



Security Council SC/10230

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

Security Council
6520th Meeting (AM & PM)

STALEMATE IN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATIONS PERSISTS, 'BOLD AND DECISIVE' STEPS

NEEDED TO RESOLVE CONFLICT, UNITED NATIONS POLITICAL HEAD TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

Palestine Observer Welcomes Strong Support for State-Building Initiative; Israel Says Peace Cannot Be Imposed, Must Come through Return to Direct Negotiations

Unfortunately, the stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had persisted over the past month and, with the state-building efforts of the Palestinians progressing, "bold and decisive steps" were needed to resolve the decades-old conflict, a top United Nations political official told the Security Council today.

"Despite the Palestinian Authority's accomplishments, the institutional achievements of the state-building agenda are approaching their limits within the political and physical space currently available," said B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, ahead of a day-long open debate.

Both parties should be concerned that the political track was falling behind the significant progress made by the Palestinian Authority in its state-building agenda, he said. In the six areas where the international community was most engaged with the Palestinian Authority, governmental functions were now sufficient for a viable State, according to a recent United Nations report. In parallel, Israeli measures to facilitate movement had also supported economic activity and access to basic services.

However, he said, "far-reaching rather than incremental steps" were needed from Israel to lead to progress on the ground, by rolling back restrictions to match the Palestinian Authority's achievements. He noted also that the Palestinian achievements did not apply to certain areas, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, and he reiterated calls for the end of settlement activity in the West Bank, and for Palestinian unification.

On the diplomatic front, he stressed the importance of empowering the leadership of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, whose two-year state-building plan was due to be completed in September, and of bringing the parties back to the negotiating table. He said Quartet envoys continued to work with both Israelis and Palestinians, but it had been determined that more time was needed for consultations before the next Quartet meeting was scheduled.

At the same time, he pointed out that the reporting period had seen the highest levels of violence in Gaza and Israel in two years, with civilians killed and injured on both sides due to rockets fired into Israel, Israeli responses and other violent incidents. He emphasized the importance of ending the closure of Gaza in conformity with Council resolutions, but at the same time he reiterated, in the context of media reports of potential flotillas, the Quartet position that all goods should be brought into Gaza through established channels and that there was no need for unnecessary confrontations.

Following Mr. Pascoe's briefing, the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel made statements. The Palestinian Observer welcomed the strong international support for the state-building initiative, which was rapidly advancing to completion with the only obstacle to fully realizing its objectives being the Israeli occupation. He thanked those countries that had extended recognition to Palestine.

He said that the dramatic developments taking place in the Middle East were expressions of the aspirations for which the Palestinian people had been struggling for decades, but that had been denied them because of Israeli defiance of the international community, as it had continued its illegal practices, from settlement activity to deadly military incursions, since the last Council debate. He called on the Council to assume its obligations at this critical time and allow Palestine to take its rightful place among the community of nations with pride and dignity.

Israel's representative also noted historic changes taking place in the region, which he said held promise of spreading new freedom, but he cautioned that extremists sought to take advantage of the turbulence. He described attacks against civilians that had emanated out of Gaza during the reporting period, including a fatal attack by Hamas on a school bus, saying that represented the reality facing Israelis and was a consequence of arms smuggling, principally sponsored by Iran and Syria, which the Council had largely ignored.

He went on to draw the Council's attention to plans for another flotilla to challenge the blockade of Gaza, which, he maintained, was clearly designed for political provocation, as there were legitimate ways to get humanitarian goods into the Strip. He urged action to prevent it. Describing measures taken by Israel to improve the lives of Palestinians, he stressed that peace could not be imposed, but must come through a return to negotiations, and that Israel's commitment to a future Palestinian State must be met with a clear acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist, as a Jewish State for the Jewish people.

Following those statements, over 40 speakers took the floor to urge a return to negotiations that would tackle the tough core issues and allow the establishment of a Palestinian State as state-building efforts reached completion. Many called for greater international momentum towards that end, including more action from the Quartet. Most speakers called on Israel to halt settlement activity, while many also called for an end to rocket attacks and other violence directed against Israelis.

While calling for a further increase in goods allowed into Gaza, and in many cases an end to the blockade, many also urged humanitarian groups to avoid the provocation that another flotilla could cause. Turkey's representative, however, said that the humanitarian convoys could not be simply explained away as unilateral provocations; the root cause was the pattern of Israeli policies towards Gaza.

Many speakers saw the current period as critical, as the end of the Palestinian Authority's two-year state-building period coincided with international statements that had projected a negotiated settlement by September. "The goal of Palestinian statehood by September 2011 is well within our grasp; letting it founder on the rocks of cynicism, inaction or political expediency will have serious consequences for peace and stability," Pakistan's representative said, maintaining that failure to meet the 1999 "deadline" in the Oslo Accords had triggered the second intifada.

Also speaking today were the representatives of the United States, Lebanon, United Kingdom, Portugal, China, Nigeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Brazil, South Africa, Russian Federation, India, Gabon, Colombia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia (on behalf of the Arab Group), Norway, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Japan, Cuba, Malaysia, Tajikistan (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Syria, Morocco, Uganda, Bangladesh, United Republic of Tanzania, Australia, Namibia, Mexico, Venezuela, Tunisia, Qatar, Maldives and Iran.

The Acting Head of the European Union Delegation and the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People also made statements.

The meeting was opened at 10:10 a.m., suspended at 1 p.m., resumed at 3:31 p.m. and closed at 6:20 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met today for a briefing and an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said he regretted to report that the stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had persisted in past months, which was of particular concern given the institutional achievements of the Palestinian Authority and the evolving regional situation. "Bold and decisive steps are needed to resolve this decades-long conflict, with vision, leadership and responsibility from all concerned."

Meanwhile, Quartet envoys continued to work with both sides, but it had been determined that more time was needed for consultations before the next Quartet meeting was scheduled. In the six areas where the international community was most engaged with the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations, in its recent report, determined that governmental functions were now sufficient for a viable state. Those areas included governance, rule of law and human rights, livelihood and productive sectors, education and culture, health, social protection and infrastructure and water. In parallel, Israeli measures to facilitate movement had also supported economic activity and access to basic services.

Noting that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee Chair had also concluded that the Palestinian Authority was above the threshold for a functioning state in key sectors, he cautioned that the achievements were to date limited to certain areas, and did not apply yet to East Jerusalem, much of Area C and Gaza.

He said that the reporting period had seen the highest levels of violence in Gaza and Israel since Operation Cast Lead more than two years ago, with civilians killed and injured on both sides due to rockets fired into Israel and Israeli retaliation. Efforts to de-escalate had resulted in an uneasy calm restored on 10 April, which had been largely respected despite the firing of two Grad rockets towards Ashdod. Overall, 111 mortar shells and 155 rockets had been fired into Israel, while Israel had conducted 6 incursions and 57 air strikes. One Israeli child had been killed in an attack on a school bus using an anti-tank missile, while 19 Palestinian militants and 15 civilians had been killed in military actions.

He expressed alarm at actions of Hamas to escalate violence and was also deeply concerned at civilian casualties on both sides, reiterating that all parties must fully respect international humanitarian law. He called on the parties to uphold and solidify the prevailing fragile calm, in order to mitigate the humanitarian harm, illustrated by the closing for security reasons of the Kerem Shalom crossing point from 5 to 12 April. The weekly average of truckloads entering the Strip during the period had been 909, compared to 566 in June 2010 before the announcement of the revised Israeli policy, but still far below pre-closure levels. Six additional United Nations school and road projects had been approved, but he urged early approval of two United Nations housing projects and expressed hope that coordination procedures to facilitate entry of approved material would be further streamlined.

He emphasized the importance of ending the closure of Gaza in conformity with Council resolutions, but at the same time he reiterated, in the context of media reports of potential flotillas, the Quartet position that all goods should be brought into Gaza through established channels and that there was no need for unnecessary confrontations. He also deplored the murder of the activist Vittorio Arrigoni in Gaza, allegedly by a Salafist group, and regretted that Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit was still in captivity. He added that the human rights of the several thousand Palestinians in Israeli prisons must be respected and he continued to underscore the importance of releases to the Palestinian Authority.

He also expressed concern that the Palestinian Authority was not able to extend its state-building work to Gaza, underscoring the need for unity under the Authority's framework. In the meantime, he noted, preparations for municipal elections on 9 July continued in the West Bank, while Hamas had yet to authorize electoral work in Gaza. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission had opened voter lists for exhibition and challenges, including 40,000 newly registered voters.

