



Security Council

PROVISIONAL

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Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

6265th meeting

Wednesday, 27 January 2010, 10 a.m.
New York

<i>President :</i>	Mr. Zhang Yesui	(China)
<i>Members :</i>	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Vukašinić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Issoze-Ngondet
	Japan	Mr. Okuda
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Lukwiya
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted .

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*) : I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's

provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Shalev (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 22 January 2010 from the Chargé d'affaires, a.i., of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2010/44 and which reads as follows:

"I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Wednesday, 27 January 2010, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, acting head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Serrano to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 22 January 2010 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 26 January 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, in which he requests that the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, be invited to participate in the consideration of the item in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Mahmassani to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I wish to acknowledge the presence of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, at today's meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: An extremely worrying impasse persists in efforts to bring about Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, amidst low confidence between the parties, disputes over the terms of reference for negotiations, continued creation of facts on the ground, tensions in Jerusalem, uneven developments in the remainder of the West Bank and unsustainable conditions in Gaza.

Intense diplomatic activity has continued, to try to bring about resumed negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, including United States Envoy George Mitchell's recent visit to the region. These efforts are continuing, and the parties have indicated that they are reviewing developments, but a breakthrough has not been achieved.

The Secretary-General and his Envoy are actively engaged with the parties and regional partners, and within the Quartet, in an effort to support the initiation of a meaningful process that leads to a clear endgame. The Secretary-General met Envoy Mitchell on 6 January, and we welcome Mr. Mitchell's engagement with Quartet envoys and other partners in Europe on 12 and 13 January. We also note the efforts of Egypt, which hosted Israeli and Palestinian leaders for discussions this month. Special Coordinator Robert Serry recently visited Cairo and Amman.

We believe that the Quartet can and must play its full role at this crucial juncture if obstacles are to be overcome and a process is to be resumed with prospects for success. The parties must also assume their responsibilities. Notwithstanding certain steps, Israel can and should do considerably more to build confidence through the implementation of obligations on the ground and by signalling a genuine commitment to negotiating and resolving all core issues, including Jerusalem, within a clear time frame. While we do not underestimate the difficulties and concerns involved, the Palestinians should continue to engage in earnest, as they are doing, in an effort to bring about resumed negotiations.

Despite the political impasse, the Palestinian Authority continues its efforts to advance its State-building agenda. During the reporting period, the Palestinian Authority marked the completion of its 1,000th small project since 2008 targeting underserved communities. On 14 January, Prime Minister Fayyad presented the Government's priority interventions for 2010: institution-building, strategic infrastructure and the delivery of services. We urge the international community to support that programme. The total cost is estimated at \$5.5 billion, of which only 50 per cent is fully or partially funded.

The Palestinian Authority also faces a recurring budget deficit that is estimated at \$1.2 billion. It is therefore in need of further budgetary support in 2010. In fulfilling outstanding pledges from the Paris and Sharm el-Sheikh donor conferences, the Palestinian Authority has requested that assistance be frontloaded and that measures be taken to ensure the predictability of financing.

The Palestinian Authority also continues to make progress in the areas of law and order and combating potential terrorism, in accordance with the Road Map. Four hundred newly trained Palestinian security personnel were deployed in Hebron in early January. Progress has been made in recent months in addressing human rights concerns in Palestinian Authority prisons.

We note positively new Israeli measures to facilitate economic activity in the West Bank. On 4 January, the opening hours of the Tarkumiya commercial goods crossing between the southern West Bank and Israel were extended to improve access for goods. On 15 January, a section of a road south-west of Hebron that connects two major routes and provides critical access for some villages to service centres was reopened to Palestinian traffic for the first time since 2001.

We urge Israel to take more far-reaching measures to facilitate Palestinian development in the West Bank, including the further easing of closures — which stand at 569 obstacles to movement — facilitating improvements in Area C and refraining from demolishing Palestinian homes. During this reporting period, demolitions left over 100 Palestinians, including 34 children, homeless.

I would like to reiterate the Secretary-General's concern about the situation in East Jerusalem. He calls on Israeli authorities to put an end to activities such as settlement construction and expansion, house demolitions, the closure of institutions and the revocation of residency rights.

As they have for nearly a decade and contrary to the Road Map, Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remained closed during the reporting period, including Orient House and the Chamber of Commerce. Protests by Israelis and Palestinians alike against Israeli actions in Sheikh Jarrah — where several families have been evicted and a further 25 face the same threat — have continued and now take place most weeks. Seventeen demonstrators arrested on 15 January were released the following day after the Israeli court ruled their arrests illegal, but a further 20 were detained on 22 January. There are also persistent concerns with regard to settler-run archaeological excavations, including tunnelling activities, in the sensitive Silwan neighbourhood, which is adjacent to the Old City. New cracks that appeared in roads after recent heavy rain have been attributed by some reports to those activities.

There continue to be official announcements of intent to expand settlement construction within the Israeli-determined municipal boundaries of occupied East Jerusalem, in areas of existing settlement and in Palestinian neighbourhoods. Those include the 692 new housing units in three existing settlements announced on 28 December, a new project announced on 4 January to house 24 settler families in the Palestinian neighbourhood of the Mount of Olives, and a plan announced on 6 January to establish 50 new settler housing units in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Shuafat. We urge the Israeli Government not to finalize the approval of those plans. The international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem. The status of the city remains a final status issue for negotiations, through which a way must be found for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States.

The policy of partial temporary settlement restraint in the remainder of the West Bank announced in November by Prime Minister Netanyahu is being broadly implemented. Teams of Israeli inspectors have visited settlements to verify that stop-work orders are being put into effect. However, due to the exemptions in the policy and, in some cases, the fact that construction is continuing contrary to the policy, construction activity has been reported in several settlements. On 20 January, Defence Minister Barak upgraded to university status a college in the large settlement of Ariel in the occupied West Bank, while Prime Minister Netanyahu planted trees in Gush Etzion and Ma'ale Adumim on 24 January.

Settlement activity throughout the territory occupied in 1967 is illegal, and its continuation is contrary to the Road Map. We once again strongly urge the full implementation of Israel's obligations to freeze all settlement activity, including as a result of natural growth, and to dismantle the outposts erected since March 2001. On 12 January, Prime Minister Fayyad announced that the Palestinian Authority is seeking to implement a boycott of settlement products within Palestinian areas.

Palestinian, Israeli and foreign protestors continued demonstrating in the villages of Nil'in and Bil'in, where the barrier is built on occupied Palestinian territory contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. There have also been clashes between protestors and Israeli security forces.

During the reporting period, there was a substantial increase in Israeli military operations in the West Bank — 143 in total — in response to alleged security threats. Three Palestinians were killed, 87 injured and over 300 arrested, 12 of whom were found to be carrying explosives. In a serious episode, Palestinian gunmen killed a settler on a road near Nablus on 24 December. In an action strongly denounced by the Palestinian Authority, Israeli forces entered Nablus on 26 December and killed three Palestinians alleged to be the perpetrators. Palestinian security forces arrested several individuals in the course of their own investigations into the killing of the settler.

In total, there were 107 violent incidents between settlers and Palestinians during the reporting period, which left 22 Palestinians and 18 settlers injured — partly due to the "price tag" policy to protest the Israeli Government's policy of settlement restraint. Following the evacuation of the Givat Menachem outpost yesterday, settlers attacked Palestinians and their property in the neighbouring village of Bitilu. We note that the Israeli police detained a number of settlers on suspicion of involvement in the mosque arson at Yassuf, which was reported in the last briefing. However, more must be done to impose the rule of law. In total, there were 107 violent incidents between settlers and Palestinians during the reporting period, which left 22 Palestinians and 18 settlers injured — partly due to the "price tag" policy to protest the Israeli Government's policy of settlement restraint. Following the evacuation of the Givat Menachem outpost yesterday, settlers attacked Palestinians and their property in the neighbouring village of Bitilu. We note that the Israeli police detained a number of settlers on suspicion of involvement in the mosque arson at Yassuf, which was reported in the last briefing. However, more must be done to impose the rule of law on violent settlers.

Turning to Gaza, as he stated on the first anniversary of Operation Cast Lead on 27 December, the Secretary-General remains gravely concerned that neither the issues that led to the conflict nor its worrying aftermath is being addressed. This has created an unsustainable situation and a sense of hopelessness for the civilian population in Gaza, more than half of whom are under 18.

Hamas remains in de facto control of Gaza, asserting security control and pushing forward its social and institutional agenda. We regret its refusal to sign the Egyptian reconciliation proposal, accepted late last year by factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) following an extended process of discussions, and urge Hamas to reconsider this position.

We continue to support the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority, and to express the hope that free and fair elections throughout the Palestinian territory can be held as soon as possible. In the meantime, with the passing of the 25 January 2010 date by which the ranks of elected officials would ordinarily have been renewed by elections, the presidency and legislature have been extended by PLO decision until elections can be held, though the legislature is unable to meet due to the internal divide.

Efforts to secure the release of Israeli captive Gilad Shalit in exchange for a number of the 9,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails have not so far achieved a breakthrough. There was a notable increase in the number of projectiles fired from Gaza by militant groups during the earlier part of this reporting period. Over 70 projectiles of different calibres were fired, 19 of which reached Israel. There were 20 Israeli incursions and 11 air strikes against targets in the Strip, leading to 11 Palestinian fatalities, including six civilians, and six injuries. This spike in violence is worrying and underscores the fragility of the current situation. However, we continue to believe from our contacts that major constituencies wish to maintain calm. We urge all parties to refrain from violence and respect international humanitarian law.

Reports of weapons smuggling continue to cause concern. Egyptian efforts to combat smuggling have continued, including through the use of tunnel-detecting sensors and the insertion of metal sheeting in parts of the ground along the border. Goods smuggled through tunnels are both sustaining and distorting the Gaza economy. There is an urgent need for all crossings into Gaza to be opened as foreseen in the Agreement on Movement and Access.

On 6 January, during a demonstration by Palestinians in Rafah, Gaza, demanding the entry of a solidarity convoy of humanitarian aid, an Egyptian soldier was shot and killed on the Egyptian side of the border with Gaza. As the incident evolved, at least 13 Palestinians were injured on the Gazan side of the border. The Egyptian authorities have called on Hamas to ensure that those involved in the killing are brought to justice.

We repeat our call for an end to the blockade of Gaza. During the reporting period, a weekly average of 534 truckloads of imports entered the Strip, a 10 per cent decline in quantity from the last reporting period, although it is positive that in December there was a slight expansion in the types of allowed imports, with goods such as candles, brooms, eye glasses and blankets entering. There was a 13 per cent increase in the amount of cooking gas entering Gaza, although shortages remain. There has also been a limited response to the United Nations call for a winterization package for Gaza. In particular, since 29 December, and following an appeal to the Israeli Government by the Secretary-General, 57 truckloads of glass have entered the Gaza Strip as part of an Israeli clearance for a total of 100 truckloads. This has enabled more ordinary families to repair some of the lesser damage caused during operation Cast Lead. In addition, Israel permitted the export of 41 truckloads comprising nearly 2 million camatons and over 40 tons of strawberries during the reporting period, with approximately 300 tons of strawberries expected to be exported by the end of the season.

