



## Security Council SC/9457

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

Security Council  
5983<sup>rd</sup> Meeting (AM)

### **ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENTS, INTRANSIGENCE, LACK OF GOOD FAITH THREATENING ANNAPOLIS PROCESS, RISKING MIDDLE EAST PEACE, SAUDI ARABIA TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL**

#### **Palestinian Authority Says Impossible to Rationalize Talks amid Settlement Activity; Israel Says Attacks, Threats on Ground, Not Settlements, Impeding Peace**

Continued Israeli settlement activity threatened the Annapolis peace process, and Israel's intransigence and lack of good faith on the issue compounded the already difficult Middle East problem, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia told Security Council members, including 10 Foreign Ministers today, as it met at his request to consider the situation.

Saud Al-Faisal said the settlements were changing the demographics of the Palestinian territories and were clearly in contradiction to international agreements. They made it virtually impossible to establish a future Palestinian State or to convince Palestinians of the possibility of peace. Most Council members had issued unilateral statements opposing that activity, but it was time for a unified position on the issue, in order to save the peace process.

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Amre Moussa, added that, if, in the coming weeks, efforts to rescue the peace process did not succeed, the Arab nations would come to the Security Council for action. The Council was "owned" by the international community and could not shirk its responsibilities. "We shall no longer follow illusions or tolerate insults to our intelligence or self-respect," he stressed.

Calling for an end to the construction of settlements, Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, explained how Israel had built settlements in Palestinian territories since 1967, despite 10 Council resolutions condemning and prohibiting that activity and the first article of the [Road Map](#) that called for an end to the settlement policy. How could he rationalize continued negotiations to his people when the settlement activity continued? he asked. Palestinians were fulfilling their commitments to the greatest extent possible; Israelis correspondingly must stop their settlement activity.

The representative of Israel in turn wondered why previous speakers had failed to mention Hamas' missile attacks against Israel, among other things, or Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its support of Hizbullah and Hamas. Israel's settlements falsely appeared to be the principal obstacle to peace. Israel, however, remained committed to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and to a two-State solution and was prepared, if the conditions were ripe, to make painful concessions in the pursuit of peace.

"Let me also state clearly that settlements are not an obstacle to peace -- or should I say, it is not the settlements that are the obstacle to peace," she said, adding, "Yes, we understand the sensitivity of the issue of settlements in the eyes of our neighbours. Yes, there is also parallel sensitivity on our side, due to the historic bond of the Jewish people to this biblical land." However, settlements were not the principal issue. They were used as another instrument to bash Israel instead of addressing the realities on the ground. Progress began with genuine dialogue, with the release of Israeli hostage Corporal Gilad Shalit and an end to all terrorist attacks.

In the ensuing debate, Noer Hassan Wirajuda, Indonesia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, noted, however, that chances for achieving a two-State solution were diminishing with the doubling of Israeli settlements in the West Bank in 2007 and further plans for new construction in 2008. Israeli settlements seemed to have been aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Fourth Geneva Convention stated explicitly that an occupying Power should not transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory being occupied, and the United Nations Charter held it inadmissible to acquire territory by force.

France's Minister for Foreign Affairs Bernard Kouchner said that his country, along with the other member States of the European Union, took the position that the settlement activity was illegal and harmed the peace process, as well as the future viability of a Palestinian State. For France, there could be no peace without an immediate and unconditional end to settlement activity. At the same time, he called on the Palestinian Authority to work to end terrorism. He welcomed the reform of the Palestinian security services and hoped that recent developments in Gaza would result in progress and the release of the Israeli hostage. He

urged the two parties to take bold steps towards peace.

United States' Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stressed that the international community was obligated to speak loudly against terrorism and extremism in all its forms. The kind of language the United Nations had experienced this week when the President of Iran had said that a Member State should be wiped off the face of the Earth was unacceptable. The United States would ask the Council to convene again to take up the matter of one United Nations Member calling for the destruction of another.

The Annapolis process, she said, did not only expect political negotiations, but also progress on the ground, as well as the fulfilment of Road Map obligations by both Israel and the Palestinians. Regional States should consider ways to reach out to Israel, to demonstrate in words and deeds that a comprehensive solution required that Israel belonged in the Middle East and would remain there.

