrainian woman and her 18-month-old son in the Al-Shujaeyya neighbourhood; three persons from the town of Al-Zawaydah in central Gaza; three members of the Sa'id family in Al-Qarem in northern Gaza; 15-year-old Muhammad Atef Abu Al-Husna from Gaza City; and Jihad Abu Medief, a fighter from the Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigades. Dozens were wounded. Three persons were killed by shelling from Israeli gunboats in the town of Al-Zawaydah in the central Gaza Strip. Two people were killed in an air strike in the northern Gaza Strip. It was reported that family members had uncovered dozens of bodies in the towns of Al-Latara and Juhor Ad-Dik in the central Gaza Strip. Palestinian medical sources said that the bodies of three Palestinians were found in Khan Yunis in the afternoon. According to sources in the Palestinian Authority, the death toll in Gaza amounted to more than 780. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Gaza's International Football Stadium, a \$2.5 million facility built with funds received from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the Governments of France and Saudi Arabia, was bombed and destroyed. IDF also shelled the town of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, including its Al Ribat mosque; the house of the deputy head of the police department in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood of Gaza City; the house of the head of security in Rafah; and the Al-Zeitoun police station. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs published its “Protection of civilians weekly report” covering the period 1 to 8 January 2009 in which it stated that, according to several testimonies, on 4 January Israeli soldiers had evacuated approximately 110 Palestinians into a single-residence house in Zeitoun (half of whom were children), warning them to stay indoors. Twenty-four hours later, Israeli forces repeatedly shelled the home, killing approximately 30 persons, the youngest of whom was five months old. The Office described this as one of the gravest incidents since the beginning of operations. It indicated that the number of child fatalities had increased by 250 per cent since the beginning of the ground operation in Gaza on 3 January. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, www.timesonline, www.ochaopt.org, Ynetnews)

Three Israeli soldiers were injured in the northern Gaza Strip in the afternoon. In the early afternoon, two Palestinians were killed in IDF operations in the north of Gaza. In the morning a senior Hamas operative was killed by IDF tank fire in the Zeitoun neighbourhood, while an IAF strike killed two other Hamas operatives and an unknown man. (The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

Some 32 projectiles, including Qassam rockets and a Grad missile, had landed in Israel since the morning hours in the areas of Ashdod, Ashkelon and Beersheba and the Sha'ar Hanegev and Eshkol Regional Councils. Several people suffered shock, one man was slightly injured and several buildings were damaged. The Grad missiles landed near the city of Beersheba, some 40 km from Gaza. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

A resident of Jenin, armed with an axe, slightly injured a man in the Israeli city of Rehovot before being arrested. (Ynetnews)

Less than a day after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), the Israeli Cabinet decided that the army's offensive in Gaza would continue. A statement issued after the Cabinet meeting indicated that “the State of Israel has a right to defend its citizens, and therefore IDF will continue to operate [in Gaza] in order to complete its mission, which is to bring about a change in the security situation in south Israel in accordance with plans that had been approved prior to the launching of the offensive.” Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel's “Operation Cast Lead” would proceed, despite the Security Council's resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Israeli television reported that Israel was heading towards “phase 2” of the Gaza offensive, which would entail a massive invasion of Palestinian cities, towns and refugee camps. Israel rejected the call formulated in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), saying it was not practical. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni stated that “Israel has acted, is acting and will act only according to its considerations, the security needs of its citizens and its right to self-defence.” On the other hand, Hamas rejected the

resolution on the grounds that it did not meet the Palestinian demands of ending the siege of the Gaza Strip and the opening of border crossings. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

A three-member Hamas delegation left Gaza to join talks in Cairo on a truce proposal. (Reuters)

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France announced that international staff from the country would arrive in the Middle East in the coming days in order to accompany aid convoys destined for the Gaza Strip, as part of a joint initiative by Egypt and France. (Ma'an News Agency)

Danish Minister for Development Ulla Tornaes called Israel's attacks on aid and medical workers "unacceptable". She strongly condemned the Israeli attack on an UNRWA truck and described the humanitarian situation in Gaza as critical and said that it was vital that emergency aid to the population of Gaza could get through and be distributed. She added that Israel had to do everything in its power to ensure that the emergency aid deliveries could be recommenced. The Israeli Ambassador to Denmark had been called to meet with the Danish Foreign Ministry on Sunday. (Ma'an News Agency)

UNRWA put into effect a temporary suspension of movements of staff throughout the Gaza Strip, a decision that was compelled by incidents in which UNRWA staff, convoys and installations had come under attack. The incidents, including the previous day's tragic loss of life, had occurred as a result of a breakdown in the effectiveness of the humanitarian coordination mechanisms established in coordination with the Israeli authorities. In recent days, UNRWA's humanitarian convoys had on numerous occasions come under Israeli fire even though their safe passage through clearly designated routes at specifically agreed times had been confirmed by the Israeli liaison office. (UNRWA press release)

In a similar development, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs called for an impartial inquiry regarding respect for international humanitarian law. (www.eda.admin.ch)

In a field update issued by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it was stated that UNRWA had "put into effect a temporary suspension of staff movement throughout the Gaza Strip", a decision "compelled by incidents in which UNRWA staff, convoys and installations had come under attack". ICRC stated that it would not be conducting relief convoys outside Gaza City for the day. The news came after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) the previous day, which called for the "unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment." (www.ochaopt.org)

In a joint statement issued on behalf of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and UNRWA Commissioner-General, it was indicated that a high-level meeting had taken place at the Israeli Ministry of Defence Headquarters in Tel Aviv at which the United Nations was informed that the incidents which led to a temporary suspension of United Nations staff movements were deeply regretted and did not reflect official Government policy. The United Nations received credible assurances that the security of United Nations personnel, installations and humanitarian operations would be fully respected, including undertakings of improved liaison and more effective internal coordination within IDF. On that basis, United Nations staff movements suspended the day before would resume as soon as possible. The United Nations urged the parties to respect resolution 1860 (2009), in particular its call for the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, and for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire. (UN press release dated 9 January 2009)

The United Nations Human Rights Council held its ninth special session on the grave violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the recent aggression in the occupied Gaza Strip. In her statement, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay called for a "credible and independent" investigation into any violation of international humanitarian law in the Gaza conflict that might constitute a war crime. "The situation is intolerable. The ceasefire called for by the United Nations Security Council must be implemented immediately. The violence must stop", said the High Commissioner. She also called on the parties to the conflict to allow the deployment of independent human rights monitors in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to document any violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and urged that special procedure mandate holders be granted unrestricted access to Gaza and the West Bank. (www.ohchr.org)

10

Israeli planes dropped leaflets over Gaza warning that Israel was about to escalate its campaign against Hamas targets. (AFP)

The Saraya Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, released pictures indicating they had seized weapons from the Israeli military during a surprise attack on Israeli troops north of Gaza City. They also said they had caused casualties among the Israeli soldiers while attacking them with rocket-propelled grenades and rifles. They said that the attack, which had taken place near the ruins of the American International School in northern Gaza, was carried out jointly with the Al-Aqsa Brigades. (Ma'an News Agency)

At least 21 Palestinian rockets hit southern Israel, injuring 14 people. A man from Ashkelon was slightly wounded after a Qassam rocket slammed into his apartment, followed by another Qassam strike in the centre of the city. In the afternoon, two Grad rockets were launched into Ashdod.

One of the rockets exploded in an open area in Gan Yavneh. (Haaretz)

Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for detonating two bombs in the midst of Israeli soldiers as well as shooting another soldier on the Al-Kashef hill in eastern Gaza, and for targeting an undercover Israeli force in eastern Jabalya with three rocket-propelled grenades. They also claimed responsibility for bombing a house they said contained undercover Israeli operatives in the At-Tuffah neighbourhood, firing two projectiles at Ashkelon and five mortars at an Israeli military installation in Al-Maghazi. (Ma'an News Agency)

A group calling itself Jaysh Al-Umma (Army of the Nation) claimed responsibility for shooting an Israeli soldier in eastern Gaza. The National Resistance Brigades, the armed wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said they had shelled a gathering of Israeli tanks east of Al-Maghazi, in central Gaza. (Ma'an News Agency)

Stone-throwing Palestinian demonstrators clashed with Israeli soldiers at an Israeli electric fence in the village of Qiffin, north of Tulkarm. The head of the village council, Sa'eed Hersha, said IDF had fired tear gas and live ammunition. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli army spokesman Jacob Dallal said that the army had killed several hundred Palestinian fighters since the war began on 27 December. "There is no question that the military ability of Hamas has been diminished" he said. (AFP)

Palestinian sources said that Egypt had demanded that Hamas respond to its ceasefire proposal within 48 hours. Egypt warned that if Hamas rejected its offer, it would be unable to stop Israel from continuing its ground offensive. Amos Gilad, the head of the Defense Ministry's political security branch, would be travelling on Monday for talks in Cairo with the head of the Egyptian security services. A Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo for similar talks. (Haaretz)

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met with PA President Abbas, who urged Israel and his Hamas rivals to accept the Egyptian plan "without hesitation". A Hamas delegation was due to hold talks with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman. Mr. Mubarak called for an immediate truce, opening Gaza's border crossings, preventing arms smuggling and resuming Palestinian reconciliation talks. Mr. Abbas said he wanted an international force in Gaza rather than controlling traffic on the Egyptian side of the border, as suggested by European countries. (AFP)

In a speech from Damascus carried by Arab channels, Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said support by Israelis for the 15-day

offensive compromised the moral fabric of the State of Israel. Mr. Meshaal said Israel was deliberately targeting civilians to destroy morale in Gaza, but the attack was failing to achieve military objectives, citing rockets still falling on Israel from Gaza and Palestinian resistance to far superior Israeli forces. He said the ferocity of the Israeli attacks had finished off chances for a lasting peace between Israel and the Arab world.

(Reuters)

Some one thousand Israeli activists from Peace Now and the Meretz party protested against the offensive in Gaza, opposite the Defence Ministry compound in Tel Aviv. *(Haaretz)*

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in cities across Europe and in southern Lebanon, protesting the Israeli offensive in Gaza. In Europe, protests took place in Stockholm, Oslo, Edinburgh, London, Innsbruck, Barcelona, Milan, Florence, Venice, Berlin, Duisburg and Paris. *(AP)*

ICRC spokesman Simon Schornoe said hospitals in the south of the Gaza Strip were increasingly struggling to get medicines and fuel. Red Cross staff had managed to accompany engineers to do some repair work on a power station near Gaza City, he said. Electricity in some areas could be re-established. On the same day, an ICRC ambulance came under fire during the three-hour lull in fighting. The agency said it was halting its service of escorting Palestinian ambulances. Mr. Schornoe said that ICRC needed to be able to move more than just three hours a day, adding "We request that the wounded receive care 24 hours a day." *(AP)*

II

Tanks and warplanes pounded the outskirts of Gaza City before dawn after Israel warned it would escalate its war on Hamas targets, as the death toll in the 16-day-old conflict was estimated to be more than 850. *(AFP)*

Palestinian medics said that three Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded by heavy Israeli tank fire and air strikes, some according to doctors by white phosphorus shells, which Israel had denied using. As the day began, increasing tank fire on the Al-Sheikh Ajlin and Zeitun neighbourhoods of Gaza City as well as on Sudaniyah, near the Mediterranean Sea in north-western Gaza, had been heard. Hamas and Islamic Jihad said several people had been hurt during clashes between armed Palestinian gunmen and Israeli tanks on the edge of Al-Sheikh Ajlin. They said militants were placing roadside bombs to impede the advance of the tanks, believed to be attempting their first incursion into the neighbourhood. An Israeli military spokeswoman confirmed that the army had forces in the area. Dr. Yusef Abu Rish at Gaza City's Nasser Hospital said at least 55 people had been injured by white phosphorus shells, saying "These people were burned over their bodies in a way that can only be caused by white phosphorus." An Israeli military spokeswoman denied the claims. *(AFP)*

A total of 22 rockets fired from the Gaza Strip struck Israel, one of which exploded in an empty school playground in the northern Negev city of Ashdod. There were no casualties in the incident. *(Haaretz)*

Some 30 Gazans had been killed and nearly 100 injured since midnight the previous day. Five Palestinians were also killed in separate strikes near Gaza City and in the Jabalya refugee camp. Israeli warplanes shelled the home of Mohammad Dahlan in the Ar-Remal neighborhood of Gaza City and the home of Shadi Abu Labad in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip. IDF had used white phosphorus bombs, causing damage in Khuza'a and Abasan villages, east of Khan Yunis. Medical sources at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis said most of the morning's casualties had been women and children. Medical staff appealed to international agencies for supplies to deal with the burn victims suddenly pouring into the hospital.

Meanwhile, Israeli ground troops continued their advance towards Gaza City. At least 50 were injured as Israeli strikes hit a dozen homes in the village of Khuza'a, many of which were still ablaze through noon. Air strikes in the north resulted in the killing of four members of the Bashir family in the Al-Karama neighbourhood, northwest of Gaza City. Strikes at the northern border town of Beit Lahia killed three from the Ma'rouf and Ghaban families and injured dozens more. Later, witnesses said, IDF withdrew from the As-Sudaniyah area, north of Gaza City, after a night of shooting there. In the south-west quarter of Gaza City, clashes were heard in the Al-Sheikh Ajlin neighbourhood as Israeli troops approached the evacuated Netzarim settlement, south of the city. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported said that on the sixteenth day of continuous IDF attacks across the Gaza Strip, 53 Palestinians had been killed, including 10 children and 6 women. The total number of victims had risen to 852, including 203 children, 58 women and 165 civil police officers. *(www.pchrgaza.org)*

Israeli military intelligence chief Major General Amos Yadlin told the Cabinet that Hamas' ability to fight had been hurt by "Operation Cast Lead". He said Hamas was now suffering from ammunition shortages and had been hard hit by the deaths of senior militants. But despite this, Mr. Yadlin said that the group was not expected to raise a white flag. Shin Bet security service chief Yuval Diskin told the Cabinet that many Gazans were furious with Hamas for bringing a disaster on Gaza. *(Haaretz)*

IDF began deploying reservist troops to the Gaza Strip for the first time since Israel began its offensive 16 days ago. The Government announced the previous week that it had approved the call-up of tens of thousands of reservist soldiers. *(Haaretz)*

Israeli warplanes had been flying over Egyptian territory during their air attacks along the border between Gaza and Egypt, witnesses said. *(Reuters)*

Egypt's news agency MENA reported that talks were progressing between Egyptian officials and a Hamas delegation in Cairo to find an end to the fighting in the Gaza Strip. The Agency quoted an unnamed Egyptian official as saying that the Hamas delegation had agreed on the need to stop the fighting as soon as possible. *(Haaretz)*

Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told the Security Cabinet that no external body would ever be allowed to determine Israel's right to defend itself against security threats. Israel was disappointed by Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), passed on 9 January, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Olmert told the Cabinet that Israel was close to achieving its aims in its offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and would press on with the operation. *(DPA, Haaretz)*

Hamas rejected Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), saying it would not help the Palestinian cause or Palestinian resistance. Palestinian factions in Damascus, including Hamas, rejected the deployment of international forces or observers in the Strip, saying they would be working with Israeli forces and would weaken Palestinian resistance. The factions however welcomed any "sincere" efforts that would stop the slaughter of Palestinians. *(DPA)*

In Amman, King Abdullah II of Jordan met with PA President Abbas and appealed for "immediate" world pressure on Israel to comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and halt its offensive in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Abbas made a stopover in Amman after meeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo. King Abdullah underscored the importance of coming up with a unified Arab attitude that foiled the Israeli schemes and helped to launch a real worldwide effort to find a solution to the conflict, on the basis of ending the occupation and setting up an independent Palestinian State. *(AP)*

League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa said he was organizing an urgent meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers to discuss ways to end the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip. The summit could be held in Kuwait. *(AP)*

US president-elect Barack Obama said in remarks broadcast on the ABC News show, This Week with George Stephanopoulos, that he would begin the search for Middle East peace immediately on becoming president. He said that the Gaza conflict only underscored his determination to become involved early. *(Haaretz)*

Pakistani security forces used tear gas and batons to repel anti-Israel protesters who tried to attack the US consulate in Karachi. In the Syrian Arab Republic, demonstrators accused Arab leaders of complicity in the Gaza assault. Separately, activists protesting the Israeli campaign drove

from Turkey to the Syrian Arab Republic in a convoy of 200 cars and participants hoped Syrian protesters would join them at the border the next day.