The Gaza power plant faces fuel shortages, largely as a result of funding shortfalls, and efforts are continuing to resolve this important issue to prevent a shutdown of the plant, which would have worrying humanitarian consequences. It is also vital that the entry of materials for repair of electricity infrastructure be facilitated by Israel, together with sufficient quantities of fuel.

On 1 January, citing concerns over tunnelling and the risk of attack, the Israeli authorities announced that the Nahal Oz crossing, which is used for the transfer of fuel from Israel to Gaza, will no longer be operational. The bulk of fuel imports will now pass through the much smaller-capacity Kerem Shalom crossing. With the exception of a conveyor belt at the Kami crossing used for the import of grain, it is very concerning that Kerem Shalom is now the only operational crossing for the import and export of goods into and from Gaza.

There has still been no satisfactory Israeli response to the United Nations proposal to complete stalled projects for housing, schools and health facilities. This is extremely disappointing, and the Secretary-General intends to continue to pursue this matter. We note with concern restrictions that appear to be preventing senior international visitors from entering Gaza.

Towards the end of 2009, there was an increase in impediments within Gaza due to demands from Hamas for information from aid agencies, leading to several incidents involving the confiscation or interference with aid supplies. Following interventions by the United Nations, the goods have been released and operations resumed. We will continue to insist on non-interference with international aid operations in Gaza.

On 15 January, an arrangement was concluded whereby the Government of Israel made a payment of \$10.5 million to the United Nations in respect of losses sustained in the nine incidents investigated by the Gaza Board of Inquiry. In the light of this payment, the United Nations has agreed that the financial issues relating to those incidents have been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. As members of the Council are aware, the Secretary-General has written to the President of the Council informing him of this arrangement. We hope that Israel will allow the entry of sufficient materials to allow the rebuilding of the damaged United Nations buildings and facilities now that funds are available.

We continue to support all efforts towards a resumption of Israeli-Syrian negotiations, and comprehensive regional peace. United States Envoy Mitchell visited Lebanon and Syria on 19 and 20 January in the course of consultations on a comprehensive regional peace, and met with the leaders of both countries. On the ground, the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remains stable, although settlement activity continues.

Progress in Lebanese-Syrian relations was highlighted by Prime Minister Hariri's first visit to Damascus on 19 December 2009, where he met Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad for extensive talks. The Prime Minister also visited Turkey, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and France during this reporting period. President Sleiman held talks with French President Sarkozy in Paris on 30 December.

On the security front, an explosion took place in the evening of 26 December 2009 inside a building used by Hamas in Beirut's southern suburb of Dahiye. The explosion left two Hamas members dead and wounded three others. The investigation into the incident is ongoing. Progress, albeit slow, continues to be made towards the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp, which commenced on 25 November 2009.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remains quiet but fragile. On 26 December, in the vicinity of Sarda, a UNIFIL patrol observed several men digging a hole, where 250 kilograms of explosives were found by UNIFIL; the men fled as the patrol approached. Israeli air

violations continued on a daily basis during the reporting period, with a marked increase in early January.

We remain deeply concerned at the current stalemate. If we cannot move forward decisively towards a final status agreement, we risk sliding backwards, with potentially profound and negative implications. We continue to urge the parties to implement their Road Map obligations, build confidence, resume negotiations on all final status issues and see them through to a two-State solution, and we believe the Quartet must play its full role in support of the process. We remain committed to an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and an end to the conflict, through the creation of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security and comprehensive regional peace, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We thank the Secretary-General for being with us this morning. Mr. President, on behalf of Palestine, I warmly congratulate you and your friendly country China on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and on your wise stewardship of the Council this month. We express appreciation as well to Burkina Faso for its skilled guidance of the Council's agenda in December.

On this occasion, I also extend Palestine's sincerest congratulations to the new members of the Security Council: the friendly, fraternal countries of Lebanon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon and Nigeria. We express full confidence in their commitment to the Charter and to international law and the resolutions of the Council, and we wish them all success in upholding their responsibilities and fulfilling their duties on the Council over the next two years. Likewise, I wish to express Palestine's deep appreciation to those members of the Council whose terms ended in December: the friendly, fraternal countries of Libya, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia and Viet Nam. They served with consummate dedication, ability and an unwavering commitment to the pursuit of peace and security, including with regard to their efforts to address the question of Palestine in the Council.

Before proceeding, I also express appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing about recent developments and the situation on the ground, which regrettably remains critical, with worsening humanitarian conditions and a continued freeze of the peace process.

The Palestinian Government has declared that today, 27 January, is the day of solidarity with our prisoners, and from this Chamber I would like to salute the thousands of our heroic prisoners in Israeli jails. We hope that the day of their freedom is not very far away.

The Palestinian people have begun yet another year facing formidable challenges and hardships. The situation on all fronts is critical due to ongoing Israeli violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel's impunity and intransigence have deepened the population's distress and thwarted efforts over the past year to restart the peace process. The situation in the Gaza Strip remains grave, and the precarious situation in occupied East Jerusalem threatens to further inflame tensions and destabilize the fragile situation in the area and throughout the region.

We continue to witness unbearable human suffering in the Gaza Strip. More than a year later, the population remains traumatized by the Israeli military aggression of last winter and the brutal crimes, including war crimes, perpetrated by the occupying Power during that aggression. The ongoing illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza has only intensified the impact of the massive losses and destruction on the population, which has been prevented from recovering by Israel's deliberate obstruction of reconstruction. The humanitarian, socio-economic and psychological conditions of the Palestinian civilian population, especially of children, the infirm and elderly, remain dire and cause for great concern.

The perpetuation of this unjust, absurd situation confirms beyond a reasonable doubt that this blockade is aimed at collectively punishing and debilitating the population, young and old. This man-made disaster has impoverished the population, with abject poverty and near-total aid dependency affecting more than 75 per cent of the population. It has caused the near collapse of civilian infrastructure, including that of the rapidly decaying health, water and sanitation systems; it has caused extreme socio-economic distress in all sectors and has sown the seeds of deep despair and hopelessness, with far-reaching consequences for the Palestinian people now and in the future.

How can the world's conscience bear to continue witnessing the suffocation and deprivation of an entire people? What can justify forcing families to live in the ruins and disaster intentionally imposed upon them? How can the international community bear to allow the continued obstruction of the great quantity of aid that has been so generously pledged to help the Palestinian people recover and rebuild and to restore their communities and some sense of human dignity to their lives?

These are questions we pose to the Council today and that we will continue to ask as we persist in pursuit of accountability and justice, including in the follow-up of the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), for the war crimes committed against our people. Our common humanity and humanitarian instinct — so proudly and vividly on display when the members of the international community rise together to assist those afflicted by disaster, tragedy and human rights violations around the world with speed and compassion — demand that we not remain silent in the face of this deplorable, immoral situation.

More than a year after Israel's aggression against Gaza and nearly three years after imposition of the blockade, the Palestinian people and their leadership once again call upon — appeal to — the international community to take whatever steps are necessary to break the blockade and to compel Israel to immediately open Gaza's border crossings for the regular, sustained movement of persons and goods. This is essential for allowing the reconstruction of Gaza and economic and social recovery to finally begin, including the implementation of the Secretary-General's proposal for jump-starting reconstruction through United Nations civilian infrastructure projects, which Israel shamefully continues to reject. We reiterate in this regard that international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), must be respected.

Simultaneously, in the West Bank, the Palestinian people continue to witness and suffer from Israel's ongoing illegal seizure and colonization of their land, particularly in and around the heart of the Palestinian territory: occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli settlement and wall construction, confiscation of Palestinian land, home demolitions, provocations against holy sites, settler terror and lawlessness against Palestinian civilians and property, often upon the incitement of officials and religious leaders and including the desecration of mosques and cemeteries, and the imposition of obstructions to freedom of movement continue unabated.

Official Israeli declarations regarding the construction of new settlement units continue to be made regularly, in defiance of repeated international calls for Israel to cease all of its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and to comply with international law, United Nations resolutions and its Road Map obligations.

East Jerusalem remains the target of an aggressive and illegal Israeli policy aimed at altering its demographic composition, status and distinctly Palestinian character and identity, and at severing the city from the rest of the territory. In addition to settlement construction and the transfer of even more settlers to East Jerusalem, this unlawful agenda is being pursued via the expulsion or forced displacement of the indigenous Palestinian population through the demolition of homes, evictions and the revocation of the residency rights of thousands of the city's Palestinian inhabitants. In 2008 alone, Israel revoked the Jerusalem residency rights of nearly 5,000 Palestinians, forbidding them to live in the city that for thousands of them is their place of birth. The fact that this is the highest number of revocations in a one-year period since the occupation began, over which time Israel has revoked the residency rights of nearly 9,000 Palestinians, is reflective of Israel's ill intentions in East Jerusalem.

Clearly, as international consensus regarding the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and the need to resolve the question of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States continues to solidify, Israel is blatantly and arrogantly accelerating its efforts to artificially create an overwhelming Jewish majority there and further entrench its de facto annexation of the city. All such illegal actions, undertaken under a variety of arbitrary and empty pretexts, are highly inflammatory, threatening local and regional stability, stoking religious sensitivities, sabotaging resumption of negotiations and jeopardizing the two-State solution.

What is going on is unquestionably about the viability and prospects of actually achieving this two-State solution for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, in turn, the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. This is genuinely endangered by Israeli actions that are undermining the viability and contiguity of Palestinian territory; the viability, cohesion and development of Palestinian society; the viability and recovery of the Palestinian economy; the viability and credibility of and support for the peace process; and the viability and primacy of international law and our international system.

We have repeatedly called the attention of the international community to the critical situation in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, and repeatedly appealed for action to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. In numerous resolutions, the Council has demanded the complete cessation of Israeli settlement activities and the dismantling of the settlements, and has directly addressed Israel's colonization measures in occupied East Jerusalem, calling for an immediate halt to all such measures and deeming the changes caused by those actions to be illegal. These resolutions include, but are not limited to, 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 298 (1971), 446 (1979), 452 (1979), 465 (1980), 476 (1980) and 478 (1980).