Gordan Jandroković, Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia, said that none of the Road Map obligations could be read as separate from the others. Both sides were making an effort to improve the situation on the ground; the downward slide of conditions in the West Bank had been halted. He urged continued donor support of Palestinian State-building, which concerned the Israeli interest in security as well. Now was a crucial time for the peace process, and it was of primary importance that the negotiations be encouraged.

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, South Africa, Italy, Costa Rica, the United Kingdom and Burkina Faso also took the floor, as did the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the representatives of Libya, Viet Nam, China and Panama.

The meeting, which started at 11:10 a.m., adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

### Background

The Security Council met today to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at the request of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia (document S/2008/615). It asked that the Council convene an urgent meeting at the ministerial level to address the issue of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.

### Statements

SAUD AL-FAISAL, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, said that continued Israeli settlement activity threatened the Annapolis peace process and the application of international law in the Middle East. The absence of good faith and intransigence by Israel on the settlement issue compounded the already difficult Middle East problem. The settlements were changing the demographics of the Palestinian territories and were clearly in contradiction to international agreements. They made it virtually impossible to establish a future Palestinian State or to convince Palestinians of the possibility of peace. Israel should cease all settlement activity immediately, including the issuance of permits.

He said that Arab States had made powerful pledges to come to a peace agreement, but they must question Israel's commitment to peace if it continued its settlement activity. Most Council members had issued unilateral statements opposing that activity, but it was time for a unified position on the issue, in order to save the peace process. The growing perception in the Arab world that there was a lack of seriousness on the Middle East peace process must be addressed. If nothing resulted from this meeting, he was determined to come back to the Council until there was action.

AMRE MOUSSA, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, said the situation in the occupied Arab territories had deteriorated because of the building of Israeli settlements. Two years ago, in September 2006, the members of the Arab League had come together with the goal of reviving the peace process. Meeting at the ministerial level, consensus had been recorded of reviving the peace process with the goal of establishing a viable Palestinian State on the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The occupation of Arab lands should be halted. That Arab initiative had led to reviving the peace process.

He said that Annapolis followed, with four objectives: establishment of a viable Palestinian State by the end of 2008; resumption of active negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians; a complete halt to settlement activities; and a comprehensive agreement that included all tracks, including the Syrian and Lebanese. Most of those objectives had not been attained, with only three months left in 2008. There was no evidence that a Palestinian State was within reach. Negotiations had produced no results, nothing had been approved and nothing was written. That confirmed the absence of political will on the Israeli side to accept the prospect of a viable Palestinian State on equal footing with Israel.

The continuation of that situation would have serious negative repercussions on the regional security and the prospects of an Israeli-Arab peace, he said. While the Palestinian and Israeli representatives were negotiating, the Israelis were building settlements and changing the landscape on the ground, rendering negotiations irrelevant. None of the commitments – the stopping of settlements, removal of outposts and lifting of roadblocks – had been honoured.

He said he had come to the Council today to underline that the settlements practices had reached the point of quashing any hope of a viable Palestinian State – the territory was threatened by violent settlers, costing territorial integrity and social and economic viability. Settlements were completely illegal. Unfortunately, Israeli policy had been allowed to continue because of the immunity it received. The current situation could only unleash violence and promote hatred.

The Arab community of nations continued to abide by the terms of the Arab initiative, he said, inviting the Israeli people to reconsider the Arab offer of peace. He called on the Israeli people to mobilize against the destructive settlements policy and to strive for peaceful coexistence. If, in the coming weeks, efforts to rescue the peace process did not succeed, the Arab nations would come to the Security Council for action. The Council was "owned" by the international community and could not shirk its responsibilities. "We shall no longer follow illusions or tolerate insults to our intelligence or self-respect."

MAHMOUD ABBAS, President of the Palestinian Authority, showing maps of the Middle East over time, said that, since 1967, Israel had built settlements in Palestinian territories despite 10 resolutions issued by the Council condemning and prohibiting that activity. There was also a resolution on Jerusalem itself in which construction of settlements was called an illegal act. Nothing had changed however. He showed, as an example, maps of three settlement blocks, which he said seemed to rule out a Palestinian State, dividing it into cantons, implying that the vision of United States President George W. Bush for two viable States would not come true. Settlements had an impact on many issues, such as water, borders and Jerusalem, and threatened the peace process itself.