A few thousand people marched in largely peaceful pro-Palestinian rallies in the Italian cities of Rome, Naples and Verona. (AP)
In London, thousands of people gathered at Trafalgar Square to support the Israeli operation in Gaza, while anti-Israeli protesters held a counter-demonstration nearby. In Antwerp, Belgium, home to a large Hassidic Jewish community, some 800 people took part in a peaceful pro-Israel demonstration. On the same day the British Observer newspaper published a letter by 11 leading British Jews urging Israel to end its Gaza campaign and negotiate a settlement for security reasons. In New York, thousands of supporters of Israel rallied near the United Nations, declaring the offensive an act of self-defence. Across town at Times Square, about 150 pro-Palestinian demonstrators waved signs with pictures of dead and wounded children. (AP)

Luisa Morgantini, Vice President of the European Parliament, and eight members of the European Parliament delegation entered the Gaza Strip through the Rafah border crossing to prepare a report to the European Union plenary session on the situation in the Gaza Strip. The delegation would stay in Gaza until 13 January, visiting refugee camps, hospitals and towns. (Wafa)

In a press release, Human Rights Watch in Jerusalem said that Israel should stop using white phosphorus in military operations in densely populated areas of Gaza. Human Rights Watch researchers in Israel had observed during the previous days multiple air-bursts of artillery-fired white phosphorus over what appeared to be the Jabalya area in Gaza. (www.hrw.org)

UNRWA said that they had resumed relief operations in Gaza, but fighting still prevented them from reaching all the people who urgently needed help and evacuating the sickest out of Gaza. UNRWA spokesman Johan Eriksson said that the agency had brought food and other aid to around 10,000 people, but that the situation for civilians was "extremely dire". "We are receiving reports that people are burning their furniture in order to cook in makeshift ovens", he said, adding that 1 million people in Gaza were still without electricity. A convoy of 53 trucks had been able to ship food, medicine, blankets, mattresses and tents from Israel to Gaza, but it had taken an entire day to pass checkpoints and unload the goods at the Kerem Shalom border crossing and then load them onto Palestinian trucks, he added. The daily three-hour lull declared by Israel to allow aid groups to do their work in besieged areas "is of very little significance to us because these trucks have to be on the road from the break of dawn until after nightfall", Mr. Eriksson said. (AP)

WFP had handed out 1,200 monthly food rations to people in Gaza and 1,400 emergency bread packages, said spokeswoman Emilia Casella. But the agency had been unable to reach many people who needed food and could only access 60 per cent of its stocks in Gaza, she said. (AP)

With the fighting continuing on its sixteenth day, UNRWA had been able to open only 6 out of 10 emergency distribution centres in Gaza, UNRWA spokesman Johan Eriksson said. (AP)

WFP announced the launching of "Operation Lifeline Gaza", an initiative to help ramp up food distribution to residents of the Gaza Strip, aiming to provide ready-to-eat, culturally acceptable food to hundreds of thousands of people caught in the conflict. "We are proposing an immediate, innovative solution to hunger in an unusually challenging situation, where many people are suffering from a complete breakdown in access to food and clean water", said WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran. (UN News Centre)

UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura deplored Israeli attacks on media installations in the Gaza Strip and condemned the killing of Palestinian journalist Basel Faraj in the line of duty on 6 January. Mr. Matsuura called on Israel to allow local and international media professionals to report on events in the area. (www.unesco.org)

12

In a taped television message, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said Hamas was determined to continue fighting, adding, "Gaza will not break — our victory over the Zionists is near". He said, however, that Hamas did not have the physical might to withstand Israel's "war machine". (Haaretz)
Twenty Palestinians were killed in Israeli air strikes on targets throughout the Gaza Strip, especially in the Jabalya refugee camp. A Palestinian paramedic was killed when a missile hit his ambulance. A man and a boy were killed in a car parked near a mosque. A young girl, identified as Ayat Al-Banna, was killed by a shell. Nine were dead by noon on the seventeenth day of Israel's war on Gaza. Shortly after noon, Israeli planes hit Palestine Square in central Gaza City, killing 2 and injuring at least 10. Armed groups were heard clashing with Israeli ground soldiers at the three entrances of Gaza City. Air strikes hit dozens of homes on the northern, eastern and southern borders of Gaza City. Warplanes continued to use phosphorus bombs and homes around the city burned, covering the area with smoke. More clashes were reported between Palestinian fighters and Israeli soldiers in the Zeytoun and Tuffah neighbourhoods. Air strikes also killed five, including two women and a child, in Beit Hanoun.

The total number of dead from 17 days of Israeli strikes was over 900, along with some 4,100 injured. (Ma'an News Agency)

An IDF reserve soldier who refused to enter Gaza along with his unit, in protest of the killing of Palestinian civilians, had been jailed for 14 days in a military facility. He was the first soldier to be tried for refusing orders since the beginning of the operation. (Haaretz)

Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired 19 rockets at the western Negev, one of which made a direct hit on a home in Ashkelon. The five residents of the house managed to flee to a bomb shelter before the strike. Other rockets were also reported in Sderot and in Be'er Sheva. A rocket also exploded in an open field near Kiryat Gat, causing no casualties or damage. (Haaretz)

Israeli soldiers detained five Palestinians in the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency)

In a press conference in Ramallah, PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad called for the acceptance of the Egyptian initiative without any delay, to save "our people from an impending catastrophe and to prevent the loss of more lives". He said that despite Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the Egyptian initiative, Israeli attacks had continued for the seventeenth day, with 900 dead and over 4,000 wounded. Mr. Fayyad said the humanitarian crisis was deepening, with extensive destruction of infrastructure, lack of safe drinking water and lack of safe shelter for the great majority of the population of the Gaza Strip. Tens of thousands of Gazans had been displaced and there was an acute shortage of food and medical supplies. He said the Palestinian Authority condemned Israel's rejection of resolution 1860 (2009) and its continued disregard of the will of the international community. (Wafa)

League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that Arab Foreign Ministers would hold an emergency meeting on the Gaza Strip situation in Kuwait on 16 January. The meeting would "examine the developments relating to Israel's refusal to abide by United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 (2009)", Mr. Moussa told reporters. (AFP)

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said on Europe-1 radio that European military observers should be sent to Gaza to monitor any eventual ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, adding that the group could be expanded to include monitors from other regions. He said that they should include military observers "to testify to the maintained ceasefire", but added, "neither the Egyptians nor the Israelis want international observers on their territory for the moment". (AP)

Israel's Central Elections Committee banned Arab political parties from running in the following month's parliamentary elections, drawing accusations of racism by Ahmad Tibi, an Arab lawmaker who said he would challenge the decision in the country's Supreme Court. The ruling reflected the heightened tensions between Israel's Jewish majority and Arab minority in the Knesset caused by Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)

At the opening of the plenary session, European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering expressed "deepest regret" over the Gaza conflict, calling for an "immediate end to the violence on both sides". He strongly criticized Hamas for ending the ceasefire by firing rockets on Israel and criticized Israel's "disproportionate reaction". President Pöttering said that the European Parliament together with the European Council of Ministers supported Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). (www.europarl.europa.eu)

During his final press conference, US President George W. Bush said he hoped the current conflict in the Gaza Strip would conclude by the time his term ended, but said that a sustainable ceasefire was needed and that "the definition of a sustainable ceasefire is that Hamas stops firing rockets at Israel ... the choice is Hamas' to make". He said, "Israel has a right to defend herself". He also said that he would like to see Israel "mindful" of innocent civilians, but that the country faced a serious challenge. (www.whitehouse.gov)

French Foreign Ministry spokesperson Eric Chevallier said during a daily press briefing, "France renews its call to the parties to establish a ceasefire and to fully respect international humanitarian law, and emphasizes the obligations with which they, including the Israeli army, must comply, notably the protection of civilians and the free passage of medications and humanitarian aid under

the Fourth Geneva Convention. France utterly condemns the shooting at ambulances, which constitutes a violation of the Geneva Conventions. It is incumbent on all parties to facilitate the access of medical personnel and ambulances to the wounded and to ensure their security." (www.ambafrance-us.org, www.diplomatie.gouv.fr)

A seventh Moroccan plane carrying 15 tons of aid, part of a relief operation launched upon the instructions of King Mohammed VI in solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, arrived in the Egyptian airport of El-Arich. Morocco had sent more than 90 tons of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian Red Crescent over the weekend. (www.reliefweb.int)

The head of the Palestinian Water Authority, Shaddad Attili, said in a statement, "With Israel's latest bombardment [in the Gaza Strip], there is a real risk that earth retention walls of a number of wastewater lagoons will break, releasing an estimated three million cubic metres of wastewater into the surrounding communities." (www.irinnews.org)

Saudi Arabia announced the donation of \$6.5 million to UNRWA for the relief of the people of Gaza. Saudi Arabia was also sending \$500,000 to buy fuel, which UNRWA provided to municipalities and utilities in Gaza to pump water and incinerate refuse. Karen AbuZayd, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, welcomed the donation. (UNRWA press release)

On the eve of his departure for wide-ranging, high-level talks in the Middle East to personally help broker a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a news conference at United Nations Headquarters in New York: "My goal is to step up the pace of our joint diplomatic efforts and ensure that urgent humanitarian assistance reaches those in need. It is one thing to speak to world leaders, as I have done daily in seeking to resolve this crisis. And it is another thing to be present oneself." Mr. Ban would meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit in Cairo at the start of his mission the following day, when he would also confer with League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa. He would then meet with King Abdullah II of Jordan in Amman. On 15 January, he would be in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, with meetings scheduled with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defence Minister Ehud Barak. He would then visit PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and PA President Abbas in Ramallah. He would travel briefly to Turkey for talks with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and then go to Beirut to meet with Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, and Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri. His last scheduled stop was Kuwait, where he would attend a meeting of the League of Arab States. (UN News Centre)

In a press release, the United Nations Human Rights Council announced the conclusion of its ninth special session, on grave violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the recent aggression on the Gaza Strip. It had adopted a resolution strongly condemning the ongoing Israeli military operation in Gaza, which had resulted in massive violations of human rights of the Palestinian people, and demanded that Israel immediately withdraw its military forces from the Strip. The Council had also decided to dispatch an urgent independent international fact-finding mission to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (www.unhchr.ch)

13

Israeli ground troops closed in on downtown Gaza City, battling Palestinian militants in the streets of a densely populated neighbourhood, destroying dozens of homes and sending terrified residents running for cover as gunfire and explosions echoed in the distance. Israel's push into the Tel Hawwa neighbourhood was the farthest it had moved into Gaza City during its 18-day offensive, and brought Israel's ground forces within a mile (1.5 kilometres) of the crowded city centre. Palestinian medical officials reported at least 18 gunmen and three civilians killed in fighting throughout Gaza, although the Israeli army suggested the number could be higher. Several buildings were on fire, witnesses said, including a lumberyard. Israeli gunboats had shelled the coast from the west. The Israeli military said it had carried out some 60 air strikes overnight, hitting groups of Hamas militants holed up in a hotel, a house and a mosque. It said it had also struck 15 squads of gunmen, rocket launching sites and 15 smuggling tunnels along the Egyptian border. The army said it had killed or wounded about 30 militants and that three soldiers had been wounded in overnight fighting. (AP, Haaretz, Reuters)

IAF bombed more than 80 targets across the Gaza Strip, including some 35 smuggling tunnels in southern Gaza. Among the buildings bombed overnight was the old Gaza city hall, built in 1910, which served as a court and around which numerous stores were destroyed or damaged. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said that IDF would continue its campaign against Hamas in Gaza alongside diplomatic efforts to achieve a ceasefire.

Israeli troops were pushing deeper into Gaza City and the surrounding areas of Jabalya and Beit Hanoun. IAF stated that it had struck the Hamas police headquarters in Gaza City, housing eight squads of gunmen and weapons storage facilities. The army had deployed infantry, tanks, combat engineers, artillery and intelligence units in operations throughout the Gaza Strip, with the assistance of the Air Force and Navy. (Haaretz, Al-Jazeera, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post)

The Palestinian death toll in Gaza had reached 1,033 persons, around half of them civilians, since the beginning of the Israeli air and ground offensive in the Gaza Strip. Of this number, some 322 were children and 76 women. Some 4,560 had been injured, of whom 1,600 were children and 678 women. Palestinian medical officials confirmed that 47 persons had been killed by Israeli forces in the course of the day. Up to 40 Palestinians were killed in a series of air and ground strikes on buildings and houses all over the Gaza Strip, mainly in the east and north. It was reported that Gaza was running out of places to bury the dead and that up to three or four persons from the same family were being buried in the graves of long-deceased relatives. A gravedigger stated that "Gaza is all a graveyard". (BBC, DPA, Al-Jazeera, Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post, Xinhua)

Israeli security forces shot a Palestinian as he attempted to grab an Israeli border policeman's gun in Hebron. The Palestinian later died of his wounds in a hospital. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli soldiers attacked and killed a Palestinian man, Yasser Saqr Tmeizy, while he was standing with his son on his land in Ithna village. The soldiers hit the man with batons and kicked him until he lost consciousness. He later died at the Ahli Hospital in Hebron. (*IMEMC*)

An IDF soldier was critically wounded and another two sustained moderate wounds in an explosion at a booby-trapped house in Gaza City.

Another five soldiers were slightly wounded in battles in Gaza. (*Haaretz*)

Palestinian militants fired up to 18 rockets into Israel which landed in open territory near Ashkelon, Ashdod, Yavne and Beersheba and the Eshkol and Hanegev Regional Councils. It was reported that one of the mortar shells fired on the Eshkol Regional Council contained white phosphorus. Its security chief said that "the potential danger of using such a rocket is enormous. It is far more dangerous than other Qassam rockets and mortar shells." One of the rockets caused damage to an educational institution in Ashkelon. Israel's Shin Bet security service stated that 565 rockets and 200 mortar shells had been fired at southern Israel since the launching of the offensive in Gaza. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews*)

Egypt continued to urge Hamas to accept its ceasefire proposal for the Gaza Strip. Egypt intelligence chief Omar Suleiman told Hamas representatives that the organization would have to commit to a one-year ceasefire. Hamas representatives replied that they would be willing to accept the proposal if the changes they had demanded were met. Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos met with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and told her that the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar al-Assad, had expressed willingness to help Egypt in its talks with Hamas. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni stated during a speech made to an American Jewish Committee delegation that the offensive her Government was conducting against the Gaza Strip is serving the interests of both Israelis and "moderate Palestinians". (*IMEMC*)

The European Union Presidency said that Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg was prepared to call an international donors conference to deal with the urgent humanitarian situation of the inhabitants of Gaza. (www.eu2009.cz)

The French Foreign Ministry said that European diplomats were to meet on 15 January in Paris to discuss how to allocate aid pledged to the Palestinians in the light of the Israeli offensive in Gaza. Foreign Ministry spokesman Eric Chevallier said that the meeting aimed to provide follow up to the Paris Donors Conference held in December 2007. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, Quartet Representative Tony Blair and European Union External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner would take part. Participants could also examine the possibility of holding a new donors conference, Mr. Chevallier said. (*AFP*)

The Israeli Navy turned away an Iranian ship carrying 200 tons of food and medical supplies that tried to dock in Gaza. After being turned back, the ship tried to unload the supplies in the nearby Egyptian port of El-Arish but was prevented from doing so by the Egyptian Navy. (*Haaretz*)

A Gaza City clinic run by the Near East Council of Churches was struck by a missile which destroyed hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of medical equipment. The destroyed clinic provided free primary health care to the local community, including mother and child clinics, neo-natal care and family planning. (*BBC*)

European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel said that Israel's military strikes in the Gaza Strip were "totally disproportionate" and breached international law. "One simple fact, acknowledged and denounced by established experts in the field, is that Israel is not respecting international humanitarian law ... The first obligation is that an occupying power has the obligation to preserve the life of populations, to protect them, to nourish them and to care for them. That is manifestly not the case here", Mr. Michel told Belgian newspaper *La Libre Belgique* in an interview. (*Reuters*)

The following is an excerpt from a statement by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:

"The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is extremely concerned about the hostilities in Gaza and the tragic impact on its population. Hundreds of civilians are dead and many more are injured; others have had to flee their homes but are caught in the fighting. The Movement deplores the fact that many wounded people have been abandoned and left to suffer alone, unable to reach hospitals and inaccessible to ambulances and medical workers.