He expressed concern, as well, at ongoing Israeli settlement activity and demolition of Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, calling on Israel to respect international humanitarian law. He said that Palestinian security forces continued to work to maintain law and order in the West Bank, with ongoing investigation into the 4 April murder of actor and director Juliano Mer-Khamis, a symbol of coexistence and peace. Following the Itamar murder on 11 March, two suspects from the Palestinian village of Awarta had recently been arrested, along with others held as alleged accomplices, while the 6,500 inhabitants of the village had been placed under curfews, with over 400 men and 80 women reportedly interrogated and many homes searched.

During the reporting period, he said, Israeli forces had conducted 321 search operations in the West Bank, during which 38 Palestinians had been injured and 228 arrested. Ten Palestinians had been injured by settlers and injuries and arrests had also resulted from demonstrations against the barrier. He welcomed the decision by the Israel Defense Forces to systematically investigate all Palestinian casualties in the West Bank caused by Israeli fire amongst individuals not engaged in hostilities, and looked forward to its implementation.

Turning to Lebanon, he noted that a new Government had not yet been formed, and security incidents had occurred, including a church bombing and kidnapping of foreign nationals. Noting that the first delivery of homes in the reconstructed Nahr el-Bared camp had taken place two days ago, he called for further contributions. The overall situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had remained "generally quiet and stable", while Israeli air violations continued almost daily.

In conclusion, he stressed the importance of empowering the leadership of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and of bringing the parties back to the table. "Despite the Palestinian Authority's accomplishments, the institutional achievements of the state-building agenda are approaching their limits within the political and physical space currently available. Far-reaching rather than incremental steps should be taken by Israel to lead to progress on the ground, by rolling back measures of occupation to match the Palestinian Authority's achievements." The resumption of negotiations on all final-status issues was urgent, and the international community must play its part, he said, pledging to continue to engage the Quartet partners and continue to work for a comprehensive resolution.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said the dramatic developments taking place in the Middle East were expressions of the aspirations for which the Palestinian people had been struggling for decades, but that, regrettably, the appeals to this Council to resolve the prolonged conflict by applying to Israel the same legal and moral yardstick applied to all other issues remained unheeded, and Israel continued to defy the international community with "total impunity". The result was continued conflict, loss of life and turmoil, to the detriment of Palestinians and Israelis and global peace and security.

Thus, he said, he returned to the Council with an appeal to it to uphold its responsibilities, noting that, in a series of letters sent to the President of the Council in the period since the last open debate, he had conveyed in detail the gravity of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, maintaining that Israel's intransigence and the lack of political will to confront it had kept the political process frozen and allowed for continuation of Israeli violations. While the international community decried the killing of civilians, invoking the responsibility to protect and acting for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in the Gaza Strip there was once again the inflammation of the cycle of violence and an escalation of Israeli military attacks, killing and wounding more civilians.

In that light, he reiterated his call for protection of the Palestinian civilian population and his call for the immediate lifting of the Israeli blockade. The "easing of restrictions" was insufficient. He also reiterated the call for accountability for what he called all the crimes perpetrated by Israel against civilians, including its military aggression against the Gaza strip. In addition, he reaffirmed the condemnation by the Palestinian people and their leadership of the killing of Italian peace activist Vittorio Arrigoni by extremists.

He said that his letters detailed Israel's persistence with its illegal settlement campaign, continuing to illegally confiscate Palestinian land, expand settlements unit by unit, build the wall, demolish homes and strip Palestinians of their residency rights, particularly around East Jerusalem. Palestinians peacefully protesting what he called "this rabid Israeli colonization of their land" continued to be injured, detained and vilified, along with Israeli and international activists. In recent weeks, Israel had also escalated military raids in Palestinian towns and villages. Most disturbingly, nearly the entire village of Awarta had been detained in connection with the killing of a settler family, in what he called an illustration of "the sheer lack of respect for human rights and due process of law" on the part of Israel.

"The time for decisive action is now," he said, warning that delay meant more bloodshed or the possible collapse of two-state prospects. Political will must be found to act collectively on the basis of relevant resolutions and the well-known terms of reference of the peace process. He called on the Council and Quartet members to uphold their commitments, saying that Israeli defiance must no longer be rewarded and that Israel must be called on to demonstrate its commitment to peace with actions, not just empty words, in ceasing its settlement activities and its actions aimed at altering the Arab character of the territories, and respecting Christian and Muslim holy sites. Respect for law and responsible actions were imperative for reviving the negotiations on all final status issues.

Despite serious disappointments, the Palestinian people had not lost hope and their leadership remained committed to peace through a just settlement, he said, adding that efforts aimed at Palestinian unity had been renewed. The leadership also continued to work non-stop to implement the state-building plan launched nearly two years ago by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, which was rapidly advancing to completion by August 2011, with the only obstacle to fully realizing its objectives, he maintained, being the ongoing Israeli occupation. Welcoming the many assessments of Palestinian readiness for independence, he reiterated gratitude for the strong international support of the state-building initiative. He also thanked all States that had extended recognition to Palestine and urged countries that had not yet done so to do it the earliest possible time. He finally reaffirmed Palestinian determination to end the occupation and establish an independent State by the target date of September 2011, set by the Quartet pronounced by the United States President and endorsed by the General Assembly. Palestinians were committed to the path of peace, and he called on the international community to redouble its efforts at "a critical time" to uphold United Nations principles in bringing an end to the conflict and allowing Palestine to take its rightful place among the community of nations with pride and dignity.

MERON REUBEN (Israel) said today's debate was taking place as historic changes were under way in the Middle East, and with such changes, which held the promise of spreading new freedom and prosperity in the region, came many challenges. Extremists and terrorists continued to pursue the same destructive agendas, "seeking to take advantage of the turbulence created by the transformations that are now occurring". Recent events in the Gaza Strip provided another clear example of the destabilizing threat posed by those terrorists and their patrons, bringing to light, once again, the depth of their callousness in carrying out violent attacks that deliberately targeted innocent civilians.

He said that since the beginning of March, Hamas and other terrorist groups had launched some 92 rockets and 141 mortars at civilians throughout southern Israel, as part of what was the most serious escalation of projectile fire emanating from Gaza in more than two years. "There is no question about the targets of these attacks," he said, emphasizing that Hamas had launched rocket after rocket at major Israeli centres that were home to hundreds of thousands of people; they had struck houses and buses, factories and farms, synagogues and schools.

Just two weeks ago, Hamas had used an anti-tank missile that it had smuggled into Gaza to strike and completely destroy a school bus travelling in southern Israel. He said that that act of terrorism had injured the bus driver and killed a 16-year-old on board. "As residents of New York, we see the yellow buses that bring children to school. Some in this room entrust these buses to transport their children home," he said, and asked Council members: "Can you imagine how you would feel if an anti-tank missile was deliberately fired at such a bus in Manhattan or Brooklyn?" That was the reality facing many Israelis today.

That was also the reality facing the Israeli Government as it sought to pursue the terrorists that had carried out those horrific attacks. He was continually astonished that some in the international community expressed the belief that the de facto terrorist group now in control of Gaza could conduct an independent, credible and impartial investigation into the crimes it committed on a daily basis. "It is naïve at best to put such faith in this terrorist group, which time and again shows only disdain for the universal human values on which such an investigation would be based," he said.

He noted that the attack with the anti-tank missile was a reminder of the dangerous consequences of the continued smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip. Iran and Syria remained the primary sponsors of that illegal activity, which was carried out by land and at sea. He recalled one recent attempt by those countries to smuggle weapons into Gaza, when last month some 40 tons of weaponry were confiscated on board a cargo ship concealed among a cargo of lentils and cotton,

adding that, unfortunately, neither the Security Council nor the wider international community paid enough attention to such matters, even though it was a critical aspect of resolution 1860 (2009). Indeed, despite frequent discussions held in the Council on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, there had never been a serious debate in that forum about the clear threat that such arms smuggling posed to the security of Israel and the stability of the wider region. He urged the Council to devote more attention to the matter.

He went on to draw the Council's attention to the intention of several civil society groups and non-governmental organizations to next month launch a flotilla of some 15 ships to challenge the Israeli naval blockade of Gaza. It was widely known that there were established mechanisms through which humanitarian goods could be delivered to Gaza through Israel. Those channels were being used daily by United Nations agencies and other international actors. "My country remains ready to process such goods at the Port of Ashdod and transfer them to the Gaza Strip after security inspection," he said, adding that many international leaders had spoken out against such flotillas and the one planned for May was clearly designed for political provocation and not to advance any humanitarian objectives.