In this regard, it should be recalled that resolution 478 (1980), *inter alia*, specifically deemed Israel's enactment of the so-called basic law on Jerusalem to be a violation of international law, decided not to recognize the "basic law" and other actions by Israel aimed at altering the character and status of Jerusalem, and determined all such measures and actions to be null and void, calling for them to be rescinded forthwith. Israel's illegitimate de facto annexation of East Jerusalem

thus remains unrecognized by the international community to this day. Yet Israel continues to breach the law with impunity and arrogance as it continues its destructive colonization campaign.

In this regard, as was recently reaffirmed by President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian leadership maintains that peace negotiations cannot resume while Israeli settlement activities continue. Calling for a cessation of settlements is not a so-called precondition fabricated by the Palestinian side. The position of the Security Council, the Quartet, international humanitarian law and the international community as a whole on this matter is very clear. It is a crime to forcibly seize territory, colonize it and displace or expel the indigenous population. And there is no rational justification whatsoever for allowing or accepting continued settlement activities while we are trying to negotiate an end to this prolonged, illegitimate occupation.

The reality is that Israel is actually imposing condition upon condition while it continues unlawfully to create facts on the ground in order to alter the situation in its favour and unilaterally prejudge the outcome of negotiations on the final status issues — be they Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, water or security. Regrettably, over all these years the peace process has been exploited by Israel to further its colonial enterprise.

Our demands, on the other hand, are totally consistent with international law, United Nations resolutions and the Road Map obligation to freeze all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth. They are fundamental to the achievement of the peaceful settlement that will bring an end to the occupation that began in 1967; to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security; and to a just solution for the Palestinian refugee question in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We also reiterate that negotiations must resume from the point at which they broke off. Prolonging the suffering and loss of our peoples by starting from zero in negotiations is neither acceptable nor ethical. We all know what the solution is and should have the courage to intensify our efforts, based on the just and well-known parameters: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference — including the principle of land for peace — the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

In this regard, we welcome and appreciate efforts being made in the region and the international community as a whole to revive the peace process and advance such a solution. These include the European Union's adoption, under Sweden's presidency, of its Council conclusions on the Middle East peace process on 8 December 2009, and the diplomatic efforts being exerted by the United States Administration, particularly President Obama's Special Envoy, Senator Mitchell. We stress, however, that we must strive harder to reach our shared objective sooner rather than later, in the certainty that the peace and security benefits to our region and beyond will be enormous.

Remarkably, despite the bitter, brutal realities of the continuing Israeli occupation, including the appalling punitive measures being imposed on Gaza, the Palestinian people and their leadership remain committed to the goal of peace. They are working hard to repair and build their national institutions and to heal and develop their society, as they strive for fulfilment of their legitimate national aspirations for self-determination and freedom in their homeland. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's plan, "Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State", is being pursued with determination and with wide support from the international community, for which we are grateful.

We continue to insist only that the peace we are struggling for be based on international law and that it be a just peace. Illegal Israeli actions, which are totally contradictory to the achievement of such a peace and which only fuel the conflict, must no longer be excused or tolerated. Salvaging and promoting a lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution is dependent on that. Thus, while we welcome and recognize the importance of statements from around the international community denouncing Israeli settlement activities and other illegal measures, ongoing developments provide ample proof that statements alone will not stop Israel's settlement drive.

Serious practical measures are necessary to compel Israel once and for all to cease its colonization of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, to abide by its legal obligations, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and to truly commit to the pursuit of peace. In that regard, the matters of Jerusalem and the settlements are of direct relevance to this Security Council, which is charged with the maintenance of peace and security, for they are issues that directly bear on whether or not we can have peace in our region.

It is high time that the international community confront that challenge, shoring up the necessary political will to uphold international law, the Charter and United Nations resolutions, and to demand and compel Israel's compliance with them, as is demanded of all Member States. We reiterate the need for collective practical measures, and it is imperative that the Security Council effectively shoulder its responsibilities in that regard. That will dramatically alter the situation on the ground, creating the proper conditions to propel us to a new phase that will bring an end to this prolonged and tragic conflict and usher in an era of peace, security and coexistence.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): At the outset, I wish to express the condolences of the people and Government of Israel to the people and Government of Haiti, as well as to the United Nations community and to all those who lost family, friends and colleagues in the recent tragic earthquake. Israel is humbled to have provided its assistance to the global relief effort, and grieves for those who were lost and those who suffer in that catastrophe.

We are gathered here for yet another debate on the situation in the Middle East, as we are with regular frequency. While the work of the Council remains important, I wish to ask if we engage with equal frequency on other pressing global matters. I wish to ask if brief briefings — such as we have just heard from the Secretariat, partial and, unfortunately, unbalanced — serve our joint mission to advance on the road to peace. I wish to ask if such meetings can promote peace.

The Council should hear more about both sides of the conflict, where both sides have rights but all sides also have obligations. History shows that nothing substitutes for negotiations between the parties. That was the road to peace in our region — the road of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin, the road of Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein. Peace then was the result of direct negotiations between the parties, not of meetings of this Council, important as it is.

The only way towards peace is that we, Israelis and Palestinians, engage in serious and honest bilateral negotiations to settle the issues that divide us. I reiterate here a message that my Government has stated again and again: Israel is prepared to immediately commence direct peace negotiations.

To that end, Israel instituted an unprecedented policy of restraint throughout the settlements of the West Bank. That measure is the latest demonstration that Israel is prepared to take difficult steps for peace. We should ask the Palestinian Observer why the Authority that he represents refrains from accepting our outstretched hand to negotiate an historic peace.

In the past year, given the improving security situation across the West Bank, Israel helped facilitate considerable economic progress and growth. In that unique environment, Israel calls upon the Palestinian Authority leadership to recognize the possibility of peace and to return to the negotiating table. In that respect, Israel salutes the relentless efforts of the United States Administration and of Special Envoy Senator George Mitchell to help facilitate the relaunching of peace negotiations.

In a region where threats are many, the international community should confront the real challenges to peace and security, namely, the threat of extremism, the danger of nuclear proliferation and the plague of weapons smuggling and terrorism.

In the Gaza Strip, the terrorist Hamas regime continues to hold hostage Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, in contravention of his most basic rights. Hamas fails to acknowledge previous agreements. It fails to reject violence and it fails to recognize Israel.

Less than a week ago, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal proudly announced that Hamas "will never recognize the Zionist entity". Hamas continues to smuggle large quantities of weapons into Gaza. Earlier this month 20 mortars and rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel, including a Katyusha rocket that landed south of Ashkelon, a city with a population of over 100,000 Israeli citizens.

Where are the concerned voices for peace in the face of such hatred, such smuggling and such attacks? Unfortunately, this silence is all too familiar when Israeli civilians are under terrorist attack. So let me state here clearly, as I have stated in numerous letters of complaint to the Secretary-General and to this Council, that the firing of any weapons from Gaza at Israeli territory will be met with a strong and immediate response.

In Lebanon, on 26 December 2009, near Al-Khiyam, south of the Litani River and only one kilometre from the Israeli-Lebanese border, the world witnessed the discovery of nearly 300 kilograms of sophisticated explosives, planted in close proximity to civilian infrastructure. That event, along with the explosions in Tayr Fils and Khirbat Salim in 2009, highlights the dangerous pattern; Hizbullah remains active in southern Lebanon. Such manifest violations of resolutions 1701 (2006) merit serious attention and must be addressed in future reports of this Council.

In the face of those challenges, I extend Israel's gratitude to the positive role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, in particular its outgoing Commander, General Graziano. I wish the new Commander, General Asarta, much success.

Terrorism in our region is fuelled by the flow of illegal arms. Such weapon smuggling — or should I say transfer — reflects a menacing pattern by two particular Member States that use terrorist proxies to sow violence and endless bloodshed. The continued supplying of arms to Hizbullah across the Syrian-Lebanese border is a gross violation of the arms embargo, as well as of other Security Council resolutions. Israel calls upon the Security Council and the international community to remain actively seized of those matters in United Nations debates, reports and documents, for the Governments that fuel terrorism in our region represent not merely

an Israeli problem, not merely a Middle Eastern problem. They represent a global problem.

In the face of such global threats, the international community has the responsibility to support those who act responsibly and to isolate those who do not. Governments and other forces must act boldly and seize the window of opportunity before us. In doing so, we will uphold values that lead to peace, justice and reconciliation.

I wish to conclude on a separate, most solemn note. Today marks the sixty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps. Today, we remember and honour those who struggled, those who perished and those who survived the unmatched evil of the Holocaust. As the international community reflects on the lessons of the attempt to destroy an entire nation, we must pass the torch of remembrance to generations to come. That is not only our responsibility to the past. It is our responsibility to the future.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco, for his briefing on the situation in the region, which contained precise and balanced assessments of recent developments in the Middle East. Priority attention should now, as in the past, be devoted to the issue of relaunching Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, whose path has long been obstructed by a number of obstacles.

The moment dialogue ceases, diplomatic activity withers and other, highly alarming factors take over that often lead to serious upheavals in that part of the world. We therefore advocate a new start in consultations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government.

However, in order to achieve this objective, the parties must scrupulously discharge their commitments under the Road Map, first and foremost the cessation of Israeli settlement activity, including natural growth, in the occupied Palestinian territory. The settlement issue, although under the Road Map not a precondition for the resumption of negotiations, has become a genuine barrier to Israeli-Palestinian understanding, given the objective development of events.

For that reason, the Secretary-General, the Russia and a great number of our partners, including within the Quartet, have expressed their deep concern regarding the decision of the Jerusalem Municipal Planning and Construction Committee to build new settlements and facilities in the occupied part of the city. Equally alarming is the fact that settlers are openly modifying the status quo in the historical part of Jerusalem near the holy sites of three world religions, creating a source of ongoing tension. All parties need to refrain from any step that might prejudice the outcome of future negotiations on the final status of the occupied territory.

Lasting peace cannot be achieved without resolving the problem of Gaza and the complete lifting of the blockade along its entire perimeter. Similar steps are urgently needed to address the ongoing humanitarian disaster under which Gaza's inhabitants live.

The lack of progress in the settlement process and the continuing pause in negotiations do not, regrettably, make it possible for us to announce the dates for the Moscow conference on the Middle East. At the same time, the need to convene that forum has been confirmed directly by the concerned parties, our Quartet partners and the entire international community. We are therefore pursuing preparations for the conference in cooperation with a broad circle of partners. We believe that close agreement on steps to provide international assistance for the peace process is important. The Russian Federation proposes to organize, in February in Moscow, a ministerial-level meeting of the Quartet to discuss possible opportunities to overcome the crisis in the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. It will also serve as an important step on the path to organizing the Moscow conference.

Collective efforts, including within the format of the Quartet, are currently of fundamental importance to extricating the regional peace process from its impasse. The lack of unity within the Palestinian and Israeli societies on the prospects for settlement of the Middle East conflict complicates the international community's diplomatic efforts in that respect. A clear priority is restoring intra-Palestinian unity towards the signing of an agreement on reconciliation between leading Palestinian factions, elaborated with Cairo's assistance. We support Egypt's efforts, which are playing a key role towards resolving the problem.