Some wounded have even died because ambulances did not receive the required clearances to reach them in time. We call on the involved parties, in particular Israel, to remove restrictions on medical teams so they can do their life-saving work. We would like to reaffirm that under international humanitarian law all parties concerned have a duty to collect, care for and evacuate the wounded, without delay or discrimination." (www.icrc.org)

The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Jakob Kellenberger, called for medical workers in Gaza to be protected, at the start of a three-day visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, during which he planned to hold talks with senior Israeli and Palestinian officials. Outside Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital, Mr. Kellenberger said "I wanted to see this hospital ... and I can only say this is really very sad and it hurts a lot when you see what I've just seen. It's absolutely indispensable and not negotiable that [the] medical mission in such a conflict has to be protected." At least 12 medics had been killed since the beginning of Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" on 27 December. (*AFP*)

Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations Jean-Maurice Ripert told reporters after closed-door consultations of the Security Council "Everybody supported the role the Secretary-General can play ... in getting an immediate ceasefire and for implementation of [Security Council] resolution 1860 (2009) ... We think the timing [of the Secretary-General's visit] is right. There are very important initiatives on the ground that could help." (*AFP*)

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed deep concern at "the devastating effects that the current military engagement in Gaza [was] having on children." "The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by 193 States, testifying to a universally recognized commitment for the respect and protection of the rights of children. But the rights enshrined in the Convention, including the right of children to life, survival and development and to be protected from all forms of violence, have been blatantly violated during this crisis. The Committee recalls that human rights law, including the Convention, applies at all times, including in situations of armed conflict" the Committee said. (www.unhchr.ch)

Human Rights Watch said in a report that Israel should immediately allow humanitarian groups broad access to Gaza and allow the evacuation of the wounded to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population. (www.hrw.org)

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Nine IDF soldiers were wounded, one seriously, as Palestinian militants fired anti-tank missiles at Israeli paratroopers just outside Gaza City. Earlier in the day, IDF paratroopers killed a Palestinian suicide bomber who tried to detonate his explosives near them. Five paratroopers were wounded during a gun battle in northern Gaza when they were fired upon by gunmen. A total of 16 soldiers were wounded within the day. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews*)

Palestinian surveyors indicated that Israel's assault on Gaza had destroyed at least \$1.4 billion worth of buildings, roads, pipes, power lines and other

infrastructure in an already impoverished territory. (AP)

An Israeli settler shot and killed a Palestinian youth, 17-year-old Nasser Awdi, near the town of Qalqilya in the West Bank. The settler, from the nearby "Emmanuel" settlement, opened fire at him from a passing car. The settler claimed that he fired into the air at a group of Palestinians throwing stones. (Haaretz, IMEMC, Middle East Online)

Three rockets fired from Lebanon landed in open areas near Kiryat Shmona in northern Israel, without causing injuries or damage. IDF responded by firing a number of artillery shells. (Haaretz, Reuters)

The Israeli army raided several villages near the West Bank city of Hebron and arrested seven Palestinian civilians. (IMEMC)

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Amman for talks with King Abdullah II of Jordan as part of a regional tour aimed at implementing Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) which called for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire. Mr. Ban arrived from Egypt where he had held talks with President Hosni Mubarak, Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Amre Moussa. "My call is [for] an immediate end to violence in Gaza, and then to the Israeli military offensive and a halt to rocket attacks by Hamas", Mr. Ban told reporters after his meeting with Mr. Mubarak, adding that "it is intolerable that civilians bear the brunt of this conflict". Mr. Ban said that "negotiations need to be intensified to provide arrangements and guarantees in order to sustain an endurable ceasefire and calm". He added that once a ceasefire was ensured, he intended to dispatch a United Nations assessment team to Gaza to determine the extent of damage as well as the extent of humanitarian needs after which the United Nations would try to issue a fresh appeal for humanitarian assistance. (AP, DPA, www.un.org/)

Hamas announced that it had accepted the Egyptian initiative for a ceasefire in Gaza "in principle" and that it was now waiting for Israel's response.

The announcement came after two days of intensive talks with representatives of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service. Hamas indicated that it did not want to change the "broad outlines" of the Egyptian plan but denied that it had accepted the Egyptian initiative unconditionally. It was stated that Hamas was prepared to accept a short-term ceasefire with Israel while Egypt was pressing for a long-term truce. Mention was made of a deal for a 10-day ceasefire. A senior Hamas official indicated that the group would not agree to have the tunnels between Gaza and Egypt destroyed as it would undermine the resistance. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak were expected to discuss the developments that evening. (AP, AFP, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Ynetnews)

It was reported that senior Israeli defence officials believed that Israel should strive to reach an immediate ceasefire with Hamas and not expand its offensive against the group in the Gaza Strip. During a meeting of the IDF General Staff with heads of other security branches, officials were reported to have said that Israel had achieved several days ago all that it possibly could in Gaza and expressed reservations about launching the third phase of "Operation Cast Lead". (Haaretz)

The President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, announced that his country had cut diplomatic ties with Israel as an act of solidarity with Palestinians suffering from Israel's current offensive in the Gaza Strip. He called on the international community to unite in defence of humanity and mocked the Security Council as "Insecurity Council" for its "lukewarm" response to the crisis. He called for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to face criminal charges for the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians. He also said that Israeli President Shimon Peres should be stripped of his Nobel Peace Prize for failing to stop the invasion. The previous day, Jordan had recalled its ambassador to Israel. (Efe News Service, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger said that he had witnessed "shocking" scenes of women and children wounded in Gaza the day before and that Israeli forces were denying medical teams access to portions of the territory. He was the first top-level humanitarian official to visit Gaza during the current Israeli offensive. (Ma'an News Agency)

Members of a newly arrived French medical team said that they were "utterly shocked" by the situation on the ground in the Gaza Strip. Upon arrival, several of the doctors said that they could not believe "the overuse of power by the Israeli army", while one said that he had seen "internationally forbidden weaponry used against civilians". "This has led to a great number of casualties, especially among women and children", another doctor said. (Ma'an News Agency)

As in previous days, Israel introduced a three-hour humanitarian lull in the fighting to allow the population of Gaza to stock up on essential necessities.

Over 100 trucks with humanitarian aid and 104,000 litres of fuel entered the Gaza Strip. The President of ICRC described the three-hour "humanitarian corridor" as "not sufficient". (DPA, Ma'an News Agency)

It was reported that IDF planned to open more crossing points into Gaza in an effort to increase aid to the civilian population. So far food, medical supplies and animal feed were mostly coming into Gaza through Kerem Shalom, a minor crossing point. IDF intended to open the grain chute at the Karni crossing and allow for the passage of 60 truckloads of grain and to allow the transport of items such as corn, wheat and animal feed. (The Jerusalem Post)

According to a Palestinian water official, up to 800,000 Palestinians, accounting for more than half the population of the Gaza Strip, were without running water. Some of them had had no running water for two weeks. The most heavily affected area was Gaza City. (Ma'an News Agency)

Continuing violence and displacement presented serious risks to more than 40,000 pregnant women in Gaza and their babies, who were at risk of becoming the unseen victims of the crisis, UNFPA warned. (www.unfpa.org/)

UNICEF Executive Director Anne Veneman issued a statement indicating that over 300 children had been killed and more than 1,500 wounded since the beginning of the Gaza crisis on 27 December 2008. She said "these are not cold figures. They talk of children's lives interrupted ... This is tragic. This is unacceptable." Ms. Veneman said that absolute priority had to be given to the protection of children who formed the majority of the Gaza population, adding that "they bear the brunt of the conflict which is not theirs. As fighting reaches the heart of heavily populated urban areas, the impact of lethal weapons will carry an even heavier toll on children ... The crisis in Gaza is singular in that children and their families have nowhere to escape, no refuge". UNICEF called on all parties to take every measure to protect children. (AFP, www.unicef.org/)

The United Nations General Assembly would hold the resumed tenth emergency session the following day in order to "send a strong message that the international community is fully in favour of an immediate ceasefire" in Gaza, according to the spokesman of the office of the President of the Assembly. (AFP, Al-Jazeera, www.un.org/)

Amnesty International proposed that the Security Council should impose an "immediate, comprehensive arms embargo on all parties to the conflict in Gaza" in order to stem the tide of blood in the Gaza Strip. It urged the United States to abandon plans to ship consignments of weapons to Israel. "The last thing that is needed now is more weapons and munitions in the region, which is awash with arms that are being used in a manner which contravenes international law and is having a devastating effect on the civilian population in Gaza", said Amnesty regional director Malcolm Smart. (AFP)

Nine Israeli human rights and aid organizations joined forces to call for emergency humanitarian relief for the population of the Gaza Strip. They released their findings on the situation in Gaza and called on the Government of Israel to take urgent action to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation there. Using the name "Clear and Present Danger", the group claimed that the number of Palestinians killed during "Operation Cast Lead" had reached 1,000 and warned that Israel was perpetrating grave violations of international law in Gaza. The organizations described the level of harm to civilians as "unprecedented" and accused the Israeli armed forces of "making wanton use of lethal force which has to date caused the deaths of hundreds of uninvolved civilians and destroyed infrastructure and property on an enormous scale. The group addressed a letter to that effect to the Israeli Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, the IDF Chief of Staff, the Attorney-General and the head of the IDF Southern Command, adding that after the fighting ended, the time would come for those responsible for the violations to face the consequences. The group claimed that there had been at least six instances of IDF soldiers firing on medical crews which had resulted in 12 deaths and 17 wounded. The group also claimed to have documented 15 cases of IDF troops firing on medical facilities. They warned of a complete collapse of the health system in Gaza, with at least 850 chronically ill patients and hundreds of wounded awaiting treatment. In a separate development, it was announced that a 28-year-old Palestinian doctor in the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza City had been killed by the IDF while he was on his way to remove casualties from a building targeted by Israeli missiles. (*Haaretz, irinnews.org*)

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The Israeli army had expanded ground operations in Gaza City, residents in the city and medics said. Several Israeli army tanks and armoured vehicles backed by warplanes carried out a larger incursion into the southern Gaza City neighbourhood of Tal Al-Hawa. Israeli warplanes carried out some 70 strikes overnight, targeting Palestinian fighters, suspected rocket launching sites and weapons storage sites, including a mosque in the south. During the incursion into Gaza City, the tanks shelled Al-Quds Hospital, which belongs to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and fire and black smoke were coming from inside the hospital, according to witnesses. "There are 500 patients, nurses and paramedics in the hospital and until now we don't know what their fate is," said Dr. Omer el-Azayza, director of the hospital. Militants in Gaza fired 17 rockets and mortars into Israel in the space of several hours. (*AFP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli snipers opened fire on families running to take shelter in Al-Quds Hospital in Gaza City. Sharon Locke, an Australian volunteer at the hospital, said, "They shot a young girl in the face and abdomen. She is now being operated on." (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel shelled the UNRWA headquarters in the Gaza Strip, engulfing the compound and the main warehouse in fire and destroying tons of food and humanitarian supplies. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said Israeli forces "were attacked from there and the response was harsh." A United Nations official at the scene at the time dismissed the claim as "nonsense". Some 700 Palestinians were inside the building, seeking refuge from the fighting, when it was hit, but UNRWA had since evacuated them to a nearby primary school. The compound was hit by what were most likely white phosphorus shells, officials said. "It looks like phosphorus, it smells like phosphorus and it burns like phosphorus", said Chris Gunness, a spokesman for UNRWA. (*AP*)

An Israeli air strike killed Said Siyam, former Minister of the Interior in the Hamas-led Cabinet, Hamas confirmed. A total of 10 Palestinians, including members of his family and bystanders, were killed in the strike. (*AP, DPA, Ma'an News Agency*)

Two Palestinian militants were killed in ground fighting with Israeli soldiers, medics in Gaza said, adding that 23 Palestinians had been killed since morning. Gaza Emergency Services Chief Mo'aweya Hassanein said that since the beginning of the offensive almost three weeks ago, 1,060 Palestinians had been killed, with 21 bodies received at Gaza hospitals. (*AFP*)

Bullets struck a building housing AP offices, penetrating a room where two staffers were working but wounding no one. A journalist and a cameraman working for Abu Dhabi Television were injured when Israeli shells hit a building in downtown Gaza City housing several news agencies and networks, including Reuters, NBC, and Al-Arabiya. The Foreign Press Association, representing journalists covering Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, demanded a halt to attacks on press buildings. IDF had collected information on the locations of media organizations at the outset of fighting to avoid such attacks (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies issued a statement which described the situation in the Gaza Strip as "completely and utterly unacceptable based on every known standard of international humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles and values". It condemned the fact that Palestinian Red Crescent Society facilities had been severely damaged and its staff prevented from sufficiently carrying out their humanitarian mission. (*www.ifrc.org*)

In a joint press conference with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his outrage over the latest attack on UNRWA facilities in Gaza and demanded a full explanation. He said that the death toll in Gaza had reached an "unbearable point", adding it was his understanding in talks with regional leaders in Egypt, Jordan and Israel that "they have some elements now in place which may enable the ceasefire to come reasonably soon. I hope so. But that depends on the political will of the Israeli Government." The use by Hamas of private homes and civilian institutions was "unacceptable," he said. During the conference, Ms. Livni said that the Israeli Government was forced to act in Gaza in order to protect Israeli citizens. Gaza was ruled by "a terrorist regime" and Israel must have a dialogue with moderate forces while simultaneously fighting terror, said the Foreign Minister. (*UN News Centre, Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas said that the next few hours would be decisive for talks on a ceasefire in the Gaza war. (*Wafa*)

Israel's envoy Amos Gilad delivered his country's "parameters of the end game" to the conflict to Egyptian mediators. Government spokesman Mark Regev said Israel wanted a total end to rocket launches by Hamas into Israel, and an arms embargo on Gaza. "There is momentum in these discussions," Mr. Regev told AP. "We are hopeful that a deal will be based on a total cessation of Hamas fire into Israel and an arms embargo to prevent Hamas from rearming is close and attainable." Egypt had had "favourable" Gaza truce talks with Israel, Egyptian media reported, citing official sources. But the official added that the Israeli delegation had some "observations" on the ceasefire proposal and it needed to have more talks. (*AFP, AP, Xinhua*)

Hamas told Egypt it would agree to a year-long renewable ceasefire in the Gaza Strip if Israel pulled out its forces within a week and reopened border crossings immediately, Hamas and diplomatic sources said. Gaza-based Hamas official Ghazi Hamad said: "I think Israel is seeking in the last moments to escalate the military operation to pressure the parties ... I don't think this will change the issues on the table." Hamas Deputy Political Bureau Chief Moussa Abu Marzouq told AP that Hamas would not abandon its demand that Israel withdraw its troops from Gaza and open border crossings before any ceasefire, even a temporary one, could take effect. (*AFP, AP, Reuters, Xinhua*)

Acting US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman and the Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry Aaro Abramovich were to meet in a bid to secure a memorandum of understanding that would also guarantee international monitors along Egypt's border with Gaza, officials said. If they could agree to the language of the document, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni might travel to Washington to sign it with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the diplomats said. (*AP*)

Leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council arrived in Riyadh to participate in an emergency summit. A Saudi Foreign Ministry official had said that "Saudi Arabia calls upon the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders to hold an emergency meeting in Riyadh in light of the escalation of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people." (*Xinhua*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that more care had to be taken to avoid incidents such as the bombing of a UNRWA aid warehouse and training centre in the Gaza Strip. She said: "It does demonstrate the very

dangerous nature of the kind of fighting that is going on and the events that we are in. We are principally concerned about the humanitarian situation in that regard." (*Haaretz*)

The European Union Presidency condemned the strike on a building of UNRWA in Gaza City by Israeli artillery. The Presidency "demands that Israel undertake measures to prevent any recurrence of this attack on civilian or humanitarian targets, which is simply unacceptable." (www.eu2009.cz)

Haaretz obtained a copy of the Egyptian truce proposal, which contained three clauses: (a) Israel and the Palestinians would agree to an immediate, time-limited ceasefire, during which the border crossings would be opened for humanitarian aid and Egypt would lead negotiations on a long-term truce; (b) The long-term truce had to include provisions on both border security and an end to the blockade of Gaza; and (c) Fatah and Hamas should resume reconciliation talks. (*Haaretz*)

The European Commission expressed "shock and dismay" at the shelling by Israel of the UNRWA compound in the Gaza Strip and called for an independent probe into the incident. "It is unacceptable that the United Nations headquarters in Gaza have been struck by Israeli artillery fire", said the European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel. "This is a very serious incident and there must be a full and independent investigation", he said in a statement. Commissioner Michel offered his "full support" to the decision by UNRWA to suspend its operations following the incident. (www.europa.eu)

The President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, expressed his deep concern that even international relief organizations were no longer safe from attack in Gaza. "The international relief of the United Nations represents a last hope for the long-suffering civilian population of Gaza. If even aid organizations such as UNRWA are no longer safe, this shows contempt for international law, and we have reached an absolute nadir in this conflict." (www.europarl.europa.eu)

British Prime Minister Brown said, "Today's attack on the United Nations headquarters in Gaza is indefensible. The United Nations's mission in Gaza is purely humanitarian, bringing relief to civilians suffering in appalling conditions as a result of the ongoing military action and restrictions on food and medical supplies entering Gaza. United Nations staff are working on behalf of the international community — any attack on them is unacceptable, as Israel has acknowledged." (www.number10.gov.uk)