"Israel is not interested in any confrontation. However, we are firmly determined to enforce our naval blockade of Gaza, which is solely intended to prevent the illicit traffic in arms and ammunition to the Gaza Strip," he said, also calling on the United Nations and the wider international community to "speak with a clear and resolute voice" against such new provocations and take the necessary measures to prevent them from occurring.

As for the situation on the ground, he said Israel continue to implement significant measures to improve life for Palestinians. In the West Bank, his Government was working closely with the Palestinian Authority to promote economic growth and institution-building. Since the beginning of 2010, it had removed more than two thirds of the roadblocks in the West Bank and expanded its professional dialogue with the Palestinian Authority in a variety of areas. Despite the fact that Palestinian terrorists continued to launch attacks at Israeli towns from the Gaza Strip, Israel had also taken significant steps to improve life for that area's residents.

He went on to note that an average of 159 truckloads of supplies were delivered to Gaza daily during the second half of 2010, which was nearly double the number that had been delivered during the first half of the year. Israel had also established a new joint coordination and supervision mechanism to move forward international humanitarian projects in the Gaza Strip overseen by third parties such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). As of the beginning of 2011, Israel had approved 121 such projects in Gaza in a wide range of fields.

"As I have done in this Council before, I reiterate Israel's call to the Palestinians to rejoin us in direct negotiations without delay. For it is clear that peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations," he said, stressing that such peace could not be imposed from outside and that any lasting agreement must be built on the core principles of mutual recognition and security. He urged all members of the Council to consider that in just the past two months, Israel had witnessed hundreds of projectiles fired at it; the brutal murder of five members of the same family; and the explosion of a bomb at a bus stop in the centre of Jerusalem that had killed a woman from the United Kingdom and injured some 50 others.

Security was not the only obstacle to peace, he continued, stressing that lasting peace would require building a culture of mutual understanding and tolerance, based on the clear recognition of both peoples' right to exist. "Israel's commitment to a future Palestinian State must be met with an equal acknowledgement that Israel is a Jewish State for the Jewish people," he said, adding that the Palestinian leadership must be unambiguous "in its recognition of my nation's right to exist and take real steps to prepare its population to live side by side with Israelis". Finally, he noted that Israel remained deeply concerned about the fate of Gilad Shalit, who had been deprived of his most basic human rights for nearly five years. The international community must do all in its power — and more than it had done thus far — to bring about his release.

SUSAN RICE (United States) said her Government remained deeply committed to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, agreed to by the parties. The United States continued to work with the two sides, other members of the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process and partners in the region to pursue negotiations towards a comprehensive peace that would ensure all legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and ensure that Israel lived in safety and security with all of its neighbours.

On the issue of settlements, she said that, "like every United States delegation for decades", President Barack Obama's Administration did not accept the legitimacy of settlements and had called for an end to their construction. The fate of existing settlements must be dealt with by the parties along with other permanent status issues. Meanwhile, the United States continued to press within the contact group on the Middle East for political negotiations that would result in a future Palestinian State. Palestinians deserved the freedom to chart their own destiny and Israelis deserved to live in safety in their own country, she said.

She noted that her delegation was deeply disturbed by use of advanced weaponry in recent Hamas-led attacks against southern Israel. "We must work together to stop Hamas and other violent extremists from launching such attacks and bringing increased misery to the residents of Gaza," she said, stressing that those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. She also urged the release of Gilad Shalit. At the same time, her Government was concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, even as supplies had increased and construction had continued. Greater efforts must be made to ensure the increased flow of commercial goods and supplies, while taking measures to ensure they did not fall into the wrong hands.

She condemned the recent attempt by Iran to ship weapons to the region, saying it was a clear demonstration of that country's attempt to flout the Council's will and subvert relevant resolutions. She urged all Member States to make clear to Iran the consequences to regional security of its reckless behaviour. The United States was also concerned by reports that groups were organizing another flotilla to send to the Gaza Strip in May. She stressed that Israel had mechanisms for delivery of humanitarian goods and all groups must avoid provocative actions. Using existing mechanisms would ensure Palestinian humanitarian needs were met and Israeli security was observed.

She said that the Goldstone Report "is back in the news". That report had called for credible local investigations and follow-up of the Gaza conflict of late 2008 early 2009. Israel had such credible domestic institutions and was doing so. Justice Goldstone had found that Israel had not intentionally targeted civilians and that Hamas had done nothing to investigate its own actions during the conflict. She urged Hamas to carry out such investigations.

On Lebanon, she urged that the country's constitutional process be followed as it sought to set up its next government. The Council must remain firm in support of the country's sovereignty and full implementation of all resolutions to that end. She added that the United States supported the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and reiterated its call on all parties to refrain from interfering in that panel's work. The United States was "deeply concerned" by continuing violence and arrests in Syria, where that Government's "brutal crackdown" had led to numerous injuries and deaths, according to credible reports from human rights groups. She urged the Syrian Government to allow foreign media and human rights organizations to verify the situation on the ground. She also urged the Syrian Government to respect the human rights of its people.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said it was clear that the prevailing sentiment in the Arab world was one of deep frustration after the Security Council's failure earlier this year to express itself on the critical issue of Israeli settlements, even as the resolution put forward by his delegation had been sponsored by an unprecedented number of States. That was a critical issue not only because such settlements were illegal, but because their continued construction undermined the vision of a two-State solution and sowed the seeds of hatred that only yielded more violence. It was the Council's duty to compel Israel to abide by its responsibilities under international law to protect the civilians of Gaza and throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

"What we witness today is how the Israeli Government continues to choose expanding settlements over peace. In doing so, it is also choosing to block the American-led peace effort rather than help them succeed," he continued, stressing that settlement construction was certainly not a "trivial issue" as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had recently claimed. Indeed, such construction had led to evictions and home demolitions, residency revocation and land confiscation. The settlement building campaign "is eating up Palestinian land and aiming to change the identity and legal status of East Jerusalem", he said.

Continuing, he said that his delegation was "extremely concerned and disappointed" by the Quartet's postponement of its next meeting. It, nevertheless, continued to support the Quartet and believed it should set a clear timetable through the end of August for negotiations on all final status issues. It should also oversee the broader push towards the goals of a free and independent Palestinian state with full membership in the United Nations by September. Proposed interim approaches, such as a provisional arrangement that was short of a two-State solution, were completely unacceptable, he emphasized.

Further on the issue of Palestinian statehood, he recalled the report of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee Meeting in Brussels on 13 April, which concluded that the Palestinian Authority had accelerated progress in improving its governmental functions in key areas, including the rule of law and human rights, social protection, and infrastructure and water. It had also confirmed that governmental functions were now sufficient for the functioning Government of a State. However, that report added that, despite progress, a primary constraint was the persistence of occupation and unresolved issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

He said a Security Council trip to the Middle East would not only assert that body's role in the peace process and its responsibility towards international peace and security; it would also offer all Council members the opportunity to assess first-hand the Government functions being carried out by Palestinian institutions. While the Arab world was witnessing unprecedented momentum for change, "let us keep in mind that the greatest source of frustration in our region remains the non-solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the historic injustice that has befallen the Palestinian people", he said. A just peace for the region also required that Israel withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, and from the remaining occupied parts of southern Lebanon.

PHILIP PARHAM (United Kingdom) said events in the region showed that people's aspirations to freedom could not be crushed, and he condemned the violent repression of protests. Palestinians, too, must realize their goal of a viable State; it was crucial for urgent progress to be made in the peace process and for a State to be born at the end of the state-building process, based on the two-State parameters that were well known to all. The leaders of both parties had to do more to bridge the gulf between them and reduce violence and tensions.

The surge in rocket attacks from Gaza and other attacks against Israelis must end, but Israel must take more care to avoid civilian casualties in its response. He also condemned Israel's decision to approve more settlement activities, saying they must stop. Israel must also speed up approvals and importation of materials into Gaza. The leadership of both sides must rise above domestic concerns to meet the aspirations of their peoples.

JOSÉ FILIPE MORAES CABRAL (Portugal) stressed the importance of dialogue and reform in all movements for change in the Middle East. He condemned violence against demonstrators and called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to protect children, in particular. Inclusive dialogue would allow change to happen in a sustainable way. He said decisive action and political will was needed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He condemned attacks against Israeli civilians and expressed concern over violence between settlers and Palestinians, as well as violence within Gaza and the firing of rockets into southern Israel. He urged Israel to exercise maximum restraint in its response and avoid civilian casualties and called for the release of Gilad Shalit.