He recalled that the first article of the Road Map called for an end to the settlement policy. Colonization continued unabated, however, and the same policy existed up to the banks of the Jordan River. How could he rationalize continued negotiations to his people when the settlement activity continued? Palestinians were fulfilling their commitments to the greatest extent possible; Israelis must correspondingly stop their settlement activity. Many outposts were even considered illegal by the Israeli Government, while many Governments appealed to the Israeli Government to stop their construction. Yet it continued.

All parties had agreed that no change must be made to towns around Jerusalem, yet changes were being made on the ground, he continued. The Israeli Government had blamed those changes on the Mayor of Jerusalem, but he asked how a Mayor could defy national policy. He wondered why Israel continued negotiations if it had no intention of stopping the settlement policy. Acts of aggression by settlers had taken place, with invasions of villages after their land was already under siege.

Palestinians, he said, had accepted many constrictions on its territories, but could no longer tolerate the continuing abuses and, if peace was not won, who knew what kind of violence lay ahead for the region and beyond. Palestinians were against all violence, but, if there was no success in attaining an authentic peace, he asked what could be done. The Security Council had the responsibility for peace and security in the region, and he urged it to fulfil that responsibility.

GABRIELASHALEV ( Israel ) said that, if a stranger were present, he would think that Israeli settlements were the primary obstacle to peace in the region. It would appear that Hamas' violent coup in Gaza and its missile attacks against Israel were not a problem. To that stranger, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its support of Hizbullah and Hamas would be irrelevant. Mysteriously, all previous speakers had failed to mention those facts. Israel's settlements, however, falsely appeared to be the principal issue. Israel, however, was no stranger to the realities on the ground and to the mutual attempts to try to reach a real solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute through mutual negotiations on the ground, not with words in the Council.

She said that Israel remained committed to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and to a two-State solution. Israel was willing to discuss all aspects related to the conflict and was prepared, if the conditions were ripe, to make painful concessions in the pursuit of peace. Israel desired peace. "Let me also state clearly that settlements are not an obstacle to peace – or should I say, it is not the settlements that are the obstacle to peace. Yes, we understand the sensitivity of the issue of settlements in the eyes of our neighbours. Yes, there is also parallel sensitivity on our side, due to the historic bond of the Jewish people to this biblical land." However, settlements were not the principal issue. They were used as another instrument to bash Israel instead of addressing the realities on the ground.

Any progress began with genuine dialogue, with the release of Israeli hostage Corporal Gilad Shalit and an end to all terrorist attacks, she said. It began by overcoming all threats to the realization of peace. While the peace process was essentially a bilateral one between the Palestinians and Israelis, the rest of the Arab world had an important role to play. The region could support the process by preparing the people of the region for the price of peace and teaching all the children of the Middle East the values of tolerance and the blessings of coexistence. The Arab world must condemn terrorism and incitements, and reject extremism, such as from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's toxic anti-Israel and anti-Semitic provocations.

"Israel understands its responsibilities for peace. Faced with today's Security Council discussion, we cannot but wonder, do you, Arab leaders, really understand your responsibilities?" she asked. Israel had demonstrated that settlements — no matter how sensitive an issue — were not the obstacle to peace when the conditions were ripe.

She said the Middle East was at a critical juncture and the moderate Arab States had two paths before them. One path was the road of excuses and false alibis. The other was one that created the foundations for a just and lasting peace. Today's meeting was coming dangerously close to choosing the first option. "What could be more symbolic, in further contrast to today's Security Council meeting, than the meeting that took place a short while ago in this very building, two floors below us between President Shimon Peres and President Mahmoud Abbas?" True progress was made through such bilateral meetings. It was the only way to achieve peace.

BERNARD KOUCHNER, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, said that today's meeting was important because of the acceleration of settlement activity since Annapolis. His country, along with the rest of the European Union, took the position that the settlement activity was illegal and harmed the peace process, as well as the future viability of a Palestinian State. For France, there could be no peace without an immediate and unconditional end to settlement activity.