"We condemn in the strongest terms the bombings this morning by the Israeli army of several hospitals and a building housing international media in Gaza City", said French Foreign Ministry spokesman Eric Chevallier. He also condemned the attack on the UNRWA building, adding that France was again appealing for an immediate ceasefire "to spare the civilian population". In Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed shock at the humanitarian situation in Gaza. She stressed the need to stop arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip. (*AFP*)

Greece strongly protested to Israel after its navy turned back a boat chartered by Greek activists to take medical aid to the Gaza Strip, the Foreign Ministry said. Karin Pally, a spokeswoman with the Free Gaza Movement, which had chartered the boat, said it had turned back after Israeli naval vessels surrounded them while still in international waters and threatened to open fire. The boat was carrying several tons of medical supplies. (*AFP*)

The European Parliament denounced the Israeli blockade preventing aid from arriving in Gaza. In adopting a resolution on the situation in the Gaza Strip, members of the Parliament called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which should include a halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and the end of Israel's military action in Gaza. Members called for a negotiated truce, which should be guaranteed by a mechanism which could include the dispatching of a multinational presence. Members encouraged the diplomatic efforts undertaken so far by the international community, especially Egypt and the European Union. (europarl.europa.eu)

Qatar continued preparations for a proposed Arab summit in Doha on the Gaza crisis as the first Heads of State arrived for the meeting despite continuing doubt about whether it would go ahead. Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said in Kuwait that a quorum of 15 countries to hold a summit in Doha had not been achieved, as only 13 of the 22 member States had agreed to attend. Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani repeated his invitation for Arab countries to attend the Doha summit on 16 January to discuss the Gaza Strip. He called on Arab countries to create a fund for Gaza's reconstruction and pledged his country would contribute \$250 million to the fund. In a televised address, he urged Arab nations to reconsider their diplomatic ties with Israel in response to the attacks on Gaza. (*AFP*)

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier arrived in Israel for the first stage of a Middle East tour to seek a truce. (*AFP*)

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela President Hugo Chavez announced plans to sever diplomatic relations with Israel over its ongoing assault on the Gaza Strip. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

"We will continue our operations in the Gaza Strip but we are suspending them in the compound of Gaza City since the trucks with aid cannot leave the area following the fire", UNRWA spokesman Adnan Abu Hasna said. The fire, which was still raging hours later, destroyed an estimated "tens of millions of dollars worth of aid", he said. UNRWA director John Ging told *CNN* that the situation at the compound was "very serious". "The workshops area of our compound, the big transport hub and warehouse, are on fire", he said. "We have 700 people in another area of the compound, two of them are injured. We are endeavouring to evacuate them ... It is a big problem for us as we have a massive fuel depot there ... This is the hub of the entire aid operation in Gaza, fuel, food, everything is stored here", said Mr. Ging. "Let's have a full investigation ... The matter is, we are having a phosphorus fire now, which is very difficult because if you put water on this it becomes toxic." (*AP*)

Six Palestinian children have been hospitalized in Brussels after their evacuation from the Gaza Strip where they were injured in the Israeli offensive, the Belgian Foreign Ministry said. (*AFP*)

In Rome, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini announced that he would accompany an aid convoy into Gaza on 19 January. He also called for a ceasefire. (*AFP*)

General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann opened the resumed tenth emergency special session of the Assembly on the crisis in Gaza.

He said that the United Nations had failed to protect the population in Gaza. "But there is another violation, one in which we, as the United Nations, are directly complicit," he said. "The blockade [of Gaza] has been endorsed, at least tacitly, by powerful parties grouped in the Quartet, placing this Organization in a dubious role and in violation of the obligations under the United Nations Charter and international law", he said. Permanent Representative of Senegal Paul Badji spoke in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. (*DPA*, www.un.org)

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro addressed the resumed General Assembly emergency special session. She said: "It is clear that a return to the status quo ante cannot be an option. If a ceasefire is to be sustainable, we need arrangements to ensure a halt to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza, the reopening of the crossings, and the reuniting of Gaza with the West Bank under its legitimate leadership."

Beyond humanitarian assistance, the international community must engage in an early reconstruction effort.” (DSG/SM/435-GA/10808)

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In the pre-dawn hours, Israeli tanks withdrew from the Gaza City neighbourhood of Tal Al-Hawa, where clashes the previous day had levelled parts of the residential area and set a hospital ablaze. At least 23 bodies were pulled out of the rubble in Tal Al-Hawa and elsewhere after medics rushed to the neighbourhood. (AFP)

IAF attacked about 40 targets across the Gaza Strip. A 14-year-old Palestinian was killed and several people were wounded during the attack on the Shabura refugee camp in southern Gaza. Three militants were also killed in IAF attacks, according to medics. (Haaretz)

Evening air strikes hit several sectors of the Gaza Strip simultaneously, killing at least 14 people, 10 from one house. The death toll for the day was 48, according to Palestinian sources. At least 10 people were killed in an Israeli strike on a house during a funeral wake, according to medics.

They were not immediately able to say whether the explosion was caused by a tank shell or an air strike. A mother and her five children from the Al-Batran family were killed in the afternoon in an air strike on their home in the Al-Bureij refugee camp. A man was killed while riding his motorcycle in Rafah. An Israeli artillery shell killed a six-year-old girl. Medics said 14-year old Issa Ermelat was killed when Israeli forces shelled the area near the An-Nejma market in Ash-Shaboura refugee camp in Jabalya, the shell landing on a group of children. (AFP)

Two rockets fired from Gaza landed in the Eshkol and Ashdod areas. There was no report of casualties. In Ashkelon, rocket fire hit a home with a pregnant woman inside. Two rockets struck Kiryat Gat, slightly wounding three people. (Haaretz)

The United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the latest figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Health on casualties in the assault on the Gaza Strip were 1,155 Palestinians dead, of whom 370 were children and 85 were women. The number of injured was at least 5,015, of whom 1,745 were children and 740 were women. An estimated 400 to 500 were critically injured. On the Israeli side, 10 soldiers and three civilians had been killed as a result of combat or rocket fire. (AFP, www.ochopt.org)

The head of the WHO office in Gaza, Tony Laurence, said that the medical system in Gaza was close to being overwhelmed and Gaza faced a humanitarian catastrophe if a ceasefire was not reached soon. Sixteen health facilities, including hospitals and primary health care clinics, had been damaged by shelling and fighting since 27 December. (AP)

Human Rights Watch said: “Israel’s use of heavy artillery in residential areas of Gaza City violates the prohibition under the laws of war against indiscriminate attacks and should be stopped immediately. Marc Garlasco, senior military analyst, said that “firing 155 mm shells into the centre of Gaza City, whatever the target, will likely cause horrific civilian casualties.” (www.hrw.org)

IDF troops shot and killed 20-year-old Musab Daana, a Palestinian who participated in a West Bank protest against Israel’s offensive in Gaza. An IDF soldier sustained light wounds when Palestinian demonstrators hurled rocks at troops who stopped them from marching into Hebron. IDF soldiers then fired tear gas and rubber-coated bullets at the group of protestors, killing one. Medics said Mr. Daana was killed by a live round to the head. Fifteen Palestinians were injured in the incident. (Haaretz)

Israeli Government spokesperson Mark Regev said: “I hope we are entering the end game and that our goal of sustained and durable quiet in the south is about to be attained.” He also said it was possible that Cabinet ministers would make a decision on a ceasefire as early as the coming weekend, but Israel was first waiting to receive reports from envoys that were travelling to Cairo and Washington to discuss the terms of a truce. (AP, Haaretz)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal said Hamas would not accept Israeli conditions for a ceasefire in Gaza and would continue armed resistance until the offensive ended. He was speaking at the opening of an emergency meeting in Doha, calling on leaders present to cut ties with Israel. However, Hamas was set to send a delegation to Cairo to discuss Egyptian efforts to mediate a ceasefire, a Hamas official said. (AP, Haaretz)

A report published in the Alsharq Alawset newspaper said Hamas had set five conditions for a ceasefire: (a) the reciprocal truce would begin on Saturday (17 January) and be followed by the immediate transfer of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip; (b) IDF must pull all of its troops out of the coastal territory within the first week of the truce; (c) the flow of trade in and out of the Gaza Strip must be renewed and monitored by observers from Egypt, Europe and Turkey; (d) the Rafah crossing must be reopened and supervised by PA security forces and international observers, until a Palestinian unity Government has been established and can take its place; and (e) the truce would be instated for one year with an option of renewal. (Haaretz)

Israeli sources said Israel objected to putting a time limit on the truce between Israel and Hamas. “A time limit on a period of quiet is a mistake. We saw that when the previous calm ran out of time, it was just an excuse for some to escalate the violence. An open-ended calm is what is needed.” Meanwhile, Israel’s envoy on Gaza, Amos Gilad, returned from his first day of talks in Egypt with a very reassuring report of progress, according to an Israeli source. He then returned to Cairo for further negotiations. (Haaretz)

Cairo officials reportedly proposed that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, PA President Abbas and Egyptian President Mubarak sign an agreement as early as 18 January to underpin a possible truce between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The pact could cover security measures along Gaza’s borders with Egypt and Israel. Palestinian and Egyptian officials had no immediate comment. (Reuters)

Speaking at the emergency summit in Doha, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad called on participating Arab countries to sever “all direct and indirect” ties with Israel in protest against its continued operation in the Gaza Strip. (AP, Haaretz)

In Doha, Qatar and Mauritania reported that they had severed political and economic ties with Israel in protest of the assault on the Gaza Strip. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said, “Syria has decided that indirect peace negotiations with Israel will be halted.” (Aljazeera, Ma’an News Agency)

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Israel should be barred from the United Nations while it ignored the body’s calls to stop the fighting in Gaza. He asked, “How is such a country, which totally ignores and does not implement resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, allowed to enter the gates of the United Nations?” (AP)

At an emergency meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Saud bin al-Faisal urged the parties concerned to move effectively to implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The Ministers adopted a proposal calling for a halt to the “Israeli aggression” in Gaza. The proposal would be presented to the Arab leaders at a summit in Kuwait on 19 January. It also appealed for the provision of all necessary funds for Gaza’s reconstruction, estimated at \$2 billion. (Xinhua)

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said, “We are deeply concerned about what is going on in the Gaza Strip. He was speaking to reporters after a meeting with African National Congress politician Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma outside Cape Town. Mr. Yang said, “We believe that the international community should exert its efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis there. The current situation is totally unacceptable.” (AFP)

French Prime Minister François Fillon said that French authorities would increase their checks on television, radio and the Internet to prevent any hate messages prompted by the conflict in the Gaza Strip. He said, “Even a cursory look at the Internet is enough to find blogs ... carrying messages of incredible violence, whether against Israel or against the Palestinians.” (Reuters)

In Washington, D.C., US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni signed an accord aimed at stopping the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip. "It provides a series of steps that the United States and Israel will take to stem the flow of weapons and explosives", Ms. Rice said of the agreement. Ms. Livni said only through a "united effort" to combat terrorism could a ceasefire between the two sides be achieved. The deal involved information-sharing, technical assistance and the use of various US "assets" to prevent arms from getting to Hamas by air, land or sea. A US official said it included the use of detection equipment, aerial surveillance and possibly the deployment of vessels from NATO countries to prevent maritime smuggling. (*Reuters, www.dw-world.de, www.timesonline.co.uk*)

The Israeli Cabinet was scheduled to vote the following day over whether to enact a unilateral ceasefire with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The decision would mean Israel would decide to end the operation without an agreement with Hamas, relying instead on the support of the US and Egypt in battling arms smuggling. The deal would also call for cooperation between Israel and Egypt on matters relating to the Gaza Strip in which they had shared interests, without the interference of Hamas. (*Haaretz*)

Palestinian surveyors said that Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip had destroyed at least \$1.4 billion worth of buildings, roads, pipes, power lines and other infrastructure. Europe's fundraisers for Palestinians, including the Foreign Ministers of France and Norway, the European Union External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Quartet Representative Tony Blair were planning to meet in Paris to discuss Gaza's reconstruction and the possibility of holding a new donors' conference. Another concern was whether a ceasefire deal would lift the blockade imposed on Gaza. Norwegian diplomat Tor Wennesland said, "You cannot rebuild Gaza without open borders." (*AP*)

Mohammad Shtayyeh, an economist who runs the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction, said a continuation of the closure would mean the final death blow to Gaza. Even under ideal conditions, with borders open, rebuilding Gaza would take at least five years.

Based on reports from 56 engineers, the fighting had caused about \$1.7 billion in damage in the first 15 days. This included \$300 million in damage in the Rafah area. About \$408 was lost in trade, wages and other income. About 4,000 houses were destroyed and 16,000 damaged. He said 30 Hamas security compounds, 15 government ministries and the main government complex had been demolished. (*AP*)

IDF announced that it would adhere to a four-hour humanitarian truce between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., to allow free flow of aid into Gaza. (*Haaretz*)

Visiting Ramallah, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "I strongly urge the Israeli leadership and Government to declare a ceasefire unilaterally." The Secretary-General proceeded to Ankara for a brief visit as part of the regional tour to press for an end to the military assault on the Gaza Strip. Mr. Ban was to hold talks with President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ali Babacan before a working dinner with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey was also going to send a delegation, headed by Foreign Policy Adviser Ahmet Davutoglu, to take part in the truce negotiations in Cairo. (*AFP, AP*)

The resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on "Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory" adopted a resolution by a vote of 142 in favour to 4 against, with 8 abstentions, calling on all parties to exert all efforts to ensure, in cooperation with the Security Council, full and urgent compliance with Council resolution 1860 (2009). It also called on States to extend support to efforts aimed at alleviating the humanitarian and economic situation. (*UN press release GA/10809*)

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White phosphorous shells struck the yard of a school run by UNRWA in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, causing panic among the 1,600 civilians who had taken refuge there, according to a report by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. An explosive shell struck the third floor of the school, killing two brothers, aged five and seven, and injuring 14 others, including the boys' mother. UNRWA demanded an independent investigation into the incident. A total of more than 50 United Nations facilities had sustained damage since 27 December. (*www.ochaopt.org*)

A total of 13 Palestinians were killed in battles throughout Gaza during the day, Palestinian medics said. The Israeli military said that its planes had struck 50 Hamas locations overnight, including rocket-launching sites, smuggling tunnels, weapons storehouses, bunkers and minefields. (*AP*)

Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire in its 22-day offensive in the Gaza Strip. After a Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, "Today, before the Government meeting, I spoke with the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, who presented Egypt's initiative to me, along with his request for a ceasefire ... I presented the President's statement to the Cabinet, along with the totality of our achievements in the operation, as well as the completion of the goals. The Cabinet decided to accept my proposal to declare a ceasefire. Beginning at 2 a.m., Israel will cease its actions against the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip and will remain deployed in the Gaza Strip and its environs. It must be remembered that Hamas is not part of the arrangements we came to. These are agreements involving many countries, and a terrorist organization like Hamas is not and need not be a part of them. If our enemies decide that the blows they have already suffered are not enough and they wish to continue fighting, Israel will be ready for that scenario and will feel free to continue responding with force." (*AP, www.pmo.gov.il*)

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics said Israel's military assault in the Gaza Strip had caused damage to the Palestinian infrastructure totalling some \$476 million. Official figures showed that since the start of Israel's offensive on 27 December, around 4,000 dwelling places had been destroyed, as well as 48 government offices and buildings, 30 police stations and 20 mosques. In total, some 14 per cent of all the buildings in the Gaza Strip had been either damaged or destroyed. (*AFP*)

The following is a statement by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"Today, another United Nations school was hit by the Israel Defense Forces. I condemn in the strongest terms this outrageous attack, which is the third time this has happened. The top Israeli leaders had apologized and had given me their assurances just two days ago while I was visiting Israel that United Nations premises would be fully respected. I strongly demand a thorough investigation into these incidents, and the punishment of those who are responsible for these appalling acts." (*UN press release SG/SM/12049*)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"I am relieved that the Israeli Government has decided to cease hostilities as of midnight GMT. This should be the first step towards establishing a durable and sustainable ceasefire leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, as called for by Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Hamas must stop firing rockets now. Urgent humanitarian access to the people of Gaza is the immediate priority. The United Nations is ready to act. Any durable solution must include the reopening of the crossings and the prevention of illicit trafficking in arms. There has been too much suffering, for too long. We have to end it now. We must begin to help people rebuild their lives." (*UN press release SG/SM/12050*)

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said Britain was prepared to deploy naval resources and provide security at the Gaza Strip border crossing points as part of an effort to secure the ceasefire declared by Israel. Mr. Brown, along with the leaders of France, Germany and Italy, said he was offering military and humanitarian help to implement the ceasefire and ease the suffering in Gaza. He also said Britain could help move injured children out of Gaza so they could receive medical care elsewhere. Britain could also help remove unexploded bombs in the Gaza area and would be prepared to increase the level of its humanitarian aid over the next five years, Mr. Brown said. (*AP*)

Algeria had sent two planes loaded with more than 37 tons of food and medical supplies for the Gaza Strip, the APS news agency reported.

