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NEW PUSH FOR PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST 'HOLDS GENUINE PROMISE'.

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

B. Lynn Pascoe Says Much at Stake in Coming Months, United Effort Needed to Ensure Diplomacy Produces Something Meaningful, Durable

"A new push for peace in the Middle East is being made, and holds genuine promise," B. Lynn Pascoe, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the Security Council this morning.

In his monthly briefing to Council members on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, he said Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas continued their bilateral dialogue and had agreed to set up negotiating teams to assist them in transforming their discussions into an agreed text. United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in the region. The Quartet's representative, Tony Blair, had recently completed his second visit to the region to develop his agenda on economic revival and institutional reform.

He noted that the situation on the ground remained of deep concern. Violence among Palestinians had killed 11 and injured 95, including 8 children. In Gaza, Hamas had adopted increasingly repressive measures. In the West Bank, Palestinian Authority security forces had been arresting alleged Hamas members and had closed over 100 charities and non-governmental organizations. The continued division of the Occupied Palestinian Territory was a matter of deep political, security and socio-economic concern.

Violence between Israelis and Palestinian had also continued, he said. In the reporting period, 20 Palestinians had been killed and 89 injured, while 1 Israeli had been killed and 50 injured. He condemned the continued indiscriminate rocket fire by militants in Gaza. Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit remained in captivity. Yesterday, the Israeli Security Cabinet had declared Gaza an "enemy entity". Announced steps, such as interruption of electricity, if implemented, would violate Israel's obligations towards the civilian population under international humanitarian and human rights law. The 1.4 million people in Gaza should not be punished for the unacceptable actions of militants and extremists.

He said that earlier steps to build confidence and improve conditions on the ground in the West Bank had not been built upon in the reporting period. The release of Palestinian prisoners appeared to have been slowed down and obstacles to freedom of movement in the West Bank had not been eased. Settlement construction was continuing, contrary to international law and the [Road Map](#). Construction of the barrier deep within the West Bank continued, as well, contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. On 4 September, the Israeli High Court had ordered a section of the barrier rerouted as the Israeli army had been unable to make a security case for the planned route.

The Palestinian Authority was working to impose law and order, institute reform and good governance, and improve living conditions. On security, more needed to be done to build confidence among both Israelis and Palestinians that the Palestinian Authority security services would operate with professionalism and determination to prevail over militias. Further action was required to disarm militants Israel had agreed to remove from wanted lists.

With the resumption of Israeli transfers of Palestinian tax revenue, public sector salaries were being paid, he said. The Government had embarked on an integrated budgeting and planning approach, which would result in a Palestinian development and reform plan for 2009-2010.

He said a World Bank report had documented a comprehensive drop in socio-economic indicators throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and private-sector capability had declined, while chronic diseases and stunting from malnutrition had increased. The economy was becoming increasingly reliant on short-term aid rather than development.

To reverse these trends, he said, the report recommended full implementation of the November 2005 Agreement on Access and Movement, consolidation of the

rule of law in the Territory, and predictable delivery of aid through the Palestinian Authority, with the Gaza Strip incorporated into any recovery plan. In that context, the continued closure of Gaza was a source of deep concern, with \$200 million worth of United Nations and World Bank infrastructure programmes and many other goods unavailable. The acting Special Coordinator was helping to develop a proposal to increase access; he called on all concerned to assist that effort.

In regard to the regional situation, he said that many in the Arab League had stressed that any upcoming Israeli-Palestinian dialogue must be substantive. He also reported on Syria's complaint of a breach of airspace by the Israeli air force on 6 September, on which Israeli authorities had not commented. Regarding the assassination of Lebanese Member of Parliament Antoine Ghanem yesterday, he said that Lebanon's Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, had requested assistance from the International Independent Investigation Commission.

On the end of fighting around the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp, he paid tribute to the Lebanese forces involved, stressed the importance of the full control of Lebanon by its Government and urged Member States to assist the Government of Lebanon to meet the humanitarian and reconstruction challenges for Nahr el-Bared. In regard to elections, he said that it was paramount that they be held in accordance with the time frame and procedures stipulated in the Lebanese Constitution. The situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained calm, with cooperative activities conducted by the mission with the parties. The mission had observed 99 Israeli air violations of the Blue Line, however.

Finally, he said the upcoming meeting of the diplomatic Quartet this Sunday, followed by meetings with a number of members of the Arab League, would provide an opportunity to advance the cause of a comprehensive regional peace. These and other meetings in the coming days would only be as useful as the agreements and steps of implementation they help bring about, however. Much was at stake in the next few months. The united effort of the international community would be vital to ensuring that the renewed diplomatic effort produced something meaningful and durable. Calculated risks were required for peace. Now was the time for regional leaders to put their long-suffering people first, to think of the next generation and to do what needed to be done.

The meeting began at 10:15 a.m. and ended at 10:35 a.m.

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