He welcomed the easing of the closure of Gaza, but called for restrictions to be lifted further, urging full implementation of related resolutions and appealing to Israel to cease all settlement activity in the West Bank and other actions against Palestinian residents there. He welcomed further work for Palestinian unity and said it was through building trust between Israelis and Palestinians, resulting in direct negotiations, that peace would be achieved. He encouraged the active involvement of the Quartet in that effort, with a clear calendar to move forward the agenda. He called on the parties to resume negotiations with the utmost urgency, so that they would coincide with the state-building agenda. State-building measures were no substitute for those negotiations, he stressed.

LI BAODONG (China) said his delegation had always advocated for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be settled through negotiations and along the lines of the Road Map and the principles of "land for peace". At present, the direct talks between the sides were at a standstill. China did not support continued settlement construction, which further hurt efforts to re-launch the talks and undercut confidence-building measures. China was concerned by escalating tensions in the Gaza Strip and urged all parties to abide by the recent ceasefire and to exercise maximum restraint towards restoring calm.

Without progress on such matters, the entire process would suffer setbacks, he continued. As that was the case, he said, the wider international community must work harder to better coordinate its activities and its advocacy for a negotiated settlement. China hoped that the Quartet would carry out its proper role and find a solution to break the impasse. China also supported a greater role for the Security Council in the process. He expressed his delegation's ongoing support for parallel progress and efforts on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the process. Finally, he said China would continue to support the exercise of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their State-building efforts.

KIO SOLOMON AMEYEOFORI (Nigeria) said the Middle East peace process seemed to follow the frustrating, but somewhat predictable, path of stretches of progress followed by seemingly intractable stalemates. As such, it was up to all concerned parties to remove all impediments to the resumption of the currently stalled direct negotiations. While it was regrettable that the Quartet's next meeting had been postponed, he welcomed the prospect of fresh proposals that would be presented by the United States, as well as Israel. At the same time, Nigeria believed that the existing Road Map peace plan was a firm basis for pursuing a comprehensive settlement to the conflict.

He encouraged Israel to freeze all settlement-related activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. At the same time, militant attacks launched from inside Gaza were unhelpful and should cease. The Palestinian leadership should continue with its efforts to heal divisions among Palestinian factions, as "it is clear that neither militancy nor military might will lead to a solution". While welcoming the recent easing of entry points into Gaza, he said that Israel must provide unhindered access of all humanitarian goods and construction supplies. In turn, the people of Gaza must use approved channels for the delivery of such goods. The fragile security situation in North Africa and parts of the Middle East provided a chance for all stakeholders to pursue peace. In that light, he welcomed the proposal by the Russian Federation for a Council visit to the region, at an appropriate time.

MIRSADA ČOLAKOMĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said her country continued to be preoccupied with the absence of any progress in the Middle East peace process, and feared that the prolonged impasse was making a necessary positive breakthrough more difficult. Its concerns were additionally burdened with reports of the latest escalation of violence, which he condemned in the strongest possible terms. It was clear that "urgent, bold and responsible moves" were needed in order to end the corrosion of the peace process. In that respect, she reminded the Council that it was also the responsibility of the Quartet, the Arab League and the Security Council itself, among other international and regional factors, to help the parties to transform the "deplorable state of affairs" into a politically sustainable negotiating process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was "deeply disappointed" by the approval of 942 new housing units in the Israeli settlement of Gilo in East Jerusalem and upcoming plans for settlements on the Mount Scopus slopes. Reiterating that such settlement activities were illegal under international law, she called upon Israel to respond positively to appeals by the international community to end them. Additionally, his country did not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem and underlined that the status of that city was a permanent status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties. With regard to diplomatic efforts, he urged that both Israelis and Palestinians immediately begin the unconditional implementation of their obligations stipulated by the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid Principles, including land for peace, the Road Map and other relevant agreements.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France), associating himself with the statement to be made by the delegation of the European Union, confirmed his country's support for democratic reforms and human rights in the context of the evolving situation in the wider region. He called for freedom of speech and assembly in Syria and pledged his country's continued aid to protect civilians in Libya. The aspirations of the Palestinian people were as legitimate as those of all others in the region, he said. Direct negotiations must, therefore, be resumed leading to the resolution of final-status issues. He deplored the postponement of the Quartet meeting, in that context.

He opposed the imposition of unilateral strategies or alteration of the facts on the ground and called on Israel to abandon further settlement activity, in that light. He welcomed initiatives to overcome the crisis of confidence between the parties and stressed that interim solutions were no longer helpful, although he approved of measures to improve the situation on the ground. He condemned the escalation of violence, including the targeting of a school bus, and called for the lifting of the Gaza blockade, as well as for imports to come through existing channels. He supported efforts to bring about Palestinian unity. In Lebanon, he urged respect for all international obligations, including those related to the Tribunal. In conclusion, he called on the international community to end the diplomatic stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so that Palestinian state-building efforts would result in their desired outcome.

PETER WITTIG (Germany) expressed serious concern that every day that passed without re-establishment of a credible political progress was a "lost day" and meant increased risks and dwindling chances in the Middle East Peace process, a situation the international community must not allow to continue. Stressing that there was no alternative to the two-State solution, he said Germany wanted to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. Making decisive progress by September was possible and the window of opportunity was still open. Negotiations were the only viable way to create such a State and both the international community and the parties needed to contribute to getting substantive talks under way.

He said the international community could do so by setting a framework of clear parameters that he believed to be a prerequisite for successful negotiations. He called on the Quartet to work in that direction and pointed out that strong United States leadership, in that regard, was needed. The parties, at the same time, needed to commit unequivocally to returning to meaningful direct negotiations on that basis as soon as possible and without setting additional conditions. In that regard, he called on President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu to show flexibility in their efforts to re-establish mutual trust and confidence. His country opposed any unilateral action that impacted on final-status issues. Further, Israel's settlement activity must cease immediately. On Gaza, he condemned the continued firing of rockets and mortars on Israel's territory, in particular the targeting of a school bus with an anti-tank missile. That type of action was deeply cynical and utterly unacceptable. He also expressed Germany's serious concern about a possible "second Gaza flotilla", noting that the planned activities carried considerable potential for escalation and called on the organizations involved to find other ways to deliver aid.

Despite concerns, he said, there had also been some positive news. For example, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee had acknowledged the Palestinian Authority's state-building efforts, saying it was above the threshold for a functioning State in key sectors. Germany had made a major political and financial investment in Palestinian state-building, in order to achieve the two-State solution and sustainable peace for both parties. "Failure to move forward rapidly will endanger the very significant achievements in state-building and in the process as a whole," he said. Determined action was required now. The status quo was not sustainable.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VIOTTI (Brazil), expressing sorrow for the recent loss of innocent life in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, said her delegation condemned those "heinous acts" in the strongest terms. Brazil was deeply disappointed that, despite broad consensus on the urgency of concrete decisions in the region, the Quartet had again postponed its meeting. That lack of movement created a void in which radicals thrived, she warned. For that reason, Brazil continued to advocate that the Council should play a greater role in support of the peace process. It also supported the proposal for a Security Council mission to the region, she added.

Settlement activity in the West Bank and Jerusalem was illegal and an obstacle to peace, and had become the single most serious threat to the two-State solution, she continued. Despite that and other challenges, Brazil commended the Palestinian Authority on the "remarkable achievements" made in such areas as the provision of health care, among others, in a manner consistent with the goal of establishing the functioning institutions of the future Palestinian State. Such achievements should be reinforced with concrete steps on the ground, as well as with progress in the peace talks. On a broader scale, the historical events and changes taking place in the Middle East were a natural expression of legitimate aspirations for progress and social justice. Brazil supported those aspirations, she said, and that, as a matter of coherence, the international community could not tolerate violence against unarmed civilians, regardless of where it was committed. Brazil called on leaders facing peaceful demonstrations to uphold basic freedoms and engage in meaningful dialogue towards needed reforms. With regard to the situation in Lebanon, Brazil looked forward to the formation of a new Government, and trusted that it would respect Lebanon's international obligations, as well as undertake the necessary task to build on its recent economic growth.

ZAHEER LAHER (South Africa) said that, as the Council met today, it could not ignore the popular uprisings throughout the Arab world and in the Middle East. Indeed, such protests had toppled several longstanding regimes. While the particulars of each incident might differ, what was clear was that the status quo, where the rights of a people had gone unfulfilled for decades, was unsustainable. As such, both Israeli and Palestinian people deserved a comprehensive solution to their long-standing conflict, so that both sides could live in security, safety and peace.