The Russian Federation is pursuing its contacts with Hamas, and within that framework continues to seek to convince the leaders of that movement to transcend any consideration not conducive to achieving the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Of course, we work with all Palestinian sides, firmly convinced that without Palestinian unity based on platform of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Arab Peace Initiative, under the leading role of Mahmoud Abbas, the legitimate head of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO, it will be very difficult to achieve a final status for the Palestinians. At their meeting in Sochi on 26 January, President Medvedev of the Russian Federation held a thorough discussion with President Abu Mazen on the entire spectrum of issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

We are devoting special attention to developing bilateral Russian-Palestinian cooperation in the context of important economic projects and cultural, humanitarian and educational links. Palestinians are regularly educated in Russia, paid for by Government grants. Palestinian Authority security bodies are staffed with individuals trained in Moscow. We affirm our solidarity with the Palestinian people and their yearning for their own State. We will leave no stone unturned in order to assist, together with other members of the international community, in achieving a settlement in the Middle East, mindful, of course, of the fact that a final settlement must be comprehensive and include the Syrian and Lebanese fronts.

Concerning Lebanon, we welcome the existing positive momentum of developments in its internal domestic situation, which resulted from the patient dialogue among all Lebanese parties aimed at seeking consensus. This approach is in line with the objective of strengthening the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Lebanese State.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his sober and realistic briefing this morning.

Peace in the Middle East is a key objective of the United Kingdom, the European Union and the international community as a whole. We want to see an end to suffering on both sides, but it is also crucial because it resonates around the world and often stands as a symbol of the international community's failure to act, feeding resentment, fostering hatred and encouraging extremists.

Over a year after the Gaza conflict, meaningful peace negotiations must restart as soon as possible if hope is to take the place of continued frustration. We continue to fully support the efforts of the United States Administration, and especially Senator George Mitchell, to bring the parties to the negotiating table. We hope that his current efforts will lead to early progress. Recent tensions in and around Jerusalem only remind us of the consequences of failure, and we call on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions which prejudice long-term agreed solutions.

The alternative to progress is not the status quo; it is further deterioration and violence. The parties should recognize that a comprehensive peace can be achieved only through meaningful negotiations, and take all the steps necessary to enter into those negotiations. The United States is not and should not be alone in this task. The other members of the Quartet are also playing an important role. The European Union stands ready to contribute both politically and practically to a final settlement. Active Arab engagement, building on the important Arab Peace Initiative, can play a crucial role in creating an atmosphere in the region that is conducive to peace.

Both Israel and the Palestinians must redouble their efforts and avoid a hardening of positions and provocative actions. The parameters of peace are well-known: two States with an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State based on 1967 borders, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, Jerusalem as the capital for both States, and a just settlement for refugees. Such an agreement is the only sustainable way to meet the national aspirations of the two peoples. If a lasting peace is to be achieved, a way must be found for Jerusalem to be shared as the capital of both States.

With this in mind, and while we recognize the recent moratorium on some building in West Bank settlements, we remain extremely concerned by announcements last month by the Israeli authorities of plans for further settlement expansion in East Jerusalem. These settlements are illegal. They prejudice negotiations and are counterproductive as far as Israel's security is concerned and are therefore an obstacle to peace. We call on Israel to stop creating new facts on the ground, which can only make a negotiated peace deal harder to achieve.

As for the Palestinians, a well-functioning State is an essential element of any future settlement. Therefore we support the ambitious two-year plan to develop the institutions of a Palestinian State and to prepare for statehood. The United Kingdom will continue to provide strong political and financial support for those efforts, which are delivering real change on the streets of West Bank towns. We encourage others to do the same. The prospects for statehood are undimmed by divided Palestinian leadership, so we urge Hamas to unite behind the legitimate Palestinian Authority.

In Gaza, the outlook is dire. We remain deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation there. Although, as Mr. Fernandez-Taranco has reported, there has been a slight easing of restrictions on certain goods — notably glass — continued restrictions are having a damaging impact on the lives of people in Gaza. The United Kingdom is providing practical support to alleviate their humanitarian suffering, but there can be no real improvement as long as there remain restrictions on the flow into Gaza of materials essential for reconstruction.

We have heard here today that there has yet to be a satisfactory Israeli response to the United Nations attempts to restart long-standing reconstruction proposals. We urge Israel to remove restrictions on the import of humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials, as required by Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which this Council adopted over a year ago. Failure to do so merely encourages increased traffic through the tunnels, provides funding to Hamas, makes the task of detecting and curbing the flow of weapons more difficult and generates greater anger, resentment and, ultimately, radicalization of Gazans. The combination of a more radical population and an increased likelihood of an inflow of illicit weapons will inevitably lead to violence. We believe it is in Israel's own security interests to ease

these restrictions.

But Hamas also bears a heavy responsibility for the situation of innocent Gazans. Hamas must release Gilad Shalit immediately and renounce once and for all its use of violence. That includes an immediate end to indiscriminate and — as the Assistant Secretary-General has said — increasing rocket attacks that threaten the people of southern Israel, as well as the means by which those rockets are supplied.

As we have stated before, achieving peace in the Middle East is a difficult and daunting task, but there exists right now a precious opportunity to secure that peace. The United States Administration is actively pursuing a settlement. There is broad international convergence on the parameters of a settlement, and the two leaders claim to want a negotiated settlement. We understand the pressures of domestic politics on both sides, which can lead to entrenched positions and make resuming and finalizing negotiations difficult. But the current favourable international context will not last forever, and the alternative to a two-State solution is continuing conflict and suffering. Now is the time for leaders on both sides to rise above domestic politics and make the difficult choices, sacrifices and compromises that are required to secure an historic peace agreement.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, for his presentation. I also thank the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

I will begin with some words on Lebanon. We welcome the establishment of the new Lebanese Government, which began its work after presidential declaration adopted in December. The visit to France by Mr. Saad Hariri, President of the Lebanese Council, accompanied by several ministers, was an opportunity for the French authorities to express their support for bolstering the Lebanese State and its institutions, for implementing the reforms that the country needs and for continuing the implementation of United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

We believe that Mr. Hariri's visit to Syria is also a step in the right direction. The normalization of relations between the two countries is an opportunity for the region, and we hope it will continue and that it will go all the way. I am thinking in particular of the demarcation of the border between the two countries, in conformity with Security Council resolutions.

Resolution 1701 (2006) must be fully implemented. In that regard, contacts between the United Nations and the Israeli authorities should continue on the question of Ghajar. We believe a withdrawal would contribute to the easing of tensions in that sector.

I move now to the Israeli-Palestinian dossier, and I wish to bring out four points.

First, our objective is clearly the relaunching of the peace process. There is no other option but a return to negotiation, aimed at the creation of a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian State living side by side with Israel with secure and recognized borders based on Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. That is also the position of the European Union, as the head of that delegation will state in his remarks, with which France associates itself.

The international community should commit itself to participating in the negotiations between the two parties and to guaranteeing the parameters of a final accord that will allow both parties to re-engage. We resolutely support the efforts being undertaken by the United States. The European Union is ready to play its full role, and we will call on the Arab States to associate themselves with those efforts.

The second point is the need for progress on the ground. As those who spoke before me have stressed, settlements remain a major obstacle on the road to a solution. The decision of the Israeli Government to announce a 10-month moratorium on new settlements and on new building permits in the West Bank is a step in the right direction. However, no peace will be possible without a complete cessation of construction in the settlements, including in East Jerusalem. They are illegal. As the President of the Republic has recalled, settlements make the prospects for a Palestinian State more difficult, and they do not contribute to Israeli security; on the contrary, they increase the dangers.

In that context, with regard to Jerusalem, all forms of provocation should be avoided. We call on the Israeli authorities in particular to cease the destruction of homes and other evictions in East Jerusalem. There cannot be a peace that excludes Jerusalem, which — as President Sarkozy said in his statement to the Knesset on 23 June 2008 — is destined to become the capital of two States.

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, should continue with its efforts to bolster the security sector and to implement the rule of law. Continuing the fight against terrorism, without mercy, should remain a priority.

Thirdly, beyond humanitarian matters that continue to be of concern to us, to forget Gaza would be a political mistake. We call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), including with the immediate lifting of the blockade — which hits the territory hard with regard to humanitarian aid, commercial goods and the movement of people — but also with a halt to the illegal arms trafficking in Gaza. We regret that the State of Israel continues not to allow the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009).

We also call for the immediate release of Corporal Gilad Shalit, a matter that France follows with the greatest attention.

With regard to the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), I recall the consistent position of France. International humanitarian law must be respected in all places, in all circumstances and by all parties to a conflict. That applies equally in Gaza and in southern Israel. In that regard, I recall how important it is for both parties to carry out an independent inquiry process consistent with international standards, regarding alleged violations of international humanitarian law and human rights during the Gaza crisis.

Fourthly, and finally, the international community should provide strong support to the Palestinian Authority and Mr. Mahmoud Abbas with a view to strengthening the institutions of the future Palestinian State. It is also for Israel to play its role with far greater resolve. Gestures have been made on the ground, but these remain insufficient. The Palestinians must be able to perceive that developments on the ground are moving towards an end to the occupation, including in the areas of freedom of movement and access. Here, financial support for the Palestinian Authority is an essential element which has political implications.

Yesterday evening the French Minister for Foreign Affairs chaired another meeting to follow up the international Donors Conference for the Palestinian State, which was held in Paris in December 2007. Following the Paris Conference, \$5.2 billion was allocated to the Palestinian Authority. France attaches particular importance to the fulfilment of these commitments. Participants in yesterday's Paris meeting included Mr. Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian Prime Minister; Ms. Catherine Ashton, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; Mr. Tony Blair, Quartet Special Representative; and the Norwegian and Egyptian Ministers for Foreign Affairs. The Palestinian Prime Minister's plan, which we support, was much discussed at the meeting. That plan falls within the framework of the Paris Conference, whose outcome would be the establishment of a Palestinian State.

I repeat: our principal objective is the urgent resumption of negotiations. This involves the Israelis and the Palestinians, but we must not forget the other regional tracks of the peace process. In that regard, we are also working to create conditions conducive to a return to talks between Syria and Israel.

The international community and the Security Council have an important role to play, because the situation in the Middle East concerns us all. France is ready to fully play its role in this effort. That is why President Sarkozy has proposed a peace summit, which would support United States efforts and would support the resumption of peace negotiations; it would be prepared in consultation with all relevant actors.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): First of all, I too wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his useful presentation.