(AFP)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said, "The United Nations, in cooperation with national and international partners, is preparing to ensure an early recovery and reconstruction response, immediately after the end of the military operations in Gaza. [UNDP], in its capacity as the facilitator of the United Nations early recovery team, will work with the Palestinian Authority to assess damages and needs, and devise plans for rebuilding. Immediate responses will include the removal of unexploded ordnance and the clearing of rubble so that social and economic reconstruction may begin." (www.undp.org)

An international group of lawyers and jurists said they would ask the International Criminal Court to probe alleged war crimes committed by Israel during its offensive in the Gaza Strip. "The request for an investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity would be placed by Wednesday [21 January] at The Hague", said Haytham Manna, spokesman for the Arab Commission for Human Rights, one of the 300 human rights groups planning to submit a 37-page dossier to the Court. (AFP)

18

Hamas announced an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and gave Israel a week to pull its troops out of the territory. Hamas had launched nearly 20 rockets in a final salvo before announcing the ceasefire. Three Israelis were slightly wounded. (AP, Reuters)

Israeli troops shot dead an eight-year-old girl in the northern town of Beit Hanoun and a 20-year-old man near Khan Yunis in the south, medics said. (AFP)

IDF began a partial withdrawal of ground troops from the Gaza Strip in the evening, shortly after Hamas announced a one-week ceasefire. Palestinian medics took advantage of the halt in Israel's offensive on Gaza to rush to areas that had been inaccessible because of furious fighting. At least 95 bodies, including those of several children, were pulled from the rubble, mostly in the northern towns of Jabalya and Beit Lahia. (AFP, Haaretz)

The Presidency of the European Union, held by the Czech Republic, issued the following statement:

"The Presidency welcomes the announcement by Israel to unilaterally cease all their military activities in Gaza and urges Hamas to immediately and unconditionally join this ceasefire. We continue to call on both parties to fully implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The priority now is to ensure that no more civilians die as a result of this conflict. It is vital, therefore, that all required humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical aid, is freely and rapidly delivered into and distributed within Gaza. The Presidency calls on Israel to fully and immediately reopen its border crossings with Gaza to help alleviate the suffering of Gaza's population. The Presidency shares Israel's concerns over arms smuggling into Gaza and welcomes United States and Egyptian efforts to find a lasting solution to this issue. The recent crisis in Gaza only highlights the need for renewed and urgent efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace. The European Union stands ready to help establish an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The Presidency calls on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to resume their discussions and emphasizes the importance of the Arab peace initiative as a major element in moving the peace process forward." (www.eu2009.cz)

European and Arab leaders gathered in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt at the Conference on Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza to lay the groundwork for a longer-term agreement to prevent new fighting in the Gaza Strip. Delivering humanitarian aid to rebuild the devastated territory emerged as a key goal from the Conference, along with stopping weapon smuggling into Gaza across Egypt's border and by sea, perhaps with an international naval force. Britain announced it was tripling its humanitarian aid to Gaza. President Hosni Mubarak repeated Egypt's rejection of any deployment of international monitoring forces on its side of the Gaza border, while welcoming help with equipment and technology. Several European leaders spoke of sending forces to patrol from the sea instead. "We must put an end to the arms traffic," French President Nicolas Sarkozy said, adding, "Several of our countries have proposed ... to make available to Israel and Egypt all the technical, diplomatic and military, notably naval, means to help stop weapons smuggling into Gaza." Without giving details of when and where, President Sarkozy said another summit for a "durable peace" would be held in the next few days. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said at the Conference that he was willing to make Italy's paramilitary Carabinieri police force available for any maritime patrols. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his remarks, "Even after the announcement of a ceasefire by Israel, the situation on the ground is still volatile and dangerous ... For the sake of the people of Gaza, I urge in the strongest possible terms Hamas to stop firing rockets ... I discussed the importance of this measure with President al-Assad earlier today in Damascus. I understand that the Syrian Arab Republic's and Turkey's efforts are bearing fruit, and I am encouraged by President Gül's remarks. For its part, I urge Israel in the strongest possible terms to show utmost restraint and withdraw its troops from Gaza in the coming days. I look to President Mubarak to continue his vital efforts to seek understandings and mechanisms to ensure that a durable and sustainable ceasefire is quickly put in place." He also said that as the United Nations "shoulders its full responsibilities in Gaza for humanitarian assistance, early recovery and reconstruction, I intend to consult closely with key partners: with Egypt and Arab countries, with Norway as the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, with Turkey, and with European, Russian and United States leaders as members of the Quartet – including the new administration of President [Barack] Obama." (AP, UN News Centre)

A delegation of European leaders met with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert in Jerusalem. At a joint press conference, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said, "We should immediately convene a major international conference which would allow us to establish peace this year", adding that he was waiting for US President-elect Barack Obama to take office so he could "strongly bring the necessary guarantees" to the process. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown urged Israel to reopen the crossings to Gaza, saying a sustainable ceasefire would require humanitarian access to the territory. Also participating in the European delegation were Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero. (AFP, www.pmo.gov.il) Italy's Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa said Italy foresaw "the possibility of sending two ships as well as a modest contingent of security officers to the Rafah border post" between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, where European Union forces were already stationed, the ANSA news agency reported. After the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said his country was willing to participate in sea operations to help clamp down on arms smuggling via Gaza's coast, Italian media reported. He also said that Italian forces might be sent to control border posts. (AFP)

The Foreign Ministry of Denmark said in a statement: "The Foreign Minister (Per Stig Moeller) had, together with his Dutch counterpart, Maxime Verhagen, today written to Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Riad al-Malki, offering to support the ceasefire ... Denmark and the Netherlands are ready to send a mission to the area to determine whether there is a need for international monitoring of Gaza's borders." Denmark and the Netherlands were also prepared to help bring about a resumption of the European Union Rafah border mission "whenever possible" and provide humanitarian support", the statement added. (AFP)

The French Interior Ministry said that a French aid team would head to Egypt's border with the Gaza Strip the following day to help provide emergency clean water to the territory. The 52 fire fighters and rescuers would distribute daily supplies of some 215 cubic metres of drinking water

to Gaza as part of the French aid mission. The Foreign Ministry said France had sent four planes carrying seven tons of medical supplies, water treatment equipment and 80 aid workers, including surgeons, doctors and bomb disposal experts, to Egypt. It said they would be put on standby on the Egyptian side of the border to be deployed in Gaza "as soon as possible". (AFP)

British International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander announced that the United Kingdom was giving a further £20 million [\$29 million] to help rebuild Gaza and to provide humanitarian assistance. (www.dfid.gov.uk)

19

No air strikes, rockets or fighting were reported by either side in and around the Gaza Strip for the first time since Israel's massive assault was launched on 27 December. Israeli officials said Israel planned to pull all of its troops out of the Gaza Strip by US President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration on 20 January, only if Hamas militants held their fire. Thousands of troops had left Gaza since Israel's declaration of its intention to unilaterally halt fire. Large contingents of Israeli soldiers remained close to the border, prepared to re-enter the territory if violence reignited. (AP)

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 1,314 Palestinians had been killed, of whom 412 were children and 110 were women, according to figures of the Palestinian Ministry of Health as of 1600 hours on 19 January. The number of Palestinian injuries was 5,300, of whom 1,855 were children and 795 were women. (www.ochaopt.org)

Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah opened the Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit in Kuwait with a demand for collective Arab measures setting out "practical steps to stabilize the ceasefire" in the Gaza Strip. He said that the Israeli offensive on Gaza was a "war crime and a crime against humanity", calling for those responsible to be held accountable. Seventeen Arab Heads of State were attending the two-day summit, while another five States were represented by senior officials. Sheikh Sabah said that the Arab Peace Initiative still formed the "clear foundation for the Arab position" for a durable settlement of the Palestinian cause. He also said that his country would donate \$34 million needed by UNRWA for its relief work in the Gaza Strip. (AFP)

Addressing the Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit in Kuwait, PA President Abbas stressed the need for all-faction talks in Cairo so that a long-term agreement over the Gaza Strip and unity government could be reached soon. He said, "What we need now is a temporary national government that can take upon itself the duty of facing this humanitarian disaster" and will then conduct presidential and legislative elections simultaneously. He also said, "We have not heard until now any rational voice that understands (Israel's) motives" for the war in Gaza. He added, "Those who do not have words of support for Gaza, it's better to keep silent." Mr. Abbas rejected any talk of abandoning the Arab initiative, saying the only option that Arabs had was to make peace with Israel. "The Arab Peace Initiative did not carry the seeds of its demise ... It was our shortcomings", Mr. Abbas said. (AFP, AP, Ma'an News Agency)

At the Kuwait summit, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah said in his speech, "Israel has to understand that the choice between war and peace will not always stay open and that the Arab Peace Initiative that is on the table today will not stay on the table." King Abdullah said his country would donate \$1 billion to a proposed Arab fund being set up to rebuild the Gaza Strip. League of Arab States Secretary-General Amre Moussa told the summit that Arab countries would have to come up with an alternative if they decided to abandon the Initiative. "The situation cannot take just freezing or suspending [the Initiative]," Mr. Moussa said. (AP)

In his address to the Kuwait summit, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "The key challenge before the leaders gathered here today is to do all possible to make sure that this tragedy does not occur again ... I look to you all to come together to prevent further violence, help the people of Gaza in this hour of desperate need, and restore stability ... The first step is a durable ceasefire. Hamas must cease firing rockets. Israel must withdraw its troops from Gaza. A durable ceasefire needs an open functioning system for the crossings in and out of Gaza, one that will immediately allow full access for humanitarian goods and personnel, and that will also ensure that we return, sooner rather than later, to the conditions reached in the Agreement on Movement and Access", Mr. Ban added. (UN News Centre)

Sources close to French President Nicholas Sarkozy said if a Palestinian unity government was established, Europe would be willing to recognize the Palestinian leadership, and would consequently lift the sanctions it had imposed on Hamas. A day earlier, the leaders of six key European Union States (France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic) voiced their commitment to helping prevent Hamas from replenishing its weapons stocks. (Haaretz)

Arab nations accused Israel of blasting Gaza with ammunition containing depleted uranium and urged the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to investigate reports that traces of it had been found in victims of the shelling, in a letter sent by Saudi Ambassador Prince Mansour al-Saud on behalf of Arab ambassadors accredited in Austria. In the letter, they urgently requested IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei to "carry out a radiological and physical assessment in order to verify the presence of depleted uranium in the weaponry used by Israel ... in the Gaza Strip." (AP)

The Egyptian State news agency MENA reported that Egypt had invited Israeli and Palestinian officials for separate meetings on 22 January to discuss an Egyptian initiative for an extended truce in Gaza. (AFP)

Briefing the press, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes said a total of 50 UNitec Nations facilities had been damaged in the fighting. On the medical side, 21 medical facilities had been damaged. The Al-Quds Hospital, damaged by shelling, was still closed. During the conflict, 13 health personnel had been killed and 22 injured, while on duty. (UN News Centre)

Amnesty International said, "The Israeli army used white phosphorus, a weapon with a highly incendiary effect, in densely populated civilian residential areas of Gaza City, according to indisputable evidence found by an Amnesty International fact-finding team which reached the area last Saturday." Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International's researcher on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said, "Its repeated use in this manner, despite evidence of its indiscriminate effects and its toll on civilians, is a war crime", she said. (www.amnesty.org)

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A 10-year-old boy and an 11-year old girl were killed when they were playing with an unexploded bomb left behind by Israeli troops east of the Gaza City neighbourhood of Al-Tufah. Gaza Strip residents were urged to stay away from ordnance left behind by Israel forces and not to eat food discarded by the soldiers. A Gaza farmer was shot dead as he inspected his land near the border with Israel. Witnesses said he was shot dead by Israeli soldiers as he approached the border, north-east of Jabalya. Meanwhile, Israeli warships shelled open areas north-west of Gaza City. No casualties were reported. Palestinian militants reportedly fired eight mortar shells at Israel earlier in the day. Israeli bulldozers entered the area of Abu al-Hamam near the Kissufim military installation and bulldozed agricultural lands. (DPA, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

IAF bombed a target in the Gaza Strip allegedly used by Palestinian militants to fire eight mortar shells at Israel earlier in the day. (Haaretz)

The following statement is attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General:

"Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met today with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. During the meeting the Secretary-General once again expressed his relief that Israel had declared a unilateral ceasefire. He stressed the importance of the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from

Gaza and of putting a framework in place to ensure a durable and sustainable end to the violence. The Secretary-General informed Prime Minister Olmert that the United Nations would continue to play a pivotal role in providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, as well as in long-term recovery and reconstruction. The Secretary-General told the Prime Minister that he was going to Gaza today in solidarity with United Nations staff who had worked heroically during the past weeks, and to demonstrate his respect and concern for all Gazans who had lost friends and families. During his visit to Gaza, the Secretary-General also intends to assure the people of Gaza that the United Nations will provide urgent humanitarian assistance and help them to start the challenging process of reconstruction. He will also visit the town of Sderot.

The Secretary-General firmly believes that a true end to violence, and true security for both Israelis and Palestinians, will only come through a just and comprehensive settlement to the long-festering Arab-Israeli conflict, including the creation of the State of Palestine living side by side with the State of Israel, in peace and security, consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions. (*UN press release SG/SM/12054*)

On his visit to the Gaza Strip, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "I'm just appalled. I'm not able to describe how I am feeling at this sight. This is heartbreaking. I am deeply grieved at what I have seen today. I have condemned on the outbreak of the conflict the excessive use of force by Israeli forces in Gaza." He also said he viewed Palestinian rocket attacks at southern Israel as "completely unacceptable". Mr. Ban was due to visit three United Nations facilities that had become battlegrounds during the conflict, including an UNRWA school. (*AP, BBC, DPA*) Thousands of Hamas supporters thronged a square outside the remains of the parliament building in Gaza City, which was heavily damaged by an Israeli air strike. Hamas supporters turned out to celebrate in the Gazan town of Khan Yunis. In Beit Lahia, around 800 people showed up for a pro-Hamas demonstration. (*AP*)

At least 250 Gazans were detained by Israeli troops during the Gaza Strip conflict, according to Palestinian Legislative Council member Issa Karake.

The men were being held in a Negev prison, living in tents and being constantly beaten. Several needed hospital treatment, which they were being denied and many were also being used by the Israeli intelligence units as information sources and were being interrogated for hours. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Arab leaders meeting in Kuwait City ended their meeting without agreeing on whether to back Egyptian peace efforts or even set up a joint reconstruction fund for the devastated Gaza Strip. (*AP*)

French newspaper *Le Figaro* reported that President Nicholas Sarkozy planned to host in the coming months an international conference in Paris to advance stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Mr. Sarkozy was reportedly seeking to capitalize on the momentum created by the participation of European leaders at the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh on 18 January. The goal of the conference was to reach a peace accord within a year.