He stressed that Israel's ongoing settlement construction seriously hampered efforts to restart direct negotiations and he urged that country to cease such construction and abide by its obligations under international law. At the same time, Palestinian unity was essential for moving the peace process forward. South Africa welcomed efforts to that end and supported the announcement by the Palestinian Authority to hold elections later in the year. He went on to express concern about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and called on Israel to remove all restrictions in that area, including on the entry of humanitarian supplies, as well as on trade and the movement of people. He also called urgently for Israel to allow construction materials into the area, so that schools destroyed in the

2008-2009 crisis could be rebuilt and businesses could be reopened. Such actions would help the people of Gaza regain their dignity and improve their livelihoods.

ALEXANDER A. PANKIN (Russian Federation) said that with the current conditions in the region, the task of achieving Arab-Israeli settlement had become increasingly pressing. The situation demanded the attention and unstinting efforts of concerned States. Yet, unfortunately, instead of stepping up such international engagement, "we have witnessed another postponement by the Quartet", despite all the preparatory work that had gone into the holding of the meeting that had been slated to take place last week. Now, as never before, Palestinians and Israelis needed international support. Indeed, he said, actions that undercut confidence-building measures continued to be committed, including Israel's ongoing settlement construction and the unprecedented escalation of violence in Gaza.

The Russian Federation continued to call for the easing of all restrictions on the movement of goods and services into Gaza. At the same time, it called on Hamas to do more to end violent activities there. Intra-Palestinian cooperation was vital to the success of the overall peace process. He reiterated his delegations call for a Security Council visit to the region "to draw the parties back to the negotiations table". Such a visit would not seek to denounce any party, but to express support for a full, fair and negotiated settlement. On Syria, he urged efforts on the part of that country's Government to address the ongoing unrest there, and added that the Russian Federation deemed external interference unacceptable. He also hoped for rapid conclusion of efforts to form a new Government in Lebanon that included participation of all parties, and urged Lebanon and Israel to work to fulfil their joint obligations under resolution 1701 (2006).

MANJEEV SINGH PURI (India) said the situation in the Middle East continued to be grim, with no sign of movement in peace talks, and he attributed that lack of movement in even holding talks as a contributing factor to the increased violence there. Stressing the importance of not losing the hopes that had been raised for a Palestinian State during the last two years, he identified lack of mutual trust between the parties to the conflict as the main hindrance to the resumption of peace talks. Statements on the existence of Israel from different sections of Palestinian society only served to aggravate that lack of mutual trust, and the perception that those statements and continuing rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israel increased the vulnerability of Israel needed to be seen in that context.

While he commended achievements in the territories administered by the Palestinian Authority, he believed it was just as important to acknowledge the deplorable situation in Gaza, where the Israeli blockade adversely affected the population, particularly their access to essential commodities. In that regard,

Gaza's access to essential commodities was imperative, as it was also driving militant elements to vent their frustration through violence. India agreed with the internationally held sentiment that the freezing of settlement activity in the Palestinian territories could enable the peace talks to resume. Another major issue was the lack of unity among Palestinian factions. He hoped recent initiatives aimed at promoting Palestinian unity would result in meaningful rapprochement among the various Palestinian groups. Equally important were issues of Arab lands still under Israeli occupation, and progress in the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, all of which were core to achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. Agreement had to be reached between the parties through dual negotiations for it to be enduring, and to that end, he hoped the parties would restart talks without delay.

MICHEL RÉGIS ONANGANDIAYE (Gabon) said that, given the dramatic developments in the region, new strategies must be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to bring about a sustainable peace. He expressed concern over the political stalemate in the conflict. He called for a lifting of the Gaza blockade and the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) in its entirety. At the same time, he called on humanitarian organizations to use existing channels for bringing goods into Gaza and to avoid provocation.

Noting positive developments in Palestinian state-building, he praised international support for that goal. He called on the Quartet to meet as soon as possible, to move the parties to conclude negotiations by the deadline of September and allow the Palestinian people to take control of their own destiny. Turning to Lebanon, he said the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) was necessary.

Council President NESTOR OSORIO (Colombia), speaking in his national capacity, reiterated that the search for a peaceful settlement required that all the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute be resolved, including the strengthening of Palestinian institutions and ensuring Israel's security, the definition of borders and the question of settlements. He welcomed the recent statement by the Quartet that, if the Palestinian Authority continued its institution-building process, it would be in a position to establish a State in the near future. He regretted that ongoing tensions continued to cause civilian casualties, particularly children, and invited the parties to exercise restraint and to do their utmost to see that those responsible for "acts of destabilization" were brought to justice.

"We also urge all parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and take all necessary measures to protect civilians, especially children, from direct and indirect violence," he said, calling on all parties to restart direct talks on the basis of mutual respect and recognition of the identity and rights of all people. Urging a comprehensive solution to the unstable situation in the wider region, he called for an end to the use of terrorism and the threat or use of force. "We must seize the momentum of renewal and the winds of change blowing in the region to provide an effective and irreversible solution to the persistent situation," he said.

ZEID RA'AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan) said the stalemate around direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations undermined "heartfelt international efforts" aimed at ensuring progress towards a comprehensive solution. As such, Israel must end settlement construction and pursue a path towards a two-State solution. The Palestinian Authority was extending every effort to build State institutions and carry out its obligations under the Road Map.

At the same time, Israel was not evincing such will. Israel's obstinate behaviour was a direct challenge to calls from Washington, D.C., and the will of the wider international community. While calling on Israel to change its behaviour and show that it was willing to work earnestly towards a solution, he encouraged the Security Council and all Member States to step up their engagement. Every State must work harder to ensure a negotiated outcome as soon as possible, because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not a regional issue, but an international one.

OMAR ALI SALEH AL OYAYDI (Saudi Arabia), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said the Arab-Israeli conflict overwhelmed all other issues in the Middle East and was worsened by the absence of good intentions on the part of the Israeli Government. Instead of seriously being engaged in the peace process, it continued to confiscate more Palestinian territories and build illegal settlements, in addition to killing Palestinians and unlawfully evicting them from their lands. Israeli settlement activities detrimentally affected the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian State that could survive in the future, and made it difficult for any Palestinian Government to convince its people that peace was achievable.

While Arab States had clearly affirmed their commitment to achieving a just and comprehensive peace through the Arab Peace Initiative and based on international law, there had been no reciprocal response from Israel, he said. Hence, there was an urgent need to revive the peace process and for Israel to deal truthfully and seriously with that process, including the immediate freeze on building and to begin the dismantling of those settlements, instead of expanding them. The Arab Group demanded that the United Nations, especially the Security Council, and the Quartet assume their responsibilities, and stop what he called the vicious settlement activities and the continuing aggression against the unarmed Palestinian people in Gaza.

The Group further called for an end to the Israeli "siege", and for the opening of the crossings to and from Gaza, as well as activation of the crossings agreement, he said. The Arab Group asked the international community to implement all relevant United Nations resolutions, especially those of the Council, and demanded Israeli forces withdraw from all Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. He added that the frozen peace process "increases the lure and encourages the eagerness of extremist tendencies, despair and frustration which have reached a dangerous stage". Urgent attention must be paid to the Arab and Islamic public perception that the international community lacked seriousness and credibility and the perception of double standards in the manner it handled the conflict.

TINE MORCH SMITH (Norway) said assessments showed that a functioning Palestinian State structure now existed, but that the state-building agenda was rapidly approaching its limits in terms of what could be achieved within the political and physical space available to the Palestinian Authority. Israel needed to take further steps to dismantle restrictions and measures in Area C, allowing access to land and water in those areas and a coherent trade strategy.

The state-building and political negotiating tracks were interdependent, she stressed, with resumption of negotiations needed urgently, because time was running out. Only a few months remained until the internationally recognized deadline for negotiating a framework agreement on permanent status and a subsequent comprehensive peace treaty. Now was the time for both parties to come back to the negotiating table and show, through decisive action, that the conflict could be ended and that Palestinians could have their own independent, democratic and viable State.

MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that, at this critical juncture, the international community must renew its resolve to uphold its commitment to a two-State solution, overcoming the defiance of Israel in its pursuit of illegal settlement activities and other practices. The Security Council should reject and condemn such unlawful acts and be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its legal obligations. The Movement regretted the fact that the draft resolution calling for their immediate cessation had not been adopted earlier this year. He appreciated efforts aimed at convening a conference of contracting parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention on enforcing the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He condemned what he called "heinous" military attacks on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip earlier this month, and called on the Council to take all necessary measures to protect civilians, similar to actions by the Council to protect civilians elsewhere, and to ensure that Israel lifted its blockade on Gaza. He strongly condemned the continued detention of thousands of Palestinians, calling for their release, with priority attention paid to their plight. The international community must exert all efforts to ensure that Israel abided by its obligations and resume final-status negotiations "on the correct ground", so that an independent Palestine could be realized this year. Finally, he condemned Israeli violations of resolution 1701 (2006), and called on all parties to fully implement it. He demanded that Israel fully withdraw from the Syrian Golan.