We fully support the ongoing international efforts to reactivate the Middle East peace process, and we are contributing to them. Meaningful negotiations covering all core issues, leading to a comprehensive settlement, should start without further delay. However, we sadly observe that there are still certain issues blocking the way. We need to eliminate the remaining obstacles on the way to peace and to put our focus on confidence-building.

In that respect, I wish to emphasize, first, the current pattern of demolition of Palestinian homes, eviction of Palestinian families and revocation of residency rights of Palestinians of Jerusalem, which is unacceptable and undermines trust between the parties. Last year set an all-time record for the number of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem who were stripped of residency rights. In 2008, the number of Palestinians whose residency was revoked was 21 times the average of the previous 40 years. Such numbers are quite striking and give a clear idea about the scope of the current practices.

The international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem. The core issues include the status of Jerusalem, and this should be settled in such a way that Jerusalem can emerge as the capital of two States living side by side in peace and security. In the meantime, many faiths meet in Jerusalem and hold the city sacred. Jerusalem reflects our common cultural heritage and unites us in our values. Therefore, the importance of preserving the demographic composition, character and status of Jerusalem, as well as its cultural and religious fabric, is great. Any unilateral act on the nature of Jerusalem can easily have much broader ramifications.

We call on Israel to put an end to the pattern of forced evictions and house demolitions imposed upon Palestinians, to refrain from any provocative action in the city and to preserve the status of Jerusalem, as required by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories are of great concern and illegal under international law. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 446 (1979) and 452 (1979), as well as the Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, require Israel to withdraw from territories occupied since 1967. It is difficult to see how any agreement can be reached while the settlements continue to grow. Therefore, Israel must go beyond moratoriums which are very limited in scope as well as in time frame and meet its commitments in full. All settlement activities including "natural growth" must be ceased completely and permanently, and outposts

erected since 2001 must be dismantled. Otherwise, it will not be possible to clear the way towards a peace based on the two-State solution.

One year after the Israeli operation, more than 1.4 million Palestinian men, women and children are still trapped in the Gaza Strip. Their daily lives in a tiny area are marked by power shortages, little or no running water and deteriorating health care. Mass unemployment, extreme poverty and food insecurity are steadily worsening due to the impact of the continuing blockade. The blockade prohibits exports and restricts the entry of basic goods, including food and fuel. Although Israel has announced that it would allow glass to be transported into Gaza, with other essential construction materials barred by Israel, the people in Gaza are unable to rebuild their shattered lives. More than 20,000 people displaced from their homes still live in tents or other rudimentary housing.

This cannot go on. The incomparable suffering of the people of Gaza must come to an end. Resolution 1860 (2009) must be implemented. The rebuilding of Gaza must start. The pledges made by the international community in Sharm el-Sheikh last March should be transformed into actual reconstruction. The human rights and well-being of the Palestinians in Gaza must be ensured. Unless the crossings to Gaza are fully open and there is an absolute return to normal daily life in Gaza, building confidence and making progress towards peace will be extremely difficult.

In the Middle East, we are yet again at a crossroads. The stakes are high. The framework for a negotiated settlement has already been laid out in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Within that framework, we have to move forward and overcome the current stalemate.

At this critical stage, there is no alternative but to focus on the political process, eliminate obstacles, renounce violence and push forward with determination for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Otherwise, as the Secretary-General has put it, we risk sliding backwards. That is a possibility that no one can afford. **Mr. Salam** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing.

A year has passed since the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009), which called for a cessation of Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip. Yet Israel continues to tighten the noose around Gaza. More than a year after the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009), Israel continues to subject the inhabitants of Gaza to collective punishment. Indeed, Israel has neither opened the crossing points nor authorized reconstruction activities. In addition, it is limiting movement in and out of Gaza, thus depriving the inhabitants of their right to a decent life, work, water, food and medicine.

Israel's policy is a flagrant violation of not only the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009), but also of the principles and provisions of international law and international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and The Hague regime. Israel has turned Gaza into one big prison and continues, through its illegitimate ambitions, to suppress the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to just and lasting peace and security in the region. These aspirations have been reflected in a great many Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

There are countless examples of this, and at a time when my Government is striving to implement all of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), Israel continues to violate Lebanon's sovereignty on an almost daily basis, by ground, air and sea. It continues to occupy the north part of the village of Ghajar, the Kfar Shouba hills and the Shaba'a farms. It also refuses to provide maps of the mines and cluster bombs that it has laid in my country. Israel continues to refuse to implement resolution 497 (1981) and to fully withdraw from the Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967. It also continues to seek to change the legal and physical status of the Golan by establishing and expanding its settlements there.

What is taking place in Palestine is even worse. Israel is trying to delude the world into believing that it wants to return to peace negotiations without any preconditions. At the same time, it is attempting to distract the international community by announcing what it calls a freeze on settlement activities for 10 months, to conceal its continued settlement policy in the West Bank, in particular in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, claims that he is ready to resume negotiations without preconditions. At the same time, he prejudges their outcome by sticking to what he considers to be constants, thus undermining the very basis of negotiations as such. On the future of the West Bank settlements, he declared on 24 January: "Our message is clear: we are planting here, we will stay here, we will build here. This place will be an inseparable part of the State of Israel forever".

With respect to the borders, he declared on 20 January that Israel will have to maintain a security presence along the eastern side of any possible future Palestinian State. This is in addition to his previous statements rejecting the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their land, his commitment to the concept of Jerusalem as the sole capital of Israel, and his insistent demands that Palestinians and Arabs in general recognize the Jewish nature of the State of Israel, with all that these demands imply for the right of return of the refugees and the threat that they represent to the future of Arabs in that State.

By his reasoning, these are not prerequisites or preconditions, even though he refers to preconditions when Palestinians demand a comprehensive end to the settlement policy. During negotiations on the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, he justifies his settlement policy by what he calls natural growth.

The figures here will enable us to understand Netanyahu's position. Since 1991, the start of what we today call the peace process, the number of settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has increased from 200,000 to close to 500,000. Under the cover of the peace process, the number of settlers has doubled because Israel refuses to abide by calls for an end to settlement activity.

Even worse is what is happening in East Jerusalem, which Netanyahu would like to keep off the table so as to enable Israel to continue the policy it has adopted since its occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. This is a policy aimed at dismembering the city, confiscating land and property, establishing settlements, destroying houses and imposing restrictions on the inhabitants of the city in order to smother its Arab identity. Israel is clearly escalating its policy aimed at stifling East Jerusalem and changing its demographic composition and its historic and cultural character. For example, in November 2009 the Israeli Government launched the construction of 900 new housing units in the settlement of Gilo and approved during the last week of December 2009 the building of 700 new housing units in the Har Homa settlement, which was built on Mount Abu Ghneim.

Israel is continuing its settlement projects in occupied East Jerusalem. In addition to the stepping up of its settlement activity, Israel has also heightened its restrictive policies against the inhabitants of East Jerusalem through the continued destruction of houses in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and al-Bustan, limitations on building permits for Palestinians and the confiscation of residency permits from around 5,000 of the city's inhabitants. It continues to impose restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of faith and belief through the restrictions imposed on Muslims during Friday prayers in the Al-Aqsa mosque. The same is true of the restrictions imposed on Christians in Jerusalem at Christmas, which deprive them of the joy of celebrating Christmas in their church. Is it acceptable to prevent worshippers from entering the holy sites without an Israeli permit? This is in addition to Israeli excavations under the Al-Aqsa mosque, which threaten its foundations.

The very least that can be said about these practices is that they are a blatant challenge to international law, international humanitarian law, the United Nations Charter and dozens of resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly. All those resolutions state that occupied East Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory. All of these Israeli practices and changes to the nature of the city are null and void and are without legitimacy or legality. Furthermore, these acts carried out in East Jerusalem threaten the prospects of achieving a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since without East Jerusalem there is no viable, contiguous Palestinian State, and no historic, religious, cultural meaning or importance for the Palestinian people or Arabs in general. Jerusalem is, as we say and sing, the flower of all cities. Jerusalem is not just a monument of stone or a group of hills. Jerusalem is a spiritual map. It is the path of those who have risen to heaven. It is the very symbol of international law. What the occupation accomplishes is to violate that law. It is a violation of the multiple dimensions of the city and the narrative of tolerance that it contains. That is the reason behind Lebanese President Sleiman's 12 November 2008 address to the General Assembly, speaking of dialogue among cultures, when he said that

"... Jerusalem, the city of peace, where believers in the monotheistic religions come together, would not realize its historic mission unless the injustice imposed on its sons and on the Palestinian people as a whole is redressed and the occupation is ended." (*A/63/PV.46, p. 16*)

The path towards peace is well known. It has been charted by Security Council resolutions. All we ask is that the Council fully assume its responsibilities and work to implement those resolutions.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): Advancing the cause of comprehensive peace in the Middle East remains one of the most important foreign policy endeavours of the United States. Our commitment to this goal is unwavering. Only through negotiations can this objective be realized — an approach that we strongly encourage the international community to support. The immediate resumption of negotiations towards a two-State solution is the only realistic way forward. It is in the interests not only of the United States, but of Israelis, Palestinians and all of the region's people. We call on all members of the Council to underscore that message publicly and with the parties.

Waiting to resume talks benefits no one. The status quo does nothing to meet the legitimate needs of Israelis or Palestinians. As Secretary of State Clinton has said, we believe that, through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree on an outcome that ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable State based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps, and the Israeli goal of a Jewish State with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments.

Despite the difficulties and the complex political circumstances in the region, we are committed to relaunching negotiations and to the cause of comprehensive

peace in the Middle East. National Security Adviser James Jones and Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell both conducted talks in the region this month. Senator Mitchell also travelled to Europe to consult with the Quartet and other key partners. High-level Egyptian and Jordanian delegations made helpful visits to Washington.

With the Israelis and the Palestinians, we have consistently pursued a two-pronged approach: first, to encourage the parties to enter into negotiations to reach agreement on all permanent-status issues and, secondly, to help the Palestinians build the economy and the institutions that will be necessary when a Palestinian State is established. The two objectives are mutually reinforcing. Each is essential, and neither can be attained without the other. Special Envoy Mitchell will be following up with the parties in the coming days, and he will return to the region in the near future.

The Quartet has long called on all parties to uphold their Road Map obligations. A freeze on settlement activity is an Israeli obligation under the Road Map, and United States policy on this remains unchanged. We do not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. That said, we also believe that the settlement moratorium recently declared by the Israeli Government is a significant step that could have a meaningful effect on the ground.

United States policy on Jerusalem also remains unchanged. The status of Jerusalem, and all other permanent status issues, should be resolved through negotiations. We disagree with some Israeli actions in Jerusalem affecting Palestinians in areas such as housing, including the continuing pattern of evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes. Neither party should take actions that could unilaterally pre-empt, or appear to pre-empt, negotiations.