(*Haaretz*)

French Foreign Ministry spokesperson Eric Chevalier said, "We are ready to work with a national unity government that will respect the principles of the peace process and commit itself to negotiations with Israel to obtain the creation of a Palestinian State." (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said progress over the return of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was a precondition for any Israeli concessions to Hamas. She said, "While there are things that Hamas wants to obtain from Israel, there is a human being that we want back – Gilad Shalit. The two matters are mutually dependent; it is impossible to separate them and we cannot move forward on any other issue until we make progress on the return of Gilad Shalit." (*Haaretz*)

Chinese Middle East Envoy Sun Bigan said, "We have been urging Hamas to face reality and join the Middle East peace process in the interest of the Palestinians. It has been demonstrated that the Middle East issue and the conflict between Palestine and Israel cannot be solved by war or by use of force." He visited Egypt, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory from 12 to 15 January. (*AFP*)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met to discuss the request by the United Nations to send an investigation team to Gaza in the next few weeks to assess the damage caused by the war. During a visit to Gaza on the same day, the Secretary-General demanded a full investigation of what he termed the "outrageous" IDF shelling of three United Nations buildings in the Gaza Strip, which Israel claimed Hamas had used as cover to launch attacks, a proper judicial inquiry and guarantees that United Nations buildings would not be attacked again. Mr. Ban condemned Israel's excessive use of force and demanded that those responsible for shelling schools and other facilities run by UNRWA during the 22-day offensive should be held to account. *Ma'ariv* had reported that IDF had privately admitted using phosphorus bombs and that the Judge Advocate General's Office and the Southern Command were conducting investigations. Phosphorus bombs can be used to create smoke screens, but their use as weapons of war in civilian areas is banned by the Geneva Conventions. Doctors and victims have provided witness accounts of attacks by shells containing white phosphorus, which leave wounds that continue to burn weeks after the initial injury. (*Haaretz, The Irish Times, Ma'an News Agency, The Times*)

The Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* quoted Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal as saying that his group was surprised by the force Israel recently used against it in the Gaza Strip. Speaking at the Arab conference in Doha, Mr. Mashaal told a closed forum that Hamas believed that Israel's 22-day campaign would last no longer than three days. "We did not expect the crimes that were committed against our citizens", he said. He also said that there were meant to be massive protests in front of Egyptian embassies across the Arab world, to pressure Cairo into opening its border crossing with the Gaza Strip. "These protests never took place", he said. (*Haaretz*)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on Israel to reopen the borders with the Gaza Strip immediately to allow the free movement of Palestinian people and goods. Mr. Ban said he was promoting the idea of a third party, perhaps the European Union or Turkey, to police the border crossing to ensure that weapons could not be smuggled to Hamas. (*Financial Times*)

Land confiscations in the West Bank were continuing, according to PA Minister of Waqf and Religious Affairs Jamal Bawatneh, saying soon there would be no land to hold a Palestinian State. "Hundreds of dunums of land in Yatta village [south of] in Hebron were confiscated" during the Gaza invasion, said Mr. Bawatneh. He called on Arab leaders to pay attention to the land grabs and speak out against them. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

IAEA would look into a claim by Vienna-based Arab ambassadors that Israel might have used ammunition containing depleted uranium in the Gaza Strip attacks. IAEA spokesperson Melissa Fleming said that a letter from the ambassadors, addressed to Director General Mohammed ElBaradei and delivered by the Saudi Arabian Ambassador a day earlier, would be circulated to member States and that IAEA would investigate the matter.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor said, "These accusations have been raised in the past many times and have been proven groundless each time by independent investigators." (*AP, Reuters*)

Former Irish President Mary Robinson and 2008 Nobel Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari were reportedly on a shortlist of candidates to lead a United Nations Human Rights Council inquiry into the violence in the Gaza Strip. The Council voted on 12 January by a large majority to set up a probe into "grave" human rights violations by Israeli forces against the Palestinians. (*AFP*)

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Israel completed the pullout of its troops from the Gaza Strip. The withdrawal was completed before dawn and an army spokesperson stated that "as of this morning, the last of the IDF soldiers have left the Gaza Strip" and redeployed around it, adding that they were "prepared for any occurrences". Initially, it had been the aim of IDF to have the last Israeli soldier leave Gaza before the inauguration of US President Barack Obama. Spokesman for the Israeli Prime Minister Mark Regev indicated that "we've redeployed on our side of the frontier and we will follow events closely. If Hamas breaks the ceasefire, we of course reserve the right to act to protect our people." (*AP, BBC, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Palestinian medical sources in Gaza reported that the bodies of two women, Kamila al-Attar, aged 90, and Halima Siyam, aged 62, were discovered in

the northern part of the Gaza Strip and that three additional persons, who had been wounded earlier during the IDF offensive, had died. They indicated that these latest deaths brought the death toll in Gaza to 1,323. *(IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)*

Israeli forces arrested seven young Palestinians, mostly teenagers, in the northern West Bank. They were seized from their homes in the village of Qayrou, south of Nablus. Several Israeli patrols raided the village overnight and ransacked a number of houses. *(IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)*

Six Palestinians were arrested in a pre-dawn attack in the village of Sa'er in the southern West Bank. *(IMEMC)*

Undercover Israeli forces arrested Salih Kamil, a leader of the Islamic Jihad, at his home in Qabatiya, south of Jenin. *(IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)*

A Palestinian woman was injured by a rubber-coated steel bullet fired by Israeli troops in the West Bank village of Shoykh Al Arob near Hebron. Troops had fired on youths throwing stones. *(IMEMC)*

Israeli Navy boats shelled areas in the Gaza Strip but did not cause any injuries or damage. *(IMEMC)*

Palestinian officials indicated that US President Barack Obama had telephoned PA President Abbas and reiterated that his administration would work in full partnership with him to achieve peace in the Middle East. In a statement, the Office of Israeli Prime Minister Olmert indicated that he had briefed Mr. Obama on the situation in Gaza and said that "he was hoping that the measures being taken by Israel, Egypt, the United States and Europe to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza will succeed and that we would be able to consolidate the ceasefire and able to continue in the future the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority." Mr. Olmert added that Israel would invest an additional effort in supplying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip as well as in improving the financial situation of Palestinians residing in the West Bank. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said that President Obama had used the opportunity on his first day in office to communicate his commitment to active engagement in pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace from the beginning of his term. During the telephone calls he had "emphasized his determination to work to help consolidate the ceasefire by establishing an effective anti-smuggling regime to prevent Hamas from rearming." Mr. Obama also intended to bolster the ceasefire by "facilitating in partnership with the Palestinian Authority a major reconstruction effort for Palestinians in Gaza." *(AP, AFP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters, Timesonline, Wafa, Ynetnews)*

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee issued a statement in Ramallah, saying it was demanding that Israel commit to a comprehensive freezing of all settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem and in the occupied West Bank and a commitment to give up its hold on all occupied land captured in the 1967 Middle East war. "The Palestinian leadership are not ready to return to political negotiations with Israel unless there is a new basis for talks", the PLO said. *(Reuters)*

Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit indicated that neither Egypt nor Israel knew whether captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was still alive. Hamas leader Moussa Abu Marzouk stated that Israel must think about the fate of Shalit after its massive bombing of the Gaza Strip. He noted that the issue of Shalit would receive more prominence in the future. *(AFP, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)*

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said after talks with European Union officials in Brussels that crossings into Gaza were open for humanitarian purposes and Israel was ready to cooperate "as far as needed" to ensure vital aid got through. "We are working with the international community and international organizations in order to help in answering the needs in the Gaza Strip", Ms. Livni told the news conference. Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, whose country holds the current European Union Presidency, told a news briefing the European Union had obtained permission for a mission to enter the Gaza Strip with aid, but added that it was not yet clear how much assistance could be brought in. *(Reuters)*

ICRC indicated that unexploded munitions were a threat to civilians and humanitarian work in the Gaza Strip. It said that it was assessing the extent of the damage caused by three weeks of fighting. The previous day, ICRC had indicated that the level of destruction was absolutely overwhelming and that the past three weeks of conflict had only further compounded the already critical situation in humanitarian terms that had prevailed over the previous 18 months. *(www.icrc.org)*

It has been reported by Palestinian and Western officials that Israel had told the United Nations and other aid groups that they must apply for project-by-project Israeli approval and provide guarantees that none of the work would benefit Hamas. Mr. Olmert had stated that "the rehabilitation efforts must be coordinated by the international organizations in conjunction with Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas, which is responsible for the destruction of Gaza, must not derive any legitimacy from the rehabilitation process." Mr. Olmert had asked Mr. Ban for assurance that any United Nations investigation of the damage resulting from the war in Gaza would include the damage that Palestinian-fired rockets had caused in the south of Israel and the Secretary-General had agreed to do so, according to an Israeli official. Mr. Ban told Mr. Olmert that the report would be aimed at prioritizing rehabilitation efforts, while Mr. Olmert insisted that Hamas play no role in the reconstruction. *(Haaretz, Reuters)*

Hamas indicated that it would welcome help from the Palestinian Authority in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Gaza Strip. Housing official Yousef al-Mansi said that Hamas authorities would not mind coordinating with the Palestinian Authority, but that the de facto government would supervise the reconstruction effort. He said that more than \$2.2 billion were needed to rebuild Gaza after the Israeli bombardment. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

Western and Palestinian officials reported that Israel was preventing the Palestinian Authority from transferring cash to the Gaza Strip to pay its workers and others hard-hit by the war. The restrictions threatened to undercut the ability of PA President Abbas' Government to reassert a presence in the Gaza Strip. PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had asked Israel for permission to send more than \$80 million to the Gaza Strip that would cover salary payments to some 77,000 PA workers in Gaza who report to him, as well as pension and welfare payments for retirees and the poor. Much of the money comes from the European Union. So far, Israel had only allowed some \$10 million into Gaza for UNRWA. *(Reuters, Ynetnews)*

According to a survey that the international aid agency, CARE, conducted among the inhabitants of Gaza, 89 per cent of Gaza's 1.5 million residents had not received any humanitarian aid since the beginning of Israel's offensive there in December 2008. The three-day telephone survey also showed that some 56 per cent of Gazans were hosting displaced persons in their homes. CARE said that the survey showed that more aid and humanitarian workers were needed in Gaza and that Israel should "fully open" Gaza's borders to allow "humanitarian supplies, building materials and commercial goods into the region." *(Ma'an News Agency)*

European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana indicated that the European Union planned to put pressure on Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to re-open Gaza so that humanitarian aid could reach Palestinians in need. He said, "it is very important that Gaza is opened. And that means opening the crossings, so that the help which the international community is willing to give can arrive to those in need." Mr. Solana added that while the bloc was committed to help, both politically and economically, it was also important that Palestinians restore their unity. *(Haaretz)*

The Foreign Ministry of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela said the country had sent to the Gaza Strip an air force plane loaded with 85 tons of aid supplies, a second batch of humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza. Foreign Minister Nicolás Maduro Moros, who supervised the aid shipment, said the Government was also considering sending doctors to assist the aid process coordinated by the United Nations. *(Xinhua)*

Israel announced plans to evacuate from the Gaza Strip some 400 persons holding dual citizenship from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Norway, the Philippines, Romania, Sri Lanka, Turkey and the United States. The Israeli authorities indicated that they would be taken from the Erez crossing through Israel over the Allenby (King Hussein) Bridge to Jordan for travel

abroad. The evacuation is the result of requests from the Governments of the dual citizens in Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

A group of Tel Aviv residents has been collecting food and clothing items over the past few days, as well as toys and hygiene products, for the benefit of the residents of the Gaza Strip, many of whom have been left without the most basic supplies following Israel's three-week military offensive. "Our goal is to help the residents of Gaza who are living under unbearable conditions", Daphna Levy, one of the drive's organizers, stated. "The situation we have left them in does not seem reasonable to us." The imminent transfer of the supplies to Gaza was made possible following negotiations between the "Candle for Peace" group and IDF officials. One volunteer stated that some Israelis felt as though it was their duty to "compensate" the Palestinians in Gaza. "It's very simple – there's a war, there are victims and people are volunteering to help." (*Ynetnews*)

IDF announced that it would investigate charges by the United Nations and human rights groups of the use of phosphorus shells. IDF said that it was investigating whether a reserve paratroop brigade had made improper use of phosphorus shells during the fighting in Gaza. The brigade had fired about 20 such shells in a built-up area, in Beit Lahia in northern Gaza. Some 200 such shells were said to have been fired during the fighting.

In the army's view, the shells were used very sparingly aside from this one case, in compliance with international law. Earlier in the week, Amnesty International had accused Israel of committing war crimes by using phosphorus shells, one of its weapons experts indicating that "white phosphorus is a weapon intended to provide a smokescreen for troop movements on the battlefield. It is highly incendiary, air burst and its spread effect is such that it should never be used on civilian areas." (www.amnesty.org, AP, BBC, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

Dozens of Palestinians rallied at the Red Cross headquarters in Bethlehem in solidarity with the Gaza Strip, demanding that war crimes tribunals be set up for Israeli leaders. The demonstration was organized by a committee of Palestinian political factions and the Palestinian Prisoner Society. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a statement read out on his behalf by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, briefed the Security Council about his first-hand experience of the suffering and destruction resulting from Israel's three-week military offensive in the Gaza Strip. He urged a "massive" international effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Mr. Ban said, "the violence, destruction and suffering before us have been a mark of collective political failure." The Secretary-General, whose diplomatic mission had included visits to Cairo, Amman, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Ankara, Beirut, Damascus and Sharm el-Sheikh, stated that "a true end to violence, and lasting security for both Palestinians and Israelis, will only come through a just and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict", adding that central to this effort was implementation of Security Council resolutions and the framework provided by the Arab Peace Initiative. "We do not need new plans and processes. We have the tools we need. We need only political will and action", Mr. Ban stated. (*UN News Centre*)

Anonymous Israeli human rights activists set up an Internet site detailing alleged war crimes committed by senior Israeli Government officials and IDF officers. The site, www.wanted.org.il, includes "arrest orders" and explains how to inform the International Criminal Court of when the "suspects" are outside Israel, and hence vulnerable to arrest. (*Haaretz*)

22

Israeli gunboats shelled an area north-west of Gaza City, injuring seven Palestinians, including five fishermen. The Israeli military said it had been firing to deter a Palestinian fishing vessel that had strayed off-limits. Dr. Mu'awiyah Hassanain, the Director of Ambulance and Emergency Services of the Palestinian Health Ministry, said a shell fired by the boats had hit a house in Beach refugee camp and wounded a man and a girl walking in the street. Another shell landed 100 yards away in an empty area near a United Nations aid distribution centre. Gunboats had been firing off Gaza's shore for several days despite the ceasefire. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

US President Obama said: "Going forward, the outline for a durable ceasefire is clear: Hamas must end its rocket fire; Israel will complete the withdrawal of its forces from Gaza; the United States and our partners will support a credible anti-smuggling and interdiction regime, so that Hamas cannot rearm ... Now we must extend a hand of opportunity to those who seek peace. As part of a lasting ceasefire, Gaza's border crossings should be open to allow the flow of aid and commerce, with an appropriate monitoring regime, with the international [community] and Palestinian Authority participating ... The United States will fully support an international donor's conference to seek short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term reconstruction for the Palestinian economy. This assistance will be provided to and guided by the Palestinian Authority." (www.washingtonpost.com)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the appointment of George Mitchell as Special Envoy for Middle East Peace. "We welcome this appointment. He's someone with experience of the Israel-Palestinian question and the settlement of political conflicts", Ahmed Qureia, head of the Palestinian negotiating team, told AFP. "We have already worked with him as the author of the Mitchell report, which called for a freeze of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from West Bank towns", he said. Israel welcomed not only Mr. Mitchell but also US President Obama's move to "engage actively" in peace negotiations, Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said. In Washington, President Obama said Mr. Mitchell would be sent to the region "as soon as possible" to ensure a durable and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza. (*AFP, www.state.gov*)

The Israeli Defence Ministry said Israel would allow journalists free access to the Gaza Strip through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing beginning on 23 January. (*AFP*)

Touring Gaza to assess what was most urgently needed in the Gaza Strip, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes called the steep Palestinian casualty toll from Israel's offensive "extremely shocking" and suggested the United Nations might ask Israel to compensate it for wartime damage to United Nations compounds in Gaza. Hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid were destroyed by Israeli shelling that struck the main UNRWA compound. "We want to make sure it is properly investigated and that we get proper accountability for it and proper compensation if it is needed, and I think it will be needed", Mr. Holmes told reporters. On the first day of a five-day trip to the region, Mr. Holmes said he was looking at immediate humanitarian needs and thinking about longer-term reconstruction in Gaza. The biggest concerns, he said, were providing clean water, sanitation, electricity and shelter to people displaced by the fighting. (*AP*)

"The Gaza humanitarian needs assessment mission" was struck by the scale and urgency of the needs of the people of Gaza, and the heavy and multifaceted impact that this conflict has had on the civilian population", according to a joint statement issued by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes and United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry. Mr. Holmes told a press conference after touring Gaza that the Gaza flash appeal would "involve a very significant appeal for resources of hundreds of millions of dollars to address short term needs perhaps for the next six or nine months". He explained that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs hoped to speed up the aid process by distinguishing the "rapid response" of providing food and shelter from more long-term reconstruction efforts, which he saw as "more political". Between 100 and 120 trucks of goods were coming through the Kerem Shalom crossing daily, and via one conveyer belt at the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, as well as "reasonably" regular fuel deliveries from the Nahal Oz fuel delivery point. The Gaza

Strip, noted Mr. Holmes, needed 500 to 600 trucks of goods per day in order to function at normal levels. UNRWA warehouses needed to be almost totally replenished after being hit by what he had "little or no doubt" were white phosphorus shells. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency, UN News Centre)

In an interview that appeared in *Ma'ariv*, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said, "We have reached the real moment and I declare to the public and to the Saudi Arabian King that I am able to accept the Arab [Peace Initiative] that was confirmed in Riyadh as a way to negotiate and reach solutions based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1968) and 338 (1973)." (Ma'an News Agency)

Egypt's MENA news agency said Israeli envoy Amos Gilad had arrived in Cairo "for a short visit to meet with senior officials to discuss consolidating the ceasefire in Gaza". Egypt had invited Hamas to Cairo for separate talks on shoring up the ceasefire, but the group would only send a delegation to Cairo on Sunday, 25 January, the Foreign Ministry said. Hamas postponed their visit to allow for more consultations between Egypt and Israel, a senior official told MENA. (AFP)