TSUNEO NISHIDA (Japan), expressing strong support for a two-State solution, said his country remained convinced that the only way to achieve durable peace was through sincere negotiations. There was presently a lack of trust, which prevented the restart of the negotiations towards that goal. Japan, thus, called on both sides to engage the United States and the international community and to take steps that would create an environment conducive to restarting direct negotiations. He strongly condemned the murder that occurred on 12 March in Itamar in the northern West Bank.

He urged the two parties to abide by their obligations under previous agreements, most importantly the Road Map, and repeated his country's call on Israel to freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank, which included East Jerusalem. In that regard, he expressed Japan's deep concern that the Israeli authorities continued to approve plans to build more settlements, stressing that Japan did not recognize any unilateral measures prejudicial to the outcome of the final-status negotiations. At the same time, he called on the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfil its commitments to end violence and work against incitement. Japan strongly supported and would continue to provide assistance to the state-building efforts by the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, he was seriously concerned with the recent escalation of violence along the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and condemned the targeting of civilians in that violence.

PEDRO NÚÑEZ MOSQUERA (Cuba) said the situation in the Middle East, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory in particular, was deplorable. The situation in Gaza was particularly appalling and was deteriorating rapidly, because of Israel's recent military activities there. A ceasefire was urgently needed. The international community must take all practical measures to put an end to such actions and stop Israel's indiscriminate bombing and killing of civilians. Cuba called for the complete lifting of the blockade to allow humanitarian goods and construction supplies to flow freely into Gaza.

He went on to condemn settlement construction, home demolitions, evictions, the destruction of holy sites and other serious and flagrant violations by Israel of international law, relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice. The Council could not stand by and do nothing in the face of such facts. He regretted that the exercise of a veto by one of its permanent members had recently prevented the Council from condemning Israel's ongoing settlement construction. Indeed, the Council's silence over the years had allowed Israel to continue, and even step up, its actions in contravention of international law. Turning to Syria, he said that any actions that Israel was planning to carry out to alter the character of the Syrian Golan were "null and void" under international law. He called for Israel's total withdrawal from the Golan, back to the 4 June 1967 borders. Finally, he stressed that an increasing number of States were recognizing Palestinian statehood, and he trusted that September would prove the right time to at last achieve that goal.

SAIFUL AZAM MARTINUS ABDULLAH (Malaysia) said his delegation was "deeply disturbed" by the recent disproportionate attacks by the Israeli military in the Gaza Strip, resulting in a number of civilian casualties. If left unchecked, such actions would lead to greater destruction and further loss of life there. He urged all involved parties to refrain from any provocative actions and called on the international community, especially the Security Council and the diplomatic Quartet, "to act swiftly and decisively" to ensure that Israel ended its military operations in the Gaza Strip. As for recent newspaper articles concerning the Goldstone Report, such comments did not nullify that report's findings. Malaysia agreed with the recent statements by the report's three other authors, which had, in a way, further

bolstered efforts to make sure that Israel answered for using disproportionate force leading to the deaths of some 1,400 Palestinians during its 2008-2009

"military onslaught" of Gaza.

He went on to say that Israel must abide by its international obligations and stop all settlement activities, construction of the separation wall and demolition of Palestinian-owned homes and buildings, particularly in East Jerusalem, all of which was illegal under international law. Resolving such issues, which were serious impediments to restarting the peace talks, required that the international community focus all its energies and efforts towards achieving a comprehensive peace in the region. Such a peace must restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State. "All parties must act truthfully and sincerely towards achieving these objectives," he said, urging the Security Council to take the necessary measures to ensure that its own resolutions on Palestine and the Middle East were fully implemented. Anything less would undermine its credibility.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) said the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lay at the heart of the many disputes in the region and merited special attention during the current period. Despite the current impasse — which he attributed to unabated Israeli settlement activity — he saw no alternative to a negotiated settlement, hoping the Quartet would meet soon to lay out the parameters of direct negotiations. Formidable Palestinian state-building and economic efforts could only be sustained if the political process proceeded in parallel with it. The international community must not turn a blind eye to Palestinians' just and legitimate appeal to be accepted as a fully fledged member State of the international community.

At the same time, he said, the plight of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip should urgently be alleviated and Israel must lift the blockade immediately. National reconciliation was also an urgent priority. Last year's flotilla tragedy was the result of numerous and successive violations of international law by Israel. Turkey had tried to prevent the incident, then referred the matter to relevant international bodies and had strictly abided by the parameters established by the international inquiry process. His country would continue to press for accountability. He added that the humanitarian convoys could not be simply explained away as unilateral provocations; the root cause was the pattern of Israeli policies towards Gaza. He reiterated his country's unwavering determination to assist Palestinians to reach their goal of a viable, peaceful and prosperous Palestinian State.

PEDRO SERRANO, Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, said that even as changes swept the Middle East region, the Arab-Israeli conflict remained a focal point and demanded "that we increase our efforts to address this problem with the utmost priority". The European Union firmly believed that the changes the world was witnessing represented an opportunity that should not be missed; the parties in the region had waited long enough and their hopes had been dashed too many times. "We have invested a great deal of efforts in the Quartet in recent weeks, and will continue to do so, because it is our conviction that by complementing and supporting US efforts, the EU alongside the UN and Russia, has a contribution to make to the negotiated solution we all hope will be achieved," he said.

Recognizing also the importance of an Arab contribution based on the Arab Peace Initiative, he said the European Union confirmed that unilateral actions by either Palestinians or Israelis could not prejudice the outcome of negotiations. The Union continued to press for a negotiated solution and would reiterate that settlements in the West bank, including East Jerusalem, were illegal and should cease immediately. Moreover, plans for new construction should be abandoned. He said that trust between the parties had been "seriously undermined", and the European Union had therefore been promoting a credible framework for the resumption of negotiations on all status issues leading to a two-State solution by September 2011. The European Union would continue its strong support of the Palestinian institution-building process and, in that regard, welcomed the upcoming donors' conference set to take place in Paris in June. The Union had increased the component devoted to institution-building — €75 million this year. However, the significant achievements in that process would only be sustainable with a political breakthrough.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO (Senegal), Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said the recent upsurge in violence in and around Gaza was a stark reminder of how tense and fragile the situation in that area was. Indeed, the rocket fire by Palestinian militants and attacks by Israeli forces, including on residential areas, had taken a heavy toll in lives, mostly among Palestinians. He made clear that the Committee condemned all attacks against civilians and stressed that all parties should act responsibly and refrain from provocation. The Committee was hopeful that the Council would redouble its efforts to ensure resolution 1860 (2009) was fully implemented. In the two years since that text had been adopted, the Gaza blockade had continued and the free movement of people and goods was still being impeded. The post-war reconstruction effort remained, with few exceptions, stalled. In addition, the goal of intra-Palestinian reconciliation endorsed by the resolution had yet to be achieved.

The "festering confrontation" around Gaza threatened peace and stability and required the Council's urgent attention, he said, especially as civilians were the main victims of the conflict and they continued to suffer mightily under the blockade. "They are in urgent need of protection; the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility under the Charter. We hope the Council will be able to act with the same vigour it has in other current conflict situations," he said, adding that the unstable ceasefire must be replaced by one that was durable and fully respected, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009).

He went on to say that the entire international community was looking forward to the resumption of serious direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians on all permanent status issues, and the Quartet had set September as the target date for their conclusion. He also welcomed the recognition of Palestinian statehood

by a large number of Member States, who had also supported the Palestinian Authority's state-building programme, also expected to be completed in September. The Committee supported the view that negotiations could only be successful if the parties implement in good faith their obligations under the Road Map, including freezing all settlement construction, including natural growth. "Negotiations will require leadership by the international community to move forward," he said, adding: "Leadership requires actions, not just words." He noted that the Road Map had left the final destination in many ways undefined. It was now time to finish the job the Quartet had begun in 2003; "foot dragging" by the Quartet must end and clear terms of reference for permanent status settlement set as swiftly as possible, so that negotiations could resume.