The United States recognizes that Jerusalem is a deeply important issue for Israelis and Palestinians, and for Jews, Muslims and Christians around the world. We believe that, through good-faith negotiations, the parties can agree to an outcome that realizes the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem and safeguards its status for people around the world.

We call on the Palestinian Authority to fulfil its Road Map obligations to ensure security, reform its institutions of governance and refrain from any acts of incitement. In that regard, we express our strong concern that a Palestinian Authority official recently attended a ceremony commemorating a terrorist who was responsible for an attack that claimed the lives of many Israeli civilians.

We were pleased to see the letter from the Secretary-General (S/2010/39) reporting that his staff continue to work constructively with the Government of Israel on issues related to the Gaza Board of Inquiry, as well as to note that the financial issues have been resolved in a matter satisfactory to the Secretary-General. At the same time, we call on Israel to reopen its border crossings with Gaza, with appropriate monitoring to address security concerns. That would allow for greater movement of people and humanitarian and reconstruction materials — consistent with resolution 1860 (2009) and the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access — thus alleviating the hardship and stress that civilians in Gaza face.

Hamas has yet to accept the principles established by the Quartet that are the building blocks of an independent Palestinian State: renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and accepting previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. Nor has it shown a greater interest in building a future for the Palestinian people than in its own hateful rhetoric and violence. We are also concerned about Hamas interference with international efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance in Gaza, continued arms smuggling and the launch of terrorist rocket attacks against Israel — which, it is important to recall, precipitated the Gaza conflict just over a year ago. We call for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit, who was abducted by Hamas and held since 2006.

A key component of international support for the Palestinian people comes through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We thank Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd for her devoted service to UNRWA over the past nine years and we welcome the appointment of Filippo Grandi of Italy to that post. We also welcome the appointment of Margot Ellis of the United States as UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General.

The United States is UNRWA's largest single donor. In 2009 we provided more than \$267 million, including more than \$116 million to the General Fund. Unfortunately, the Fund still faces severe and chronic shortfalls, which are estimated at \$140 million for this year. We appreciate the efforts of donors that have provided sizable emergency support, but there is no substitute for predictable annual contributions to the General Fund. As such, we welcome the renewed commitment of the Arab League, whose members have pledged collectively to provide UNRWA with no less than 7.8 per cent of its General Fund. It is imperative that those pledges be delivered.

Let me conclude by turning briefly to the situation in Lebanon. We thank General Claudio Graziano for his service with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and we welcome General Alberto Asarta Cuevas, who begins his new assignment tomorrow. We also recall the important contribution that all troop-contributing countries are making to this vital effort. We call upon all parties to fulfil the provisions of the Security Council's resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006).

Mr. Lukwiya (Uganda): I thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

The peace process in the Middle East is at a delicate and critical juncture. The situation remains tense. It is therefore critical that the parties resume negotiations without delay. We commend the international and regional efforts that have been undertaken to restart the negotiations. We call on the parties to embark on negotiations with a view to achieving comprehensive peace based on the vision of two democratic States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

We are encouraged by the continued efforts of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank to fulfil its obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the sectors of security and economic development. We remain deeply concerned about the continued construction of settlements and settler violence in the occupied territory. We note the announcement by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in November 2009 of a 10-month freeze on new housing projects in the West Bank. This is a positive step. However, we call for a complete freeze on all settlement activity, including natural growth.

We are concerned about the recent firing of rockets by Hamas into Israel and the air strikes by Israel into Gaza during the reporting period. We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid further escalation. This is yet another reminder of the need for a permanent ceasefire, as envisioned in resolution 1860 (2009).

We commend Egypt and others for the role they have continued to play in promoting intra-Palestinian dialogue. We call on all Palestinians to resolve their differences within the framework of the intra-Palestinian dialogue in order to achieve unity.

We remain concerned by the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza. However, we welcome the recent opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza by Israel to allow some exports to leave, humanitarian goods to be transferred and some building materials to enter. However, we think that this is not enough. We call for the complete lifting of the blockade on Gaza in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

We are encouraged by the peaceful political situation in Lebanon during the reporting period. My delegation is concerned, however, about the incidents that continue to occur, which are likely to heighten tensions in the region. We call on all parties to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006).

Finally, the heightened tensions in the Middle East and the lack of progress in the peace process are reminders that the Security Council should remain fully seized of and engaged in support of these processes. Uganda, for its part, will continue to support the efforts of all parties to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, as envisioned in relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his very comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Our debate falls on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. We pay homage to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and reiterate our commitment to continuing to prevent and fight anti-semitism and all forms of racism, xenophobia and discrimination wherever they may occur.

Recent weeks have seen the one-year anniversary of the adoption of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), which are directly linked to the situation in the Middle East. Those two resolutions remain fully relevant today, the first because it reiterates the fundamental principles of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and the second because it sets the parameters for the ceasefire and unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance to the civilian population affected by the Israeli military offensive in Gaza in late December 2008.

Today, a year after their adoption and the end of Operation Cast Lead, we regret the non-compliance with the provisions of those resolutions and that the situation in the Middle East continues to deteriorate, endangering the peace process as a whole. The picture that the Assistant Secretary-General painted in his briefing is not encouraging, but it should prompt us to redouble our efforts to persuade Israel and the Palestinian Authority to return to peace negotiations as soon as possible. That is the Security Council's responsibility.

The objective is known to all and crystal clear. We must achieve a comprehensive and definitive solution to the conflict in the Middle East that reaffirms the recognition of Israel's right to exist and allows the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State living in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, pursuant to the resolutions of the Security Council, the Road Map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The responsibility for resuming the peace process falls squarely and exclusively to the will and commitment of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The international community, for its part, has the task and responsibility of facilitating that process in order to ensure a just and lasting peace in the region. We therefore appreciate the efforts of United States Special Envoy Mitchell and his tenacity in laying the groundwork for dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

We also reiterate our support for the Quartet and call on it to pursue its efforts to establish conditions conducive to a resumption of negotiations as soon as possible.

To that end, it is crucial that both parties comply with the principles of the Road Map, which are the bases for the resolution of all outstanding matters in the conflict. We praise the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to meet its commitments in the areas of security and economic development in the West Bank. As we have heard from the Assistant Secretary-General, those efforts have begun to bear fruit. We take further note of the positive economic and humanitarian impact of the Israeli initiative to partially lift the restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods in the West Bank. We hope that these actions are definitive and lead to the complete and irreversible dismantling of all checkpoints, which is essential to the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State.

We are convinced that improved living conditions for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority's effective control over security in the West Bank are critical to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East. Nevertheless, that will not be possible if Israeli settlement activity continues. Therefore we once again call on Israel to stop that practice as soon as possible, including the so-called natural growth, and to refrain from taking actions that may incite violence in East Jerusalem and that undermine hope of any negotiated solution. The demolition of houses, the evictions and the expansion of settlements in the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem, violate international law and represent a serious obstacle to the peace process.

We take note of the initiative of Prime Minister Netanyahu to partially restrict the building of new settlements in the West Bank in order to promote the resumption of peace talks. That initiative is novel and cannot be ignored. However, that moratorium does not include East Jerusalem, public buildings or construction that is already underway, and so contravenes the Road Map principles.

In the current context we think that it is particularly important that Israel and the Palestinian Authority refrain from any type of action or statement that might erode the trust necessary to renew the process of negotiations based on the agreements and commitments that have previously been made between the parties. The definitive solution to the conflict also requires a concretization of the inter-Palestinian reconciliation that has been carried out with the help of Egypt. We lament the lack of progress in that matter, and we call on all parties not to abandon dialogue but rather to invest the political capital necessary for reaching the necessary agreements.

As I said at the outset, this month marks a year since the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) — in the negotiation of which my delegation actively participated — and of the unilateral cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip. Despite that, the situation of the civilian population in Gaza continues to deteriorate, and the blockade that impedes access to humanitarian aid has not been lifted. Now that winter has begun, it is of vital importance that the border crossings be opened in order to avoid a humanitarian disaster and to initiate reconstruction.

The Gaza blockade fosters the illicit trafficking of materials, fuel and food and opens the door to the illicit trafficking of weapons, endangering the security of the entire region. Proof of that has been the increase of rocket attacks against the Israeli civilian population, which in turn have led to new military responses, in a vicious circle. We condemn those acts of violence, especially those targeting civilian populations, and we once again urge all actors to respect at all times the provisions of international humanitarian law.

We are particularly concerned about a renewed spiral of violence that could have devastating effects on civilian populations. The international community should do all that it can to stop that as soon as possible. We therefore emphasize the need to establish an international monitoring mechanism that insures a lasting ceasefire, the opening of border crossings and the control of illicit arms trafficking. We support all initiatives aimed at establishing such a mechanism, including that suggested by the Secretary-General. We await the next report from the Secretary-General regarding violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights committed during the Gaza conflict.

Peace requires not just a renewed dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Efforts towards regional peace must also continue. We welcome the formation of the new Government in Lebanon and the commitment by President Sleiman and by Prime Minister Hariri and his Government to continue reinforcing the process of national reconciliation and to comply with the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions. Lebanon's participation as an elected member of this Council reaffirms that commitment.

That is why we call on both Lebanon and Israel, and on all actors involved, to meet the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), particularly bearing in mind recent incidents that must be investigated. We are convinced that that will strengthen the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon.

We also welcome progress being made in the process of normalizing diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria as a positive step of benefit to the region. We express our hope that Israel and Syria will again take up the process of indirect talks, which will make it possible to begin to resolve the pending matters and promote trust and security for both States.

Finally, Mexico, through its participation in the Security Council and also in other multilateral and bilateral forums, will continue to promote all efforts aimed at the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Mr. President, I congratulate you for holding this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We very much value the participation of the wider membership in the consideration of such an important issue. I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their remarks.

Over a year has passed since the end of the Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip, and the humanitarian situation remains a source of grave concern to all of us. Access to basic goods and services is grossly insufficient. The lack of building materials continues to prevent much-needed reconstruction, despite the recent permission for some glass to enter the Strip. Palestinians are therefore still forced to live in conditions that are simply intolerable. That must come to an end without further delay.

More than a year has passed since resolution 1860 (2009) was adopted, and the blockade has not been lifted yet. Israeli security concerns can and must be reconciled with the suspension of the blockade of Gaza. In fact, it has been argued here that Israeli security stands to gain from the lifting of the blockade, and we certainly believe so.

Another unresolved issue related to the war in Gaza is accountability. There continues to be a need for credible and independent investigations, in line with standard international practice, on the disturbing findings contained in the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48). We look forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of the investigations, as requested by the General Assembly. We note the payment made by Israel for compensation for the losses sustained by the United Nations during the Gaza conflict. It is disturbing and regrettable that serious incidents of this sort have taken place, and they must not happen again.