Yemen announced a new initiative calling on Fatah and Hamas to resume dialogue and form a national unity government. Based on the previous Yemeni initiative, the plan called for the resumption of dialogue between all Palestinian groups, mainly the two factions, and proposed that the dialogue be sponsored by Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. (DPA)

Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit had assigned Assistant Foreign Minister Nehad Abde Latif to organize an Egyptian-hosted conference in February on the reconstruction of Gaza. (www.mfa.gov.eg)

An adviser to Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Martti Ahtisaari said that he had been approached about participating in a possible Human Rights Council fact-finding mission to Gaza, after the Finnish news agency STT had quoted Mr. Ahtisaari as saying that any such mission would require the full cooperation of both the Israelis and Palestinians. (AP)

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967 Richard Falk said compelling evidence that Israel's actions in Gaza violated international humanitarian law required an independent investigation into whether they amounted to war crimes. "I believe that there is the prima facie case for reaching that conclusion", he told a Geneva news conference. Mr. Falk said Israel had made no effort to allow civilians to escape the fighting. (Reuters)

23

Six Palestinians were arrested and dozens choked on tear gas when Israeli forces dispersed a demonstration being held in Hebron in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. Some 2,500 protesters had turned out for the demonstration. (Ma'an News Agency)

Seven children, aged 12 to 17 years, had been seized by Israeli forces from their homes in the village of Toura al-Gharbiyah, near Jenin, the organization Defence for Children International reported. They allegedly had thrown stones at the Israeli separation wall. (Ma'an News Agency)

Two Palestinians died in Egyptian hospitals of wounds resulting from Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip, Mu'awiyah Hassanain, Director of Gaza Emergency Services, said. Two more corpses had been recovered from the rubble of buildings destroyed by Israel's bombing. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel had taken a favourable view of an Egyptian request to increase the force of its border guards along the Gaza border, according to a senior Israeli political source. (Haaretz)

Senior Hamas officials based in Gaza returned to Egypt for more talks with Egyptian mediators on the Gaza truce. They said the discussions would focus on a "working paper" to consolidate the ceasefire with Israel. One official said the talks, slated for 25 January, would also address the fate of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. (AP, Ma'an News Agency)

"There has been so much destruction here, not just to housing ... but to the infrastructure of the future state", UNRWA Director of Gaza Operations John Ging said in a conference call with journalists in Geneva. He said there was a need to establish accountability "for why the Israeli Air Force hit the infrastructure of the State of Palestine rather than the infrastructure of terror, whatever that may be." A large proportion of the destruction in Gaza involved industrial facilities and PA ministries, according to Mr. Ging. (AFP)

About 1,200 Palestinian orphans who lost their parents during the Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip were going to be sponsored by Turkish families, the Anatolia news agency reported. (AP)

Japan began airlifting some \$1 million worth of blankets, sleeping mats and plastic sheets for making temporary shelters for Palestinians in Gaza, in response to an emergency appeal by the United Nations. (Kyodo)

Countries suffering from conflicts in the Middle East had lost \$12 trillion over two decades through squandered development and livelihoods, a study by the India-based Strategic Foresight Group stated. The work was immediately endorsed by several countries that have acted as peace brokers in the region, including Norway and Switzerland. Sundeep Waslekar, who headed the study with experts from the regions concerned, said individual incomes for Israelis and Palestinians were half what they would have been if peace had been accomplished at the Madrid Conference in 1991.

(AFP, www.strategicforesight.com)

Prime Minister Olmert put Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann in charge of defending Israel against charges of war crimes during the Gaza assault, a Government source said. Defense Minister Ehud Barak was also expected to ask the Government to approve on 25 January a bill "offering moral and legal backing to army officers and soldiers following Operation Cast Lead", his Ministry said. Israel's military censor had already banned the publication of the identity of the unit leaders who fought in the Gaza Strip for fear they might face war crimes charges. (AFP)

24

Gaza's children returned to school for the first time since the Israeli offensive on 27 December. UNRWA reopened all of its 221 schools, with some 200,000 Palestinian children expected to return to class. Many of the students had lost relatives and their homes, and in many classrooms there were empty desks. Public schools run by Hamas also reopened. UNRWA spokesperson Christopher Gunness said, "There are going to be thousands of traumatized children coming to school today ... UNRWA's commitment to restoring a sense of normalcy for the next generation in Gaza is a test of our humanity and we are determined to rise to the challenge." (AFP, BBC)

A group of 25 South African medical staff, who arrived in Egypt with 84 tons of relief supplies for Gaza, said they were being held up by Egyptian security officers at the Rafah border crossing. The mission, which was supported by the South African Government and the Council of Churches, was bringing medical equipment, generators and food. (BBC)

25

Hamas official Mushir al-Masri said Hamas was prepared to reach a one-year truce with Israel, rejecting the reported 18-month Israeli offer. Mr. Masri said the truce would be contingent on the reopening of all the border crossings, including the Rafah terminal, and lifting the blockade. Hamas also expressed willingness to accept the presence of European and Turkish forces at the border crossings but opposed any international troops in Gaza as they would be "regarded as an occupation force". Asked if PA President Abbas' force would be present at the crossings, Hamas official Ayman Taha said, "Hamas is the existing Government in Gaza." Hamas official Osama Hamdan also said the Fatah movement must end peace negotiations with Israel before any reconciliation talks could take place. Asharq Al-Awsat reported a day earlier that Hamas had suggested PA

representatives be stationed at the Rafah crossing, but that they be residents of Gaza, not the West Bank. (*Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

An IDF official said Israel was considering linking the opening of the Gaza crossing with the negotiations for the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. "The operation has created new understandings between us and Hamas", the official explained. However, Hamas official Mushir al-Masri said, "The Israeli soldier is not linked in any way to the issue of the truce or the border crossings. Rather, the case ... is connected to a future prisoner exchange. No one should dream that Shalit will be seen by his family if the border crossings aren't opened." (*AFP, The Jerusalem Post*)

European Union Foreign Ministers held extraordinary talks with their counterparts from Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and the PA. Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg said the European Union could change its stance on Hamas if it gave up terrorism. Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said a humanitarian aid conference for the Gaza Strip could be held in Egypt by late February. Mr. Schwarzenberg also said certain European Union States could provide Egypt with whatever was necessary to combat the arms smuggling through the tunnels in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Aboul Gheit emphasized that the weapons did not flow from Egypt but by sea. European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said the European Union had no naval unit, but individual States had shown willingness to consider assistance in this regard. Three Czech humanitarian experts also made presentations on the current conditions in Gaza during the meeting. (*Financial Times*)

Hamas officials stepped in to offer cash handouts worth a total of \$52 million to Gazans who had lost family members, homes or businesses, as fresh evidence emerged of Israel's destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including the largest cement factory and the only operating flour mill. (*Guardian*)

Settlers from "Karmel", flanked by soldiers seized new land south of Hebron, Palestinian security sources said. The seized farmland belonged to Palestinian families from nearby Yatta. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said, "The commanders and soldiers sent to Gaza should know they are safe from various tribunals and Israel will assist them on this front and defend them, just as they protected us with their bodies during the Gaza operation." PA Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Malki said, "It does not mean there is immunity against legal actions." (*BBC, Reuters*)

The High Court of Israel had ordered the Government to allow free access to Gaza for foreign correspondents, rejecting a ban imposed even before the recent Israeli offensive there. The Court said it assumed the crossings would be closed "only in dire circumstances of concrete danger." (*AP*)

26

Israeli forces stormed the southern West Bank village of Husan and imposed a curfew. Witnesses said hundreds of soldiers in military vehicles and bulldozers entered the village, south of Bethlehem, and began house-to-house raids assaulting residents indiscriminately. Reports said 30 persons had been arrested. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

In ongoing talks on the Gaza ceasefire in Cairo, Egyptian officials were reportedly trying to persuade Hamas to accept Israel's current offer of a truce in Gaza before a far less accommodating Government under Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu was elected. Officials supposedly told Hamas that surveys showed that the opposition leader was likely to come to power in the February elections, and that he could form a coalition with "extremist parties". Israel reportedly offered Hamas a ceasefire for an unlimited amount of time and the opening for Gaza's crossings in return for the release of Gilad Shalit. (*Haaretz*)

Palestinian factions met in Cairo for the first time since November, when Hamas refused to attend unity talks, also in Egypt. PLO Executive Committee member Saleh Rafaat said, "A lasting truce and reconstruction in the devastated Gaza Strip will only come once the rival Hamas and Fatah factions reconcile". Hamas leader Jamal Abu Hashem described the meeting as consultative "to break the ice and restart the dialogue". Fatah delegation leader Azzam al-Ahmed said, "Any agreement should end this division. Otherwise, the international community will not talk to us."

Another Fatah official said the group was ready for immediate dialogue with Hamas. Head of delegation and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine Secretary-General Nayeh Hawatmeh described the Cairo talks as "promising". The talks included Hamas, Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front and other factions in the PLO. They sat with Arab Foreign Ministers in Cairo for three days of talks on the Gaza Strip reconstruction, the creation of a long-term ceasefire and the return to Palestinian national dialogue and unity. (*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

It was reported that Israeli officials had conducted frenetic diplomatic efforts and used intense diplomatic pressure to block an attempt by France to modify a closing statement of the meeting of European Union foreign ministers in Brussels. The French move was seen as an attempt to get the Quartet to soften its conditions for international recognition of Hamas. Israel feared a break in European support for the boycott of Hamas in Gaza and worked together with the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands to push the French initiative off the agenda. France was reported to have wanted the statement to say that the European Union would be prepared to hold talks with a future Palestinian unity government that agreed to honour the principles of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In addition, the French delegation was also said to have proposed striking from the statement an article calling for the reopening of the crossing points between Israel and the Gaza Strip in accordance with the 2005 agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said US President Barack Obama could use "Israel's success" in its recent offensive against Hamas: "The operation in Gaza strategically altered the position of Hamas and extremist forces, and it will serve as a lever with which the US and the international community can alter the reality during the new administration's term". (*Haaretz*)

European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel announced the launching of the 2009 Global Plan allocating €58 million to assist the Palestinian population. From this commitment, around €32 million would be earmarked to respond to the humanitarian situation in Gaza, €20 million would be for the West Bank and the remaining €6 million was destined for Palestine refugees in Lebanon. After touring some of the areas worst hit in the Gaza Strip and Sderot during Israel's 22-day deadly assault, Mr. Michel expressed his astonishment at the damage caused by the Israeli offensive and said the destruction was an unjustifiable violation of international law. He also condemned all military action against civilians, including Israeli civilians, which he described as terrorism as those attacks targeted innocent people. (*AFP, <http://europa.eu>, Ma'an News Agency*)

Over 40 truckloads of medical supplies, flour, olive oil, blankets and milk were donated by the people of Ramallah and Al-Bireh and were on their way to the Gaza Strip. The aid was being coordinated by the "Relief of Gaza" committee. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Dozens of patients, many of them children, who needed urgent treatment abroad, had been unable to leave the Gaza Strip via Egypt over the past days, their relatives said. The PA was no longer issuing the necessary paperwork to allow them passage through the Rafah border crossing, they said. Egypt recognized only PA President Abbas' administration as the legitimate one and anyone passing through its border crossings with Gaza therefore required documentation from the Ramallah-based PA Health Ministry. The Ministry issued a statement earlier saying it now wanted "to provide and ensure treatment for the injured children in Gaza close to their families and friends". "We therefore see no more reason to refer any more children for treatment abroad", the statement said. (*DPA*)

A team of Jordanian doctors was in the Gaza Strip to set up a military field hospital to treat Palestinians after the Israeli offensive. Hospital Director Zahran Bader said the tent facility would be operational the following day in Gaza City, with 44 beds and 179 doctors and medics. The hospital would include neurologists, general and reconstructive surgeons and obstetricians from the King Hussein Medical Centre. (*AP*)

An ongoing Saudi Arabian campaign to raise aid for the Gaza Strip had so far raised \$59.8 million, including \$10.7 million from King Abdullah Bin

Abdul Aziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz. The campaign had been launched in early January. (AFP)

BBC refused to air an appeal for Gaza aid prepared by the Disasters Emergency Committee. BBC official Caroline Thomson said, "We concluded that we could not broadcast a free-standing appeal, no matter how carefully constructed, without running the risk of reducing public confidence in the BBC's impartiality in its wider coverage of the story." BBC officials received more than 10,000 complaints over their decision and were the focus of numerous protests over the weekend after announcing the charity appeal would not be shown. Sky News also joined the BBC in refusing to air the Gaza charity appeal. Channel 4, Five, ITV and Al-Jazeera English announced that they would be airing the appeal. Sky News was said to be reconsidering its position. (Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, The Independent)

Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu told Quartet Representative Tony Blair that if he became Prime Minister in the forthcoming elections, "I have no intention of building new settlements in the West Bank. But like all the Governments there have been until now, I will have to meet the needs of natural growth in the population. I will not be able to choke the settlements." (Reuters)

The Egyptian news agency MENA reported that during an extraordinary session of the Arab League, delegates from 22 Arab nations had agreed to ask the General Assembly to "form an international committee to investigate Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip and to set up a criminal court to try Israeli war criminals". They also decided to send a fact-finding committee to Gaza to prepare a report on war crimes, including the use of white phosphorus and depleted uranium munitions. Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that he had informed the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court of the matter, noting that it would be discussed at the international level. (Xinhua)

27

An IDF soldier was killed and three others wounded when a roadside bomb exploded near an IDF patrol near the Kissufim crossing along the Gaza border. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. Residents near Deir al-Balah located close to where the soldier was killed said that toward evening Israeli tanks and armoured bulldozers were manoeuvring around orchards and wells, causing damage. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that Israel needed to respond immediately to the attack. Defence Minister Ehud Barak said that the incident was "serious, and it cannot be accepted and we will respond. There is no benefit in specifying [the response]." A Palestinian militant was wounded in an air strike in Khan Yunis. In addition, a 27-year-old Palestinian farmer, Anwar al Bareem, was killed by Israeli gunfire along the border. According to Palestinian witnesses, heavy gunfire was audible along the border in central Gaza; Israeli helicopters hovered in the air, firing their machine guns; Israeli soldiers and some 20 tanks and bulldozers had crossed into southern Gaza and further north, with soldiers taking up positions on rooftops while tanks fired at buildings and people fled their homes. (AP, AFP, BBC, Haaretz, IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, Timesonline, Wafa, Xinhua, Ynetnews)

Five Palestinians were arrested by Israeli troops from villages near Ramallah. Three men were arrested in Budrus while two men were arrested in Kufer Malak village after troops stormed a number of homes and destroyed belongings. Another two were arrested in Bethlehem after IDF vandalized their houses. IDF also raided the Al-Azzeh refugee camp near Bethlehem and arrested one person. (IMEMC, Wafa, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli troops arrested three Palestinians during pre-dawn raids in Hebron, the nearby town of Al Thahriya and the village of Dora. (IMEMC, Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli troops shot and injured two Palestinian youths at the Al-Far'a refugee camp near Tubas in the northern West Bank, after storming the camp and opening fire at residents. (IMEMC)

George Mitchell, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, arrived in Cairo at the beginning of a week-long tour in the Middle East and Europe. Mr. Mitchell would meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak the following day before proceeding to Israel, the West Bank, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, France and the United Kingdom. The day before, President Obama pledged that Mr. Mitchell would engage "vigorously and consistently" in the quest for Israeli-Palestinian peace and would seek concrete results, adding that "the cause of peace in the Middle East is important to the United States and our national interests. It's important to me personally." (Haaretz)

It was reported that Egypt had proposed 22 February as the date for the start of a dialogue between Palestinian groups. Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit told reporters that Egypt "will invite the Palestinian groups. We hope we will succeed in this in the third week or at the end of the third week of February." He also indicated that 5 February would mark the start of a truce between Israel and Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip. A day earlier, a member of the PLO Executive Committee stated that "a lasting truce and reconstruction in the devastated Gaza Strip will only come once the rival Hamas and Fatah factions reconcile." (AP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

Egypt warned European countries to think carefully before sending ships to patrol Gaza's coastal waters to prevent arms smuggling, saying that such a move could have significant consequences for ties with Arab States. Egypt's Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit issued the warning after the United Kingdom, France and Germany had offered to send warships to the Middle East to monitor and prevent arms smuggling to Gaza and to help consolidate the ceasefire. The three countries had sent a joint letter to the Israeli and Egyptian Governments outlining their offer of naval support.