At the same time, he maintained that recent messages of the Iranian President were unacceptable, and he called on the Palestinian Authority to work to end terrorism. He welcomed the reform of the Palestinian security services and hoped that recent developments in Gaza would result in progress and the release of the Israeli hostage. There could be no peace, however, without a Palestinian State that was viable, and he urged the Council to make its appropriate contribution to that vision. He urged the two parties to take bold steps towards peace, which his country would support.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE, Secretary of State of the United States, said her country, President Bush and herself had been very committed to the Annapolis process and to finding a lasting peace in the Middle East and securing the establishment of a Palestinian State. One year ago, there had been no peace process at all. Now, there was a viable, robust peace process with Israelis and Palestinians continuing negotiations. Noting the meeting earlier today between Presidents Peres and Abbas, as well as other meetings, she said the Quartet, the proper forum to have discussions on the issues, would meet today to discuss the Annapolis process.

She said the Annapolis process did not only expect political negotiations, but also progress on the ground, and the fulfilment of Road Map obligations by both Israel and the Palestinians. The international community also had obligations: to support the parties in their bilateral negotiations; to insist that all parties live up to their Road Map obligations; and to provide assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The United States recently had gone to extraordinary lengths to support the Palestinian Authority. Hopefully, the regional States would completely fulfil their pledges expeditiously so that the Palestinian Authority could meet its obligations to its people.

Regional States should consider ways to reach out to Israel, to demonstrate in words and deeds that a comprehensive solution required that Israel belonged in the Middle East and would remain there. The international community was obligated to speak loudly against terrorism and extremism in all its forms. The kind of language the United Nations had experienced this week when the President of Iran had said that a Member State should be wiped off the face of the Earth was unacceptable. The United States would ask the Council to convene again to take up the matter of a United Nations Member calling for the destruction of another.

NOER HASSAN WIRAJUDA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, said that Palestinian land claims had disintegrated as Israeli settlers kept encroaching further into their territory, making the achievement of a viable Palestinian State very difficult. Chances for achieving a two-State solution were diminishing with the doubling of Israeli settlements in the West Bank in 2007 and further plans for new construction in 2008.

Israeli settlements were a blatant violation of international law, he said. For example, the settlements seemed to have been aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which went against provisions of the Geneva Convention governing how occupiers should treat occupied areas. In addition, the Fourth Geneva Convention stated explicitly that an occupying Power should not transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory being occupied, and the United Nations Charter held it inadmissible to acquire territory by force.

He joined the Secretary-General and the Quartet in calling for Israel to end all settlement activity and to comply with Security Council resolutions and obligations under the Road Map, as agreed at Annapolis. He attached prime importance to the Council's role in responding to the settlement issue, and thought the Council could soon take steps to call on Israel to dismantle existing settlements in the near future, as it had done in 1980.

KAREL DE GUCHT, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, said that the long-standing position of the European Union, including of his country, was that settlement activity, in East Jerusalem and other areas, was illegal under international law and threatened the viability of the peace process. It was necessary for the Council to shoulder all its responsibilities in that area. Meetings on the topic should address the complete situation, however, and not just one problem area, and should include all topics, such as the role of Hamas and its allies, in the effort to improve progress towards peace.

In that effort, negotiations must continue, he said, but there also must be progress on the ground. Palestinians must continue to carry out their structural reform, and Israel must freeze settlement activity and lift restrictions on circulation in the West Bank. Cooperation between the two parties must also continue in all possible spheres. At the same time, the 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip must not be forgotten. He condemned Hamas' campaign to dominate the area, stressing that Palestinian self-government must be consolidated under President Abbas.

NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa, said that, after Annapolis, her country had thought that settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories would cease. Those settlements were illegal and changed the facts on the ground, and were a key obstacle to the peace process. She urged the Council to demand that Israel immediately and completely freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, in order not to change the facts on the ground and prejudice final status negotiations.

She continued to encourage both the Palestinians and the Israelis to persist with their negotiations to achieve an independent, economically viable State of Palestine, living side-by-side with Israel, with both States enjoying secure and internationally-recognized borders. She reiterated that the primary responsibility for peace and security lay with the two sides, while the Council should continue to do its part and not neglect the situation.

FRANCO FRATTINI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, said it was important that the last months of the year yielded some concrete achievements in the negotiations. The clock was unfortunately ticking against peace. Italy, together with other European States, would continue efforts to build on the Annapolis process. The security of Israel was non-negotiable and could only be guaranteed if a Palestinian State had solid institutions founded on the rule of law. It was also important for Arab countries to continue to provide robust political and economical support to President Abbas' efforts.