More than a year after the end of the military operations in Gaza, it is not only the humanitarian situation that is untenable. The paralysis of the peace process has also gone on for too long and risks leading to further deterioration of the political landscape. An independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders, is long overdue.

Our challenge now is to find a way forward that will enable both parties to resume serious and result-oriented negotiations as soon as possible. My delegation understands that intense efforts are under way to create the conditions for the process to resume. The parties have the obligation to avoid any action that might jeopardize such efforts. Attempts by Israel to artificially create faits accomplis on the ground and change the demographics of the West Bank and East Jerusalem are especially unhelpful. The revocation of Palestinian residency rights, evictions and house demolitions are not acceptable. Settlement activities, including so-called natural growth, are illegal and must cease.

Palestinians should also do their part. Overcoming their divisions, keeping extremists in check and enhancing democratic governance is essential. Based on past experience, my delegation believes that future negotiations should allow for the necessary engagement of the international community. We must all remain engaged and provide the diplomatic support needed to sustain the peace process. Brazil reiterates its support for holding a comprehensive international conference on the Middle East, once conditions are appropriate.

The further involvement of relevant players from outside the region may prove beneficial. In November, in the first state visit by an Israeli President to Brazil in 40 years, President Shimon Peres met with President Lula in Brasilia. A few days later, President Mahmoud Abbas also paid an official visit to Brazil. President Lula is scheduled to visit Israel, Jordan and Palestine in March in order to follow up on bilateral discussions in a number of areas.

As we all know, there will be no peace in the Middle East without a Palestinian State, the parameters of which are well known. Its establishment is in the interests of Israelis, Palestinians, the region and the international community as a whole. We must all help the parties to translate such common interests into a politically sustainable negotiating process without further delay, with a view to reaching a peace agreement at the earliest possible time.

We welcome the formation late last year of a Government of National Unity in Lebanon. That was a vital step towards consolidating a stable, inclusive and democratic State in that country, and a very positive development for peace in the region.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): Austria would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their presence and contributions to our debate. Austria aligns itself with the statement to be made by the acting head of the European Union delegation on behalf of the European Union.

Austria is gravely concerned that peace talks remain deadlocked despite the ongoing efforts, in particular those of the United States administration, to bring the parties back to the negotiation table. We urge the parties to overcome the current standstill, which plays into the hands of violent extremists rather than leaders who embrace peaceful and democratic ways to achieve the legitimate aspirations of their peoples. An independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living in peace and security with the State of Israel, is the realization of such Palestinian aspirations, a key contribution to stability and peace in the wider region, and the best long-term guarantee for Israel's security.

Negotiations to achieve this two-State solution must be urgently resumed. Such negotiations should be pursued under an agreed time frame, respect previous agreements and undertakings, and tackle all final status issues, including borders and security, settlements, Jerusalem, refugees and water. A genuine peace requires the parties to find a way, through negotiations, to ensure the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. To restore their faith in the negotiation process, Palestinians need to see an end to illegal activities that create obstacles to the viability of their future State, such as the construction of settlements and the separation barrier on occupied land in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, house demolitions and evictions.

We have taken note of Israel's decision on a partial and temporary settlement freeze. This can be seen as a first step in the right direction. However, ongoing settlement construction, the inclusion of settlements in the National Priority Area programme, and the most recent endorsement of the construction of almost 700 new settlement units in East Jerusalem put into question Israel's overall readiness to seriously and comprehensively negotiate the settlement issue. We therefore call on the Government of Israel to immediately end all settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, including natural growth, and to dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001.

We strongly encourage the Palestinian Authority's efforts to build the infrastructure and institutions of a future State that will provide opportunities, justice and security for its citizens, and address the legitimate security needs of its Israeli neighbours. Austria, both bilaterally and within the overall efforts of the European Union, will continue to assist Palestinian State-building. Normal economic activity is key to funding these efforts. We welcome steps taken by Israel to ease some of the restrictions; these have contributed to economic growth. We look to Israel for decisive reinforcement of the removal of obstacles to movement and access in the West Bank. Every job created through improved freedom of movement contributes to sustainable peace and security for all.

One year after the end of the military operations of Israel in Gaza, it is highly disconcerting to note that the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) is still overdue. As delivery levels of basic commodities remain far below needs, Austria once again urges the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza.

We recognize the right of Israeli citizens to live free from fear and from indiscriminate attacks emanating from Gaza. And, of course, we also recognize the right of the Government of Israel to protect its population against such violent attacks. At the same time, we, like others, believe that what is still a de facto blockade is not the right instrument to achieve this goal, that it cannot be justified in view of existing obligations under international humanitarian law, and that it leads to unacceptable humanitarian consequences.

We wish to underline the continued need for thorough and credible investigations of all allegations of grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in relation to the Gaza conflict. There must be accountability and an effective remedy for victims of such violations. We expect all parties to cooperate with the Secretary-General as he prepares his report to the General Assembly on their investigation efforts.

In connection with this wider issue of addressing the legacy of the Gaza conflict, we note with satisfaction that Israel has recently agreed to make a payment of \$10.5 million to the United Nations in respect of the losses sustained by the Organization during the incidents that were investigated by the United Nations Board of Inquiry. We appreciate the constructive engagement of Israel in this process and hope that Israel will also consider such steps in similar cases. However, as the United Nations has rightly pointed out, providing these financial means will not of itself repair the damaged buildings and facilities. We therefore join the United Nations in its call for the unhindered and expedited passage to Gaza necessary to facilitate effective reconstruction.

In view of the recent tensions between Lebanon and Israel, Austria reiterates its call on all parties to comply fully with resolution 1701 (2006). We call on Israel to halt violations of Lebanese air space and urge the parties to avoid any rhetoric or acts that could endanger the current cessation of hostilities. In view of the discovery of explosives by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon near Al-Khiam, we also wish to underline the importance of efforts to ensure that the area south of the Litani River is kept free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons.

In conclusion, we wish to underline the shared responsibility of all parties, as well as all partners in the region and in the international community, to transform the unsustainable status quo of what can, at this stage, only be called a situation of fragile calm into a comprehensive and durable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which also requires decisive steps towards a settlement between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.

Austria, together with its European Union partners, stands ready to support concrete and early results on the path towards a comprehensive peace.

Mr. Okuda (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing.

We very much regret that we have yet to see the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Arab parties, including the Palestinians, despite international efforts, especially those of the United States, to resume negotiations. There seems to be only little progress on many issues that we take up with regards to the peace process. We are concerned that the longer the negotiation is not resumed, the more precarious the situation will become.

Japan would like to emphasize that we must not be discouraged from making efforts to revive the peace process and to encourage the parties to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace through negotiations. We believe that the people in the region have already suffered enough. We must endeavour to resume the negotiations, as there is no way to achieve peace other than through sincere negotiations between the parties.

We reiterate our call on both parties to carry out their obligations and commitments under the Road Map. In that regard, we consider the decision of the Government of Israel to suspend new settlement construction for 10 months as a step in the right direction. However, Japan reiterates its call on the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activities, including natural growth, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The status of Jerusalem is one of the core issues of final status negotiations, and we call on Israel to refrain from taking any actions that will prejudice the outcome of such a negotiation.

We encourage the Palestinian Authority to continue in its efforts to improve the security situation, which will contribute to carrying out its commitment to ending violence and terrorism. We also strongly support the Palestinian Authority's two-year plan to build institutions that will support a future Palestinian State. That effort is essential if a future Palestinian State is to be viable.

On Gaza, we call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) in all its aspects. One year after the end of Operation Cast Lead, it is unacceptable that the blockade, which has created a serious humanitarian situation in Gaza, remains. We call on Israel to improve the movement of goods and people, and to cooperate with the relevant United Nations agencies. We take note of the Secretary-General's letter to the President of the Security Council on the follow-up to the Board of Inquiry into incidents in Gaza (S/2009/250). We expect that the continued dialogue will improve cooperation on the ground between the United Nations and the Government of Israel. We are also concerned about the rockets that continue to be fired into southern Israel and call on all who are responsible to immediately stop such actions, which could precipitate a far graver situation.

Palestinian unity under President Abbas is important to enable the Palestinian people to seek a negotiated solution with one voice, and we reiterate our support for the Egyptian effort to achieve Palestinian reconciliation.

Japan strongly supports the international efforts, especially those of the United States, to revive the peace process. Japan will welcome any action by Arab States that will help to create an environment conducive to reviving the peace process. Japan, for its part, will continue to work with both parties and to encourage them to take politically difficult but necessary steps for the resumption of the peace process. Japan will also continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian people to improve the humanitarian situation and to assist the Palestinian Authority in its effort to build the institutions and viable economy necessary for a future independent State.

Mr. Vukašinić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): I would first like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, Ms. Gabriela Shalev, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour, for their presence and contribution to our debate.

The Security Council is meeting at a time when new risks are emerging in the Middle East. These risks can potentially jeopardize the efforts of the various players focusing on enhancing the peace processes in the region. However, as has been said so many times before, while negotiation processes are crucial, lasting peace in the Middle East is urgently needed.

Therefore, at the outset, Bosnia and Herzegovina calls for the urgent resumption of negotiations that will lead, within an agreed time frame, to a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

In the wake of the first anniversary of military operations in the Gaza Strip, allow me to emphasize our grave concerns regarding the living conditions in that area. It is discouraging that, despite the international community's calls, no progress has been made in Gaza in the past year.

Bosnia and Herzegovina urges that all possible steps be taken to ease restrictions of movement in Gaza. We call for the further sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for access to humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. We believe in the necessity of fully implementing the Agreement on Movement and Access. Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns all violations of international humanitarian law and emphasizes that the Israeli and Palestinian civilian populations must be protected.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is deeply concerned over the decision on the new settlement activities of Israel in occupied East Jerusalem. Settlements on occupied land are illegal under international law. The demolition of homes and expulsions in East Jerusalem represent a grave obstacle to the peace process. Therefore, we join the numerous calls of the international community for Israel's settlement activities to be brought to an immediate halt. We fully support United Nations activities aimed at diffusing the tensions and call on all sides to show restraint.

Bosnia and Herzegovina considers that securing lasting peace and stability in the Middle East region is possible only through diplomatic efforts and full commitment to the peace process. Hence, we urge that both the Israelis and the Palestinians immediately start unconditionally to implement their obligations, stipulated by the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the Road Map and the agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. In that context, we would also like to commend the efforts of the Quartet, the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League, as well as other international factors seeking to contribute to the peace process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina considers that the regional context is of great importance. A comprehensive peace in the Middle East must include a settlement between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.

The political progress made in Lebanon since the new Government was formed late last year is commendable. Bosnia and Herzegovina welcome the efforts of the Lebanese Government in the field of political, social and economic development.