They were also willing to help monitor border crossings in Gaza. President Hosni Mubarak held talks with visiting European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana on efforts to shore up a fragile ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz, Xinhua)

French President Nicolas Sarkozy will meet with Noam Shalit, the father of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, at the Élysée Palace and will update him on the latest developments in the diplomatic efforts to secure his son's release, since Gilad Shalit holds dual Israeli-French citizenship. In a separate development, a senior Hamas member told the London-based newspaper *al-Hayat* that the "negotiations for Gilad Shalit's release won't start from zero but from where we left off", and added that they "won't disclose any information about him. In addition, this issue is being handled by the movement's military wing." (Haaretz, Ynetnews)

PA President Abbas confirmed that the PA had called for an international investigation of Israeli war crimes. In a news conference, Mr. Abbas said, "We call upon the International Criminal Court to do it." "We want a national dialogue, without conditions and based on the formation of a government that does not bring back the siege and that allows for democratic elections," he added. (Ma'an News Agency)

In an AP interview, former US President Jimmy Carter said that Israel will face a "catastrophe" unless it revives the Mideast peace process and establishes an independent Palestinian State. "If we look toward a one-State solution, which seems to be the trend – I hope not inexorable – it would be a catastrophe for Israel, because there would be only three options in that case", Mr. Carter said. One would be to expel large numbers of Palestinians which would amount to "ethnic cleansing"; the second would be to deprive the Palestinians of equal voting rights and therefore of the majority (which would be like "apartheid"); and the third would be to give the Palestinians equal voting rights, and therefore the majority ("and you would no longer have a Jewish State"). Mr. Carter said that he still believed in a two-State solution as the best option, with Israel's right to exist in peace being recognized by all its Arab neighbours, and Israel withdrawing from most of the land it captured in 1967 to create an independent Palestine. He added that this was "almost completely compatible" with United Nations resolutions, US official policy and the Arab Peace Initiative that called for a land-for-peace swap. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Israel announced that it was closing until further notice all the commercial crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip in response to the killing of an IDF soldier near the Kissufim crossing. Defense official Peter Lerner said that this was "another example of terrorist activities against the crossings, the same crossings that serve the Palestinian people for ... aid." PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad urged Israel to return to the 2005 Gaza Access and Movement Agreement. (AP, IMEMC, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

ICRC indicated that some 115 Palestinians had been registered by their families as missing in the Gaza conflict and that it was trying to trace the missing persons and restore contact between them and their families. An ICRC spokeswoman said that "they may have been detained, wounded or just not been in touch", adding that ICRC expected to have access to all detainees. In a separate operational update, ICRC indicated that hospitals in Gaza and their patients were still facing severe hardships. (www.icrc.org, *Reuter*)

John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Karen AbuZayd, UNRWA Commissioner-General, briefed the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Highlighting UNRWA early-recovery activities, including its quick response plan, Ms. AbuZayd stressed that there were challenges that went well beyond the humanitarian realm. "They lie in the province of political action [and], for this reason, it is on this Council and its esteemed members that part of the burden of restoring normalcy to Gaza rests", she said. She went on to say that all Gaza's borders needed to be opened and kept open continuously – on both the Egyptian and Israeli sides – to allow two-way freedom of movement for people, goods and cash, and critical negotiations to end the Israel-Hamas conflict should proceed in an inclusive and balanced manner.

Mr. Holmes announced plans to launch, on 2 February, an emergency appeal as a prioritized plan for urgent needs. However, there were two basic conditions that needed to be met: much freer access of goods and staff; and ensuring that relief agencies worked more effectively with Israeli officials and the PA, and dealt practically with those in control on the ground. (*UN press release SC/9585*)

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Israeli aircraft bombed smuggling tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border in Rafah. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Gaza militants fired a rocket into the Negev; no casualties were reported. (*Haaretz*)

Hamas said it had fired three mortar rounds against an Israeli unit operating inside the Gaza Strip. Witnesses confirmed seeing mortar fire against four Israeli tanks in the area. (*AFP*)

Israeli warplanes bombed the area near the border in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. Witnesses said the warplanes fired missiles at the As-Salam district of Rafah in addition to a local metal workshop allegedly used to manufacture homemade projectiles that were fired into Israel. The strike came hours after another Qassam fired by Gaza militants hit the Eshkol region in the western Negev. There were no reports of injuries.

(*Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli military arrested 14 Palestinians during overnight raids in Bethlehem and Hebron and the village of Beit Suweif. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces imposed a curfew on Zabuba village west of Jenin and seized eight Palestinians, security sources said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

France summoned Israel's ambassador to protest after Israeli troops had fired warning shots as European diplomats, including France's Consul-General, were blocked at Gaza's Erez border crossing, the Foreign Ministry said. (*AFP*)

"Factions of the resistance reject the signing of a truce agreement before the opening of all crossing points, the lifting of the blockade and the arrival of supplies", Hamas and seven other Palestinian groups said in a statement. A meeting of the factions also rejected "any regional or security arrangement that would compromise the security of our people and of the resistance against Israel", the statement said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

US Middle East Envoy George Mitchell held talks in Israel with Prime Minister Olmert and other security officials. He said afterwards a long-term Gaza truce had to be based on an end to weapons smuggling to Hamas and the reopening of the territory's blockaded borders. Mr. Olmert told Mr. Mitchell that the border crossings into the Gaza Strip would not reopen permanently unless the issue of captive IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was resolved.

Mr. Mitchell said that after finishing his consultations in the region and with the Europeans, he would report his conclusions on the next steps in the peace process to President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Clinton. Mr. Mitchell planned to see PA President Abbas on 29 January.

Western diplomats said he would not meet officials of Hamas. (*AP, Haaretz*)

Quartet Representative Blair called for "a new strategy in Gaza" in remarks made in Cairo, and admitted that the international community's approach to the territory had not worked. (*DPA*)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh urged US President Obama to correct the "mistakes" of his predecessor, George W. Bush. "Palestine is the door to the Muslim world," Mr. Haniyeh wrote in a letter to the President, adding "justice and freedom for Palestinians is the key that will open this door." (*AFP*)

Hamas would recognize Israel if it withdrew to its pre-1967 borders, Marek Halter, a French writer, said after meeting Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal. "He told me that Hamas was prepared to recognize Israel on the lines of 4 June 1967. He told me so several times", he added. (*AFP*)

At a joint news conference with European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana in Ramallah, PA President Abbas said, "The pursuit of colonization and expansion of settlements inside Palestinian territories shows that Israel has no desire for peace." He added: "Israel tried to enshrine Palestinian divisions through its attack against Gaza in order to prevent the creation of an independent Palestinian State in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and (East) Jerusalem alongside the State of Israel." (*AFP*)

Israel had reopened commercial crossings into the Gaza Strip, the PA told Ma'an News Agency. Israel allowed in 110 trucks, 82 of which were carrying humanitarian aid, through the Kerem Shalom crossing in southern Gaza. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

UNRWA food aid was being distributed to 900,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of Israel's military offensive in the territory, Director of Gaza Operations John Ging said. All employees of the PA had been included because "they are not getting the cash for their salaries, therefore they are not able to buy the food." (*AFP*)

Hamas had accepted a plan to rebuild the Gaza Strip in which funds would be given to international agencies and kept out of the hands of the Palestinian factions, Talal Abu Tharifa, a member of the central committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and a participant in the Cairo negotiations, said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The number of buildings in Israeli settlements in the West Bank grew in 2008, with 1,257 constructed, a 60 per cent increase compared with 2007, Peace Now reported. In a study, the Peace Now movement also found that 261 new structures were built by settlers in West Bank outposts. Some 39 per cent of the new structures built in 2008 were built east of the separation wall. Moreover, said the report, not one of the unauthorized settler outposts in the West Bank had been evacuated, despite promises by the Israeli Government that it would clear them as part of its commitments under the Road Map. (www.peacenow.org.il)

Israel's Defense Ministry had concealed information showing widespread unauthorized construction in West Bank settlements, fearing the data could hurt the country's international relations, Haaretz reported. The Haaretz report said construction in three out of every four settlements in the West Bank was conducted without proper permits. In many settlements, it said, synagogues, schools and other buildings and infrastructure were built on private Palestinian lands. (*AP*)

Apart from white phosphorus, the Israeli army had used flechette rounds in densely populated civilian areas of Gaza, Amnesty International said. The organization joined the call by Human Rights Watch for the establishment of an independent, international commission of inquiry into possible violations of the laws of war by both sides, which said that the Security Council or Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon should urgently take the necessary steps to achieve this. (www.amnesty.org, www.hrw.org)

Nine Palestinians, including eight children, were wounded when an Israeli warplane fired a missile at two An-Nasser Brigades gunmen on a motorcycle in Khan Yunis. IDF said the militant, identified as Mohammed al Sumeiri (also identified as Mohammed Uda-Samidi), was involved in rigging a roadside bomb which killed an Israeli and wounded three others on 27 January. This was the fifth Israeli air strike since the ceasefire went into effect nearly two weeks earlier. (AFP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency)

After a round of meetings in Jerusalem and Ramallah, US Middle East Envoy George Mitchell said, "The Prime Minister [Ehud Olmert] and I discussed the critical importance to consolidate the ceasefire, including a cessation of hostilities, an end to smuggling and reopening of the crossings based on 2005 agreements." He also said, "The decision by President Obama to dispatch me to come to this region less than one week after his inauguration is clear and tangible evidence of this [the US] commitment." After meeting with PA President Abbas in Ramallah, he said, "To be successful in preventing the illegal trafficking of arms into the Gaza Strip, there must be a mechanism to allow the flow of legal goods." (AFP, DPA)

Javier Solana, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, expressed hope that the two unilateral ceasefires by Israel and Hamas would be rapidly transformed into a "real and lasting ceasefire" and that the crossing points to the Gaza Strip would be entirely open "in the next few days" for European Union aid. Once these two conditions were fulfilled, which Mr. Solana hoped would be feasible by 4 or 5 February, inter-Palestinian discussions could be resumed, with the assistance of Egypt, with the aim of forming a "government of consensus or government of technocrats". The first task of such a government would be to begin the work of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip and agree on the organization of new elections. Mr Solana said that if this went well, the process could see the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian political dialogue before the end of the year. (Agence Europe)

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told US Envoy George Mitchell that Israel had offered in negotiations with the Palestinians to remove 60,000 settlers from the West Bank in the framework of the permanent status agreement, Yediot Ahronot reported. On the issue of Jerusalem, "Israel agreed for the city to be divided and for neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem to be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty. The holy places would come under the administration of an international authority that would supervise access to them and which would ensure that believers of the three faiths be able to hold their religious practices without disturbance." Mr. Olmert also said Israel would agree to withdraw, in the framework of the permanent status agreement, to the 1967 borders with border revisions that kept the large settlement blocs, the article said. (AFP)

Hamas leader Ghazi Hamad told AP, "We want to be part of the international community. I think Hamas has no interest now to increase the number of crises in Gaza or to challenge the world." Another Hamas official, Mushir Al-Masri, said, "We have our hands open to any country ... to open dialogue without conditions", clarifying that that did not include Israel. Ismail Al-Ashqar, a Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said Hamas would reject any truce agreement with Israel that did not completely halt Israeli attacks on Gaza and open the territory's borders, particularly the Rafah crossing. (AP, Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas is scheduled to visit Prague on 2 February to meet with (European Union Presidency) Czech President Vaclav Klaus. (AFP) Spanish Judge Fernando Andreu began an investigation into seven current or former Israeli officials over a 2002 bombing in the Gaza Strip that killed a Hamas militant and 14 other people, including nine children. Judge Andreu said he saw a possible crime against humanity in the attack that targeted Salah Shehadeh with a one-ton bomb dropped from an F-16 warplane in densely populated Gaza City. The judge was acting under a doctrine that allowed prosecution in Spain of crimes against humanity or crimes like terrorism or genocide, even if they were committed in another country. The suit was brought by a group of Palestinians. The people named in it included Dan Halutz, who commanded the IAF at the time, and Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, then Defence Minister. (AP)

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke of the humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He was joined by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes, who also made a statement on the humanitarian flash appeal for \$613 million for immediate humanitarian and early recovery needs. Mr. Ban said, "The civilian population suffered greatly during three weeks of military operations. More than one third of the 6,600 deaths and injured were children and women ... People have lost their families, they have lost their homes, belongings and livelihoods. Schools, clinics, factories and businesses have been destroyed", he added.

He also said that he was encouraged that the US and some European countries had agreed to try to prevent the smuggling of illicit arms and weapons from the wider region into Gaza again, which otherwise would allow Hamas to use the ceasefire to strengthen itself. (AP, UN News Centre)

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Israeli troops detained eight Palestinians in Hijjah village, near Qalqilya. Clashes erupted between the villagers and the Israeli troops, but no injuries were reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas will approve a one and a half year truce, informed sources told Ma'an News Agency. Hamas would inform Egypt of its decision during meetings the following week, and Islamic Jihad was expected to give its response at the same time. The sources noted that Hamas had approved the truce on the conditions that the crossings would open on the date the agreement was set to start, and had agreed to the deployment of international monitors. The group rejected linking the ceasefire to the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, saying his file was connected to prisoner swap talks. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas said in a news conference in Ramallah with the visiting Slovenian President Danilo Türk that "the first thing we want to do is to sustain the ceasefire." Afterwards the PA will focus on reaching national unity between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and establishing a national reconciliation government that will work on rebuilding the Gaza Strip. Mr. Abbas also criticized Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal for suggesting forming a new organization that would replace the PLO: "He wants to destroy something that took 44 years to build and is recognized by more than 120 countries," said Mr. Abbas. (DPA)

PA President Abbas will pay a one-day visit to Turkey next week, an official from the Turkish President's office told AFP. The exact day of the visit had not yet been determined, the official said. Mr. Abbas and Turkish President Abdullah Gül will discuss "all aspects of the Palestinian problem, including efforts to secure unity among Palestinian groups", he said. (AFP)

US Middle East Envoy George Mitchell said, after touring an UNRWA warehouse in Jerusalem packed with aid destined for the Gaza Strip: "The United States remains committed to actively and aggressively seeking a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians as well as between Israel and its Arab neighbours ... It is important to consolidate a sustainable and durable ceasefire while addressing immediately humanitarian needs." He announced that President Obama "directed the use of another \$20.3 million to provide emergency food and medical assistance to the wounded and displaced in Gaza." (AFP)

The Palestinian Delegation-General in Switzerland said in a statement: "That's inappropriate and partial that an important panel was held [in Davos] ... to discuss the Gaza situation without the presence of the Palestinian side and only with the presence of one side, which is the President of Israel ...

We strongly believe that the voice of Palestinian victims should be heard in the panel." (AFP)

An international conference on rebuilding Gaza will be held in Cairo on 2 March instead of 28 February, as had been originally scheduled, an Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman said. (Kyodo)

WFP Regional Director for the Middle East Daly Belgasmi told correspondents that WFP's portion of the United Nations Gaza appeal was \$82.1 million. That was "really the minimum to be able to provide some assistance to the people in need". "The crossing points remain very, very

challenging", he continued, acknowledging that supply trucks were backed up on both sides of the Gaza Strip — the Egyptian, and particularly, the Israeli borders. "It's not perfect", he said, but the situation was improving. On political issues, including Hamas' role in the recovery effort, Mr. Belgasmi said that humanitarians tried not to get bogged down by politics. (*UN News Centre*)

"Farmers already struggling to make a profit before the outbreak of the [Gaza] conflict are now facing the possible irreversible loss of their livelihoods, as they are unable to replace or repair destroyed equipment, land and livestock", said Luigi Damiani, FAO Senior Project Coordinator in Jerusalem. "For many women whose husbands were killed or injured during the conflict it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide food for their families. (www.fao.org)

An Israeli human rights group, Yesh Din, said it planned to use a leaked classified Defence Ministry database to show that Government agencies and private companies building settlements in the West Bank widely ignored Israeli law, in many cases seizing land that belonged to Palestinians, and to help Palestinian landowners file lawsuits. The group said the Government had long been aware of the lawbreaking and had kept it secret. (*AP*)

"I will not keep Olmert's commitments to withdraw [from the West Bank] and I won't evacuate settlements. Those understandings are invalid and unimportant", Likud Party Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu said. (*Haaretz*)

"The Israeli Justice Ministry will provide the Spanish Government with the relevant material" for a "crimes against humanity" probe over a 2002 Israeli bombing in Gaza, the Israeli Foreign Ministry said in a statement. (*AFP*)

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A rocket was fired from Gaza into Israel. No injuries or damage were reported. (*AP*)

Egyptian security sources said the authorities had begun installing motion detection equipment and cameras in the past few days along the border with Gaza with the help of American, French and German expertise. Reuters quoted the sources as saying they hoped the equipment would detect any new tunnel-building activity in the area. (*BBC, Reuters*)

PA President Abbas had cancelled his expected trip to the Czech capital of Prague. The visit, which had yet to be rescheduled, was cancelled because of what he referred to as "pressing negotiations" on the conflict in the Middle East. (*AFP*)