SIRODJIDIN ASLOV (Tajikistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said the question of Palestine remained a top priority for the international community, and his delegation remained firmly convinced that the Security Council must not be absolved of its role in that regard. Indeed, the Council should act immediately to ensure realization by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination, sovereignty and independence. Urgent action was also required to end impunity and ensure Israel's compliance with all its legal obligations. The continued suffering of millions of Palestinians required urgent attention, particularly of those living in the shadow of Israeli military aggression in the Gaza Strip, despite Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The Organization of the Islamic Conference continued to call for urgent and serious follow-up of the recommendations in the Goldstone Report, which would be essential to promote justice, ensure accountability and avert further human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Turning to the West Bank, he said that, in that area, Israel continued to construct illegal settlements, while demolishing Palestinian homes and confiscating Palestinian land and infrastructure. It also continued to build its "annexation wall", in clear violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Such violations were "most intense and aggressive" in East Jerusalem, where Israel continued to pursue its policy of altering the Palestinian/Arab/Islamic identity of Al Quds. Overall, he said, the Organization of the Islamic Conference would continue to stress that resolving the Middle East conflict hinged on a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. "The international consensus to realize the vision of the two-State solution requires a clear stance based on international legality and justice," he said, adding that there must also be full acknowledgement of and respect for historical commitments and pledges made in that regard, as embodied in relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet-backed Road Map.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria), pointing out that the Syrian Golan heights was still under occupation, noted that it was his country that had proposed public meetings on the Middle East every three months. He said that, despite hundreds of resolutions over decades, Israel had yet to end the occupation or its illegal practices, including settlement activities, construction of the barrier and judaization of Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Security Council remained incompetent in its role, as demonstrated by the failure to pass a resolution calling for the immediate cessation of settlement activities. Israel had yet to face accountability for its actions in Gaza.

Maintaining that the international community had ignored Israeli crimes for many decades, he called on the Security Council to follow up on the demand of the League of Arab States to impose a no-fly zone over Gaza to protect civilians. He described abuses against Syrians in the Golan and plans for major new settlements, and affirmed that restoration of the total area was a basis for any comprehensive peace.

Regarding developments in Syria, he said that his President had held the first meeting of the new Government and was working to ensure reforms and promote democracy in a way that was consistent with the security and interest of its citizens. New laws called for an end to the state of emergency and an end to the Superior Council of Security, as well as respect for peaceful demonstrations. Those reforms were an issue of domestic concern and must be respected as such by the international community. Cautioning against external interference, he noted that a number of appeals had been made in the Council for the overthrow of legitimate Governments, which represented a clear violation of the United Nations Charter, and a misuse of the agenda item. He would have liked to hear the United States and United Kingdom express sympathy with the Palestinians and Syrians under occupation.

RAZA BASHIR TARAR (Pakistan) said that during the Council's last debate on the Middle East, most speakers had lamented the breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian direct negotiations and the implications for the region. "Three months later, the pall of gloom is heavier," he said, stressing that the prospects for resuming the talks were not encouraging and that the slight window of opportunity for sustainable peace created by the recent reduction in violence "appears to be slipping through our fingers". To make matters worse, the Quartet also appeared to be increasingly hamstrung in facilitating resumption of direct negotiations or specifying the parameters of a final settlement, as evidenced by the most recent postponement of its proposed meeting in Berlin.

"Amid such despair, the Security Council, too, has abdicated its role in the settlement of Palestine to individual countries and groupings," he continued. It was worrisome to note that the Council's only relevant activity was its quarterly open debates, where even spirited and well-crafted statements "failed to cure the somnambulance of its audience". The only ray of hope was the impressive march of the Palestinian Authority on the road to statehood. He said that numerous independent sources had confirmed that completing that process by the end of August was well within the Authority's reach. "The goal of Palestinian statehood by September 2011 is likewise well within our grasp; letting it founder on the rocks of cynicism, inaction or political expediency will have serious consequences for peace and stability," he said, recalling that failure to meet the 1999 "deadline" in the Oslo Accords had triggered the second intifada. September 2011 must not be "just another date" in a tragic chronology of missed opportunities. The Palestinian people had already travelled more than halfway in honouring their part of the bargain. Israel must reciprocate with an open mind and in good faith.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) said his delegation was concerned that efforts to breathe life into the direct negotiations had been delayed. Only a few months remained before final steps were taken to complete the institutions necessary to create an independent State. As such, the international community must step up its support for such an event. He welcomed the efforts and statements by United States President Barack Obama, as well as the efforts to bolster support for the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. Morocco looked forward to a return of the optimism — though it was all too brief — that had greeted the resumption of direct negotiations in September 2010.

Since those talks had stalled, Israel had persisted in building illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and had, likewise, continued its destruction of homes and confiscation of Palestinian land, particularly in East Jerusalem. It had also continued to attack Islamic shrines, actions which the international community should reject absolutely. Morocco saw such actions as blatant violations of international law. He went on to express extreme concern about the situation of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip "with the barest minimum of basic necessities". He hailed the efforts of UNRWA and other agencies working to alleviate that situation. In conclusion, he said the position of the Palestinian people, who had struggled so long for independence, could not be denied. All that remained was for Israel to evince the political will to bring about real changes that would ensure peace and justice for all people in the region.

BENEDICT LAWRENCE LUKWYA (Uganda) said that, in spite of protracted international and regional efforts, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had remanded unresolved for far too long. He recalled the international community's optimism following the resumption of direct talks between Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas, and said he was deeply concerned about the loss of momentum in the peace process in the wake of the breakdown in those negotiations. "It is now more urgent than ever that both parties redouble their efforts towards the achievement of a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a two-State solution," he said, and encouraged both the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to resume negotiations without further delay.

Continuing, he said it was essential to refrain from unilateral actions that prejudged final-status issues or undermined progress. It was also important to bear in mind that the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians for statehood "cannot be delayed much longer, and the legitimate security concerns of Israel must be addressed". Uganda remained deeply concerned about the continued construction of Israeli settlements and, in that regard, called for a complete freeze of such activities, as they hindered progress in direct negotiations and undermined Israel's own security. He saluted the Palestinians for their continued efforts towards fulfilling their Road Map obligations and also commended President Abbas for his initiatives aimed at resolving current divisions among Palestinians.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) said all Member States must fully commit moral, diplomatic, political and economic support to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, based on a two-State solution. The international community must address the key issue — Israel's prolonged illegal occupation of Arab territories. He commended the leadership and state-building efforts of Palestinian Authority President Abbas. But,

he expressed worries over the use of disproportionate military strikes and unabated atrocities that caused civilian deaths. He called for maximum restraint and respect for international humanitarian law. He lamented Israel's move to end its 10-month moratorium on settlement building. He said unilateral actions by either party could not prejudice the outcome of negotiations. Negotiations should be concluded by September 2011. Any further delay in resuming negotiations was detrimental to prospects for regional peace and security.

"We urge the parties and others concerned to undertake urgently efforts to expedite Israeli-Palestinian and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which is essential to avoid outcomes detrimental to the region," he said. Sustained regional and international support was needed for the direct negotiations and the Palestinian state-building process to be successful. Relevant Assembly and Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Conference's Terms of Reference, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative were the best guides for achieving a two-State solution.

OMBENI SEFUE (United Republic of Tanzania) said "the Middle East situation and the Palestinian question were created by human beings using the Security Council. The issues can also be solved by human beings using the same Council or any other means." Pointing out that discontent caused conflict and that conflict produced by-products that were not always predictable, he said it was important to think beyond war and to focus on making durable peace and to "go for it". He urged the Security Council to vow that, during the next meeting, it would speak of results, not a work in progress.

GARY QUINLAN (Australia) said his delegation had consistently supported an enduring settlement based on a negotiated two-State solution, allowing Israel and a future Palestinian State to live side by side in peace and security. Citing recent dramatic changes in the Middle East and North Africa, he said there was now an urgency to achieving progress towards such peace, and the Australian Government had not only shared that sentiment with Israeli and Palestinian leaders on numerous occasions, it had also continued to urge all sides to exercise maximum restraint, to avoid all civilian casualties and return to negotiations as soon as possible.

"If these steps are not taken and credible progress towards peace is not made," he continued, "there is a real risk that the surge in violence in March will be repeated, with unacceptable civilian losses on both Palestinian and Israeli sides." Australia was deeply concerned by the recent surge in violence in Israel and the Palestinian Territory, including rocket attacks on southern Israel by militants in Gaza and the killing of civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. "Violence undermines the prospects for peaceful resolution of the conflict," he said, adding that all States must condemn terrorism in all its forms. He also said that both sides must refrain from all actions that undermined confidence and the prospects for achieving peace, including the construction of illegal settlements. He called on both sides to recognize that it was in their mutual interest to return to direct negotiations, so that a just and enduring peace could finally be realized.