Regarding the Syrian track, we welcome the willingness demonstrated by Israel and Syria to advance the peace process. As a part of our strong commitment to comprehensive regional peace and stability, we fully support all efforts aimed at reactivation of the talks between the two countries.

In conclusion, Bosnia and Herzegovina reiterates the urgency with which Israelis and Palestinians must resume the peace negotiations. Such negotiations are of utmost significance for progress towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Issoze-Ngondet (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, for having organized this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Furthermore, I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for the clarity of his briefing and the enlightening information he provided to the Council. Of course I thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

As you are aware, Sir, the multiple crises in the Middle East, more specifically the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, have for many years polarized the attention of the international community. For many reasons, that region of the world has become a strategic area and now seems in large part to determine the future of global security. It is unfortunate to note that despite the many efforts made towards peace and stability in that region, all types of frustrations and humiliations continue to undermine the effectiveness of any prospect for peace and development.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no exception to that sad assessment. Indeed, negotiations on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process are again at a major impasse. More than two years after the international donors conference held in December 2007, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains very worrying, particularly because of the blockade of Gaza. In resolution 1860 (2009), adopted 8 January 2009, the Security Council called for the lifting of that measure in order to allow humanitarian aid and commercial goods into Gaza without hindrance and to allow individuals to move about freely.

We must also respond to Israel's legitimate security concerns by taking drastic measures to prevent the entry of illicit arms into Gaza and to halt the firing of rockets on Israeli civilians.

Gabon hopes for the rapid resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for a genuine and lasting peace based on respect for the principles agreed by the parties and on implementation of the rules of international law. In other words, we support the vision of a Palestinian State coexisting with the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, in conformity with the Road Map adopted in 2003 and relevant Security Council resolutions.

To revitalize that perspective, my country invites the Quartet to step up its efforts in order to lead the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resume dialogue in good faith. We strongly back France's initiatives aimed at achieving that goal and at promoting peace in the region. We also support the efforts of the United States and Russia directed at both parties with a view to a durable negotiated settlement of the conflict.

The creation of a Palestinian State is an unavoidable step to make the peace process successful. To that end, the international community should increase the aid afforded the Palestinian Authority to assist it in its programme to strengthen the institutions of a future State. We urge the United Nations to continue to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, basing its efforts on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), as well as on existing agreements and a number of peace initiatives.

My country also pays tribute to the good offices of Egypt and all the other countries participating in the Arab Peace Initiative with a view to a political settlement of the conflict and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. As the futures of Israel and Palestine are closely intertwined, only frank, ongoing, direct dialogue between the two parties will make possible lasting solutions to the conflict.

Mrs. Ogburn (Nigeria): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his insightful and comprehensive briefing. Our thanks go to the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their very useful statements.

It is a matter of great concern that despite years of engagement and efforts by the international community to find a lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East crisis, including the Palestine question, the problem remains intractable. Today, not only is the peace process deadlocked; tensions are rising in East Jerusalem and violence is reported in Gaza. The prospects for the resumption of peace talks are further hindered by the political uncertainty in Palestine, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, arms smuggling into Jerusalem and, more importantly, by settlement activities.

It is within this framework of daunting challenges that we welcome the positive developments enumerated by the Assistant Secretary-General in his statement. In particular we note the payment of \$10.5 million by the Israeli Government to the United Nations in respect of losses sustained by the United Nations last year during Operation Cast Lead.

We also welcome the efforts of the United States through its Special Envoy, Senator George Mitchell, to restart substantial peace talks in the region. In the same vein, we appreciate other initiatives, including the Middle East Quartet, the intra-Palestinian talks brokered by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the Arab Peace Initiative. Indeed, the decision by Prime Minister Netanyahu to suspend settlement activities for 10 months provides a window of opportunity that we must seize.

Nigeria remains firmly committed to the Middle East peace process, particularly the aspiration to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. We reaffirm our support for a two-State solution with both Israel and Palestine living side by side within secure and recognized borders and respect for the agreed borders of 1967. We know that progress requires achievement of core benchmarks encompassing peace talks, settlements, the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory and the issue of access to and movement in Gaza.

It is evident that following Operation Cast Lead, the political will of both parties to come together for negotiations is visibly lacking. Despair must now give way to optimism and concrete, credible engagement. We therefore join other delegations in calling for the urgent resumption of the peace talks as a means of building confidence between the parties. The need to move forward with the political process in order to consolidate the gains of past efforts has never been so critical.

As speakers before me have stressed this morning, freezing settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is critical to the resumption of dialogue and to the entire peace process. We therefore reiterate our call on Israel to adopt all possible measures to stop settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including natural growth.

On the abject humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, we encourage Israel to remove the obstacles to access and to facilitate the movement of people and goods into the Gaza Strip, consistent with the Agreement on Movement and Access. The inhabitants of the territory, especially women and children, are dependent on aid as their means of livelihood, whereas they should be engaged in gainful economic activities. Immediate steps must be taken to alleviate suffering. We encourage Israel to allow the recommencement of the stalled United Nations projects and other donor projects in the area.

The human rights violations committed by both sides during Operation Cast Lead have also not been adequately addressed. We therefore call on both sides to conduct credible domestic investigations into the many reported allegations.

We also call on Palestine to continue its unrelenting efforts to set up a functioning State structure and to strengthen its security capacity in order to address the incessant arms smuggling and other threats to Israel. We believe that an intensified intra-Palestinian dialogue will lead to domestic peace and security.

As the world commemorates International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, we wish to echo the ideals for which the United Nations stands and to call for a concerted effort to rekindle the spirit of collective existence, as enshrined in the Charter, in order to save the people of the Middle

East — and indeed the whole world — from the scourge of war.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

We are deeply concerned over the stalemate in the Middle East peace process and the bleak prospects for resumption of the peace talks. We hope the parties concerned will strengthen their belief in the peace talks, overcome the difficulties and interruptions, create favourable conditions for an early resumption of the peace talks. Israel should freeze all settlement activity and cease the building of the separation wall. Israel should also refrain from moves that do not contribute to resumption of the peace talks on the issue of East Jerusalem.

The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains a serious challenge. The parties concerned should earnestly implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and renounce violence against civilians. We urge Israel to open all the border crossings to Gaza and ensure that the region achieves reconstruction as soon as possible and that its people can return to normal life.

Internal reconciliation in Palestine is of critical importance. We hope all factions in Palestine will bear in mind the long-term interests of the nation and will work together to strive for the success of the Middle East peace process. We support the efforts made by Egypt in this regard.

The international community should redouble its efforts to push for all parties to build the momentum for negotiations. We hope the Quartet will play a bigger role in facilitating the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. We also hope the Security Council will contribute more significantly to the Middle East peace process.

China supports the achievement of the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of land for peace and the Road Map. China will continue to make constructive contributions, along with the rest of the international community, to the achievement of the two-State solution and comprehensive, just and lasting peace and development in the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, acting head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Serrano: Let me start, Mr. President, by thanking you for inviting the European Union (EU), in its capacity as a Quartet member, to participate in this open debate. The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro and Serbia and the European Free Trade Association country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

We have listened carefully to the presentations and statements just made. The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a central political and strategic objective for the European Union. On the occasion of the first Foreign Affairs Council meeting, in December 2009, following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, EU Foreign Ministers discussed in depth the current situation in the Middle East and the way forward. During this discussion the following points were emphasized.

A resumption of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, now absent for more than a year, is of utmost urgency. These negotiations, however, must be focussed and result-oriented. The negotiations must respect international law as well as previous agreements and understandings. They must include all final-status issues, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees, security and water, and must lead, within an agreed time frame, to a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

The European Union will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties. The European Union supports the ongoing efforts of the United States towards a resumption of negotiations, which are closely coordinated among Quartet partners.

The European Union stands ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements aimed at ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements. We appeal to others to join in this important task. In the meantime, the European Union continues its work as a key contributor to Palestinian State-building, in line with the Palestinian Authority's government plan. Our field missions and our work within the Quartet contribute to this. In this context, I would like to emphasize the efforts deployed by Quartet Special Envoy Tony Blair to promote Palestinian economic development and institutional governance of the future Palestinian State.

The European Union welcomes Israel's steps to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank, which have made a contribution to economic growth. Further and sustained improvements of movement and access have to follow. Many checkpoints and roadblocks remain in place. The Palestinian Authority, for its part, must build on its efforts to improve law and order.

The European Union took positive note of the decision of the Government of Israel on a partial and temporary settlement freeze. The European Union sees this as a first step in the right direction and hopes that it will contribute towards a resumption of meaningful negotiations. At the same time, the European Union reiterates that settlements and the separation barrier, wherever it is built on occupied land, as well as demolition of homes and evictions, are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. The European Union urges the Government of Israel to immediately end all settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank and including natural growth, and to dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001.

The European Union is particularly concerned about the situation in East Jerusalem and calls on the Israeli Government to stop all discriminatory treatment of Palestinians there. The European Union recalls that it has never recognised the annexation of East Jerusalem. If there is to be genuine peace, a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. The European Union calls for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem in accordance with the Road Map.

One year ago, the Gaza hostilities came to an end and the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009). However, the situation continues to be of grave concern. Full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) is urgent. The EU further emphasises the importance of appropriate and credible investigations into possible violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the parties to the conflict, in accordance with international standards. A continued policy of closures has deeply affected life in Gaza, has led to the devastation of its economy and is politically counterproductive. The European Union maintains its call for an immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of the crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. While extremists stand to gain from the current situation, the civilian population suffers.

The European Union is well aware of and fully recognizes Israel's legitimate security needs. Gaza must not be a platform for violence against Israel, and arms smuggling must stop. The European Union calls for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who has been held captive for more than three and a half years.

The separation of Gaza from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains a matter of serious concern. The EU therefore calls on all Palestinians to promote reconciliation behind President Abbas and to support the mediation efforts by Egypt and the Arab League, in order to prevent a lasting and detrimental division.

A comprehensive peace must include a settlement between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon. Concerning the Syrian track, the European Union sincerely hopes that the 2008 talks can soon be resumed and brought to a conclusion.

A comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict requires a regional approach, and the EU therefore calls on all regional actors to take confidence-building measures in order to stimulate mutual trust. An active Arab contribution, building on the Arab Peace Initiative, is of crucial importance. These views are shared among all Quartet partners.

Let me close by confirming the determination of the European Union to work with its partners in a reinvigorated Quartet to achieve the two-State solution. I would like to express the hope that this debate, held at the beginning of a new year and indeed a new decade, will mark the beginning of a political development that will finally lead to the solution of this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): As there are 24 more speakers on my list, I propose, with the consent of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting and resume at 3 p.m. sharp.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.

[*Continuation of the meeting:* 📄]

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.