He said the current settlement policies did not seem to facilitate the process. Moderation was crucial to the peace process. While understanding Israel's sensitivity to the issue, he exhorted its leaders to reflect on the issue, to restore the international legality and to avoid undermining the credibility of Palestinian negotiators in the public opinion. The situation in the Gaza Strip could not be forgotten. The worsening of the humanitarian situation and the deterioration of respect for human rights was a great cause of concern. At the same time, the permanent threat posed by Hamas to Israel was not acceptable and Corporal Shalit should be freed.

Israel should be called on to make difficult decisions, he said. Leaders had publicly recognized that it was in that country's best interest to have a democratic Palestinian State. The final goal was peace between Israel and Palestine, but also with all other countries in the regions. On Lebanon, he welcomed the important achievements of recent months, but remained concerned at the resurgent violence. He hoped that commitments undertaken by Syria would be promptly implemented. He also believed that negotiations between Syria and Israel would contribute to stabilizing the area. Security in the Middle East was a top priority. In that regard, one should face the very serious threat posed everyday by Iran.

BRUNO STAGNO UGARTE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica, said that each new settlement presented another obstacle to peace. The Council and Israel should not ignore the broad consensus that existed opposing settlement activity. At the same time, his country did not ignore the other mutual commitments that must be fulfilled to progress in the peace process. Costa Rica had very early supported the establishment of two independent States, and the United States' partition plan had supported that, but other States had ruined that plan and must take responsibility.

Given that there were many obstacles to peace, he said he particularly objected to the statements of Iran, which had made progress less tenable. Meanwhile, however, Palestinians had continued to build the basic foundations of a State, which Costa Rica had decided to recognize this year. None of the parties had done everything necessary to end the conflict and each party must pay a price for peace, but that price was less than continuing the violence. There was much agreement in the region on the shape of a peace agreement, and he urged the parties to take action to bring the process to completion, by keeping their current commitments and coming to new agreements on remaining issues.

DAVID MILIBAND, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, said the central issue was that the Middle East peace process commanded legitimacy for all parties. The international community must demonstrate in word and deed that it contributed to the process. If the international community failed to show support, the chance for the two-State solution would become remote. The Annapolis process had shown the necessity of United States leadership for a settlement. He did not agree that the current process was worse than useless. There had been successes over the past nine months, such as progress on reform.

He said the responsibility of the international community was to reiterate support for the Annapolis process. The parties needed to stick to a process of compromises. Practical support by the international community was also necessary. In that regard, the United Kingdom was helping the Palestinian Authority in establishing its security sector. All parties must support prospects for peace.

Settlements were wrong and needed to be stopped, he said. Security was best supported by a secure Palestinian State. The arming of Hizbullah was a threat to the region. The comments of Iranian President Ahmadinejad were outrageous; that was no way to talk about another Member of the United Nations. He regretted that no agreement could be reached for this meeting to condemn his words. There was a real risk that, if the post-Annapolis progress was not sustained, there would be a setback. A new momentum must be forged. The peoples of the region could not live with another 50 years of conflict. They needed strong leadership that focused on the future, not on the past.

GORDAN JANDROKOMĆ, Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia, said that his country continued to be guided by the word "hope" in its approach to the Middle East. Further negotiation, and the necessary compromises, must be supported. He also recognized the need for tangible progress on the ground. The issue of settlements was a sensitive and difficult one and the subject of much attention between the actors and international partners. He hoped that progress would be made on that issue in the high-level meetings that were slated for the next few days.

He said that none of the Road Map obligations could be read as separate from the others, he said. Both sides were making an effort to improve the situation on the ground; the downward slide of conditions in the West Bank had been halted. He urged continued donor support of Palestinian State-building, which concerned the Israeli interest in security as well. Now was a crucial time for the peace process, and it was of primary importance that the negotiations be encouraged.

ALEXANDER SULTANOV, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Middle East Envoy of the Russian Federation, said the problem discussed today was the most sensitive one of the whole question. The approach to the problems should be determined by Security Council resolutions, including resolution 242 (1967). Settlement activities were illegal, and the restrictions on the movements of Palestinians were irritants in the Annapolis process. He recalled the joint understanding after Annapolis in which the parties had pledged to immediately comply with their obligations under the Road Map. That Map required freezing all settlement activities, including natural growth activities.