JEROBEAM SHAANIKA (Namibia) reaffirmed his country's support and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their quest to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. That was a fundamental human right and the international community was duty bound to urgently help the Palestinians achieve it. This year had begun on a positive note, with the recognition of the State of Palestine, based on 1967 borders, by several Latin American countries. But Israel's unlawful expansion and construction of illegal settlements and its demolition of Palestinian homes were yet another attempt to overshadow international goodwill towards the people of Palestine. That seriously impeded peace and a two-State solution. Illegal constructions in and around Jerusalem, which attempted to alter that city's legal status and its physical, cultural and demographic character, must cease. "We call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to stop these provocative activities," he said.

The ongoing Israeli blockade of Gaza, which clearly punished the entire Palestinian civilian population, was "morally unjustifiable and unacceptable by any human standard", he said. It must be lifted immediately and the human rights of the Gaza population should be respected. The Council must take suitable steps and show its resolve to protect civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in line with international humanitarian law. "The Council should not cherry pick, acting as a matter of expediency at times, while ignoring the plight of a people who have been disposed of everything, including human dignity, for more than 60 years," he said. The Council must not fail to comply with its responsibility to protect civilians in Palestine. The time for the international community to act was now, in line with international law, the Charter and all relevant Council resolutions, whose compliance was binding on all Member States, including Israel. He fully supported the Fayyad state-building plan and called on the Council to also support it.

GUILLERMO PUENTE ORDORICA (Mexico) said that for decades, the international community had witnessed war and violence in the Middle East, and often, global actors had been unable or unwilling to act to stop such conflict. In the current context of stalemate, it was clear that direct Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and negotiations must resume and produce tangible results for both Palestinians and Israelis. If the impasse continued, the situation would only deteriorate and could exacerbate tensions in other areas. During Mexico's presidency of the Council, it had spared no effort to enhance the body's support for the Middle East peace process and efforts to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. Mexico continued to believe that the Council must make greater efforts in that regard and exert all its powers towards the resumption of direct negotiations between the two sides.

He said the Council had adopted many relevant resolutions and presidential statements on the issue, but many challenges remained. For example, even as the

Council had adopted a text that had ended the Gaza crisis of 2008-2009, the situation there had continued to deteriorate and had perhaps even regressed to the

state it had been in before military intervention. The humanitarian situation had worsened, despite the partial opening by Israel of border crossings. The situation there would improve only if an international mechanism was set up to monitor a lasting ceasefire and ensure the complete opening of border crossings to ensure unimpeded access of humanitarian goods and construction supplies. As for East Jerusalem, Israel had continued to carry out a host of practices that undermined the viability of a Palestinian State, and he called on Israel to cease such practices without delay. Mexico condemned all acts of violence and provocation, including those carried out by militant groups.

He said his delegation hoped the two sides could overcome the current impasse and resume negotiations towards agreement on a framework for a comprehensive solution. Indeed, the time had come for "difficult and momentous" decisions to be taken by the leaders of Israel and Palestine on behalf of their people, and support of the Security Council would be necessary as the peace process moved forward.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) said the Security Council should take the measures needed so that Israel would comply with resolutions that promoted the creation of two States, and he reaffirmed the call for Israel to fully respect the provisions of international humanitarian law. He welcomed the fact that a growing number of countries had recognized Palestine as a free and independent State. He demanded once again the immediate and unconditional lifting of what he called the brutal blockade of Gaza and renewed his call for Israel to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and avoid further conflict there, and to withdraw from the Syrian Golan.

He reiterated concerns about Council resolution 1973 (2011), which, he said, had led to foreign military aggression against Libya, commenting that if some Council members went beyond their legal powers and decided to redefine international law, the United Nations had lost its *raison d'être*. He reiterated calls for the Council to work closely with countries and regional organizations and take urgent measures leading to an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful and sustainable solution that reflected the will of the Libyan people. It was imperative that the military aggression of Israel against the Palestinian people and its settlement activity cease. The only way to achieve peace was through justice, he concluded, citing his President.

GHAZI JOMAA (Tunisia) supporting the statements made on behalf of the Arab Group, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement, said that hopes for an independent Palestinian State had been threatened by Israel's intransigence and its continuing acts of colonization, which were in complete contradiction to international law, as were other Israeli practices that had gone on for decades. Tunisia was proud of its 2011 revolution of liberty and it reasserted its support to just causes around the world, including the Palestinian cause.

He called for Israel to respect its commitments according to the Road Map and international law and he called on the international community to act against any measure that would seek to change the demographic nature of Jerusalem. In Gaza, he said, he called for an end to violence against Palestinian civilians. Further, the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan must end. He maintained that the occupation as a whole must also be brought to an end, for the sake of the stability of the region and the world, through decisive measures to deal with the underlying tensions and through international support to the Palestinians.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER ([Qatar](#)) said that, with its radical position, Israel had evaded its internationally agreed obligations and had caused peace talks to recently reach a deadlock. The world could no longer accept Israel's continuation of illegal settlements and its occupation since 1967 of Arab territories. It was misleading to think, particularly in the light of the current turmoil in the Arab world, that the flexibility of the Arab States and the efforts of the Quartet and the Secretary-General would last forever. It was necessary to take advantage of the current international consensus on the need for a two-State solution to avoid a regional confrontation, which could happen considering the present circumstances. Israeli leaders must take that seriously. A durable, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East could only be based on the principle of land for peace and on international law.

He reiterated Qatar's firm rejection of Israel's illegal measures in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the Arab identity of that city. The international community must reject attempts by the Israeli Government to undermine Islamic and Christian holy sites, destroy homes in East Jerusalem and expel Arab residents with the aim of Judaizing the city. Turning to Israel's occupation of Lebanese territory, he said Israel's continuous violation of Lebanese airspace and its espionage activities threatened Lebanese sovereignty and violated Council resolution 1701 (2006). He reaffirmed Assembly decisions that declared invalid Israel's annexation of the Syrian Golan and called on Israel to return that land to Syria.

ABDUL GHAFUOR MOHAMED ([Maldives](#)), joining speakers before him to express great concern over the growing violence in the Middle East, said that, as a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, his country believed that peace and prosperity in the region could only be achieved through empowerment of the people to bring in much needed social, economic and political reforms that would lead to a more democratic and representative system of governance. To that end, he urged the international community, especially the members of the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, to assist their fellow member States going through similar periods of transition, to enable them have the necessary institutional infrastructure in order to complete the transition to a system of governance that was best defined by their respective peoples.

Specifically on the question of Palestine, he expressed disappointment to note the continued suffering of the Palestinian people, who, he said, had been denied their right to self-determination and their right to live in peace and freedom in their own independent State for far too long. While recognizing the rights of the Palestinians, Maldives also appreciated and supported the right of the people of Israel to live in peace and security alongside an independent and sovereign State of Palestine. He further expressed concern over Israeli settlements, pointing out that while his country recognized the Israeli right to housing, at the same time the rights of the Palestinians did not have to be trampled. He, therefore, called on Israel to freeze the expansion of all settlements in the occupied territories.

ESHAGH AL HABIB ([Iran](#)) said the Israeli regime continued to defy international law by persisting in its illegal and inhumane blockade against the Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Such punishment continued, even as the damages inflicted on Gaza as a result of that regime's 2008-2009 onslaught still needed to be remedied. The Goldstone Report continued to be an important step towards remedying the Israeli regime's violations in Gaza. At the same time, while that report had engendered the hope that the United Nations and, especially, the Security Council, would put an end to the culture of impunity regarding Israeli war crimes, no credible action had been taken. Moreover, attempts were now under way to whitewash the atrocities committed by the "Israeli war machine".

What would remain of the United Nations credibility if no action was taken on the Report, he asked? United Nations bodies, including the Security Council, should ensure the full and immediate implementations of the Goldstone recommendations. He welcomed, in that regard, the efforts by the Swiss Government, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva Conventions, to reconvene the High Contracting Parties of the Fourth Convention on measures to enforce that treaty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and he hoped such a conference could be held before September 2011. He went on to say that it was regrettable that the inaction of relevant organs of the United Nations had only emboldened the dangerous Israeli regime's inhuman policies carried out against the defenceless Palestinian people. The generous support provided that regime by certain Powers had been monumentally detrimental to stability and peace in the Middle East. Also, the United States had continued to block Security Council actions intended to address the activities of the "Israeli apartheid regime", including its ongoing settlement construction and destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure.

As for charges levelled at his country earlier today by the representatives of the United States and the Israeli regime, he rejected those "baseless allegations and distortions" intended to detract attention from the facts about "the criminal and abhorrent atrocities" being carried out by the Israeli regime in the region, particularly the heinous crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

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