He said the parties should not take steps that would create new realities on the ground. The Palestinians also must fully comply with their obligations, especially in the security area. It was important to urge the sides to continue talks to settle final status problems, including the question of settlements. That was the goal the Russian Federation intended to pursue as a Quartet member and as a country.

GIADALLA ETTALHI (Libya) said he hesitated to take the floor because he remembered that the issue had been on the Council's agenda for almost six decades now, during which that body had adopted a series of resolutions, none of which had been implemented. The Council had often refrained from acting, despite the seriousness of developments. Perhaps a new phase had begun with this meeting, in which a group of States had been allowed to address the Council. Every time the Israelis began negotiations, settlement activity had increased, but they had increased in an unprecedented manner after the Annapolis talks. Israelis themselves reported as much.

He said that settlement activity not only impeded the peace process, but also sabotaged the very notion of an independent Palestinian State. In doing so, it severely threatened international peace and security. An Israeli report showed that the settlements impacted on Palestinian rights and was undertaken for

expansionist motives. Settlers attacked Palestinians daily. Those attacks had included the recent torching of olive groves and the infliction of numerous deaths and injuries. In addition, a system of apartheid had been created by the setting up of parallel judicial entities. He stressed that the settlement policy was a systematic one rooted in the belief that the Palestinian territories belonged to Israel, which was a dangerous notion.

LE LUONG MINH ( [Viet Nam](#) ) said his delegation shared the deep concerns voiced by both Council members and the Arab League in the ministerial meeting in Cairo regarding the illegal settlement activities undertaken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It was profoundly worrisome that Israel had nearly doubled its settlement construction in the occupied West Bank since 2007. His delegation associated itself with the position of the Non-Aligned Movement in the "Declaration on Palestine", which pointed to the illegality of Israel's construction and expansion of settlements, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

He said that Israel's continuation and expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories had not only posed a serious obstacle to the effective conduct of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks resumed after a years-long delay, but had also grossly violated the "land-for-peace" principle, one of the cornerstones of the Middle East peace process. He urged Israel to cease those illegal practices, including measures to change the status, character and demographic composition of East Jerusalem, and to fully respect and implement resolutions 446 (1979), 452 (1979) and 465 (1980), as well as relevant resolutions adopted by the Council on the issue of Israeli settlements. Israel's settlement activities only deepened the enmity and confrontation between Israel and the Palestinian people, thus failing to ensure Israel's long-term security interests.

LI KEXIN ( [China](#) ) said the Annapolis conference had provided a viable opportunity for peace in the Middle East, and the international community was waiting with ardent hope to see practical results. Over the past months, the leaders of Israel and Palestine had met on a regular basis. However, as had been noted in the Council last week, there was a huge gap in the negotiation process, and it was imperative for the political talks to produce tangible results.

He said the grave situation on the ground could not be neglected, as that situation provided the context for the negotiations and the subject to be addressed therein. The situation in Gaza had continued to worsen and the Palestinian people in the West Bank were facing many difficulties in their daily life. Israel had continued its construction of settlements. Not only was that a violation of its obligations, but they also impacted the peace talks and endangered the establishment of two States living side by side.

He urged Israel to respond positively to calls by the international community to freeze immediately all construction of settlements. The parties concerned should demonstrate their good will to implement their obligations under the Road Map and should not wait for the other one to take the first step. The Quartet meeting later today could help to accelerate the negotiation process.

RICARDO ALBERTO ARIAS ( [Panama](#) ) said he realized that the Middle East conflict was more complex than one issue, but he supported the call for an immediate halt of settlement activity in the Palestinian territories, as that was an obstacle to peace.

ALAIN BEDOUMA YODA, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of [Burkina Faso](#), reiterated the appeal for dialogue to accelerate progress towards the vision of two independent States, as desired by the international community. After Annapolis, political will was needed to successfully transform that desire into reality. There had been recent encouraging signs, but they were not enough to restore trust. The continuing threats to Israel were not helpful. Other regional initiatives had been valuable, and deserve the Council's support.

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