



Security Council SC/9563

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

Security Council
6061st Meeting (PM)

AS SECURITY COUNCIL MEETS ON GAZA, SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS FOR SWIFT CEASEFIRE

SAYS 'WE MUST MOVE FROM DEBATE TO ACTION, AND MUST DO SO IMMEDIATELY'

Palestinian Authority President Calls on Council to 'Save My People' in Gaza; Israel Says Hamas Not Interested in Making Peace – 'For Hamas, Peace Is the Enemy'

As the Security Council met on the crisis in Gaza today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for an immediate ceasefire, durable and respected by all sides, adding that the presence in the Council Chamber of the President of the Palestinian National Authority, as well as other leaders from around the world, was a reminder that "we must move from debate to action, and must do so immediately".

The Secretary-General told the Council that, according the Palestinian Ministry of Health and media sources, over 570 Palestinians had already been killed and over 2,700 injured. Israeli sources had confirmed the deaths of five soldiers and another 50 injured, in addition to four civilians killed and dozens injured in the more than 500 rocket attacks launched in the last 11 days.

He added that, as the conflict had escalated, he had repeatedly condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and the excessive use of force by Israel and had called for an immediate end to the violence. He had also warned that, if the appeals went unheeded, civilians would inevitably be killed in large numbers. Today, that was exactly what had happened at United Nations facilities in Gaza.

Three United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, set up for civilians to take refuge, had been hit by adjacent Israeli air strikes. The third strike, at a school in Jabalia refugee camp, had killed dozens of civilians. Such attacks were "totally unacceptable". Equally unacceptable were any actions by Hamas militants that endangered the Palestinian civilian population.

He said immediate humanitarian measures, including open crossings for humanitarian assistance, must be ensured. To that end, a viable international mechanism would be required. Gaza's enormous social relief and reconstruction needs must also be addressed. Palestinian unity and the reunification of Gaza with the West Bank were also urgent, as were negotiations for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, told the Council that the "Israeli machine" was continuing its 60-year-old campaign of rampant destruction, and he called on the international community and the Security Council to "save my people" in Gaza by pressing for an immediate and full cessation of Israeli aggression. Any procrastination at ending the fighting and killing would only deepen the tragedy of the past few days.

He said the choice for the Council was clear: it must show that the United Nations would not ignore the tragedy of the Palestinian people, nor would it leave the Middle East "a whirlpool of destruction during this new round of violence and hatred". The provision of effective and sufficient protection required the creation of an international force that would ensure peace and bring an end to the unjust siege that had afflicted Gaza for so long. Such a plan and force would also see the opening of all closed points of entry, in Israel, as well as Egypt. It should also ensure "an immediate and mutual ceasefire". Experience had proved that military aggression, no matter how massive, could not achieve a viable solution to differences and conflict.

Israel's representative said that for eight years the citizens of her country had suffered the trauma of almost daily missile attacks from Gaza. "No State would permit such attacks on its citizens. Nor should it," she said. However, the Hamas regime had no interest in peace and prosperity. "It is vehemently opposed to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians," she continued, adding that Hamas also rejected the Annapolis process. "For Hamas, peace is the enemy." Israel had agreed six months ago to an Egyptian-brokered "situation of calm". Hamas had violated that agreement on a daily basis, as over 350 rockets and mortar shells had been fired into Israel during that period. In the face of such terrorism, Israel had no choice.

She said Israel was not acting to gain territory or power, but to give its citizens a normal life. Some had called Israel's actions "indiscriminate", but Hamas' attacks over the past few weeks had been "very discriminate" – directed deliberately at innocent civilians, even targeting an Israeli school and kindergarten. The international community must stand unified against terrorism. Anything less would only embolden Hamas, lengthen the current round of the conflict and

accelerate the next, she said, adding: "It is not enough to speak of peace; we have to confront those who work to destroy it. For this reason, the current campaign is not an obstacle to peace, but a prerequisite for it."

At the outset of the debate, in which 14 ministers for foreign affairs participated, 8 of them from Arab countries, Bernard Kouchner, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, told delegates that his country's President, Nicolas Sarkozy, and the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, had announced a plan for a ceasefire.

Elaborating on that plan, Egypt's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, said the proposal, as outlined by Presidents Mubarak and Sarkozy, included: elements that called for Israel and Palestinian factions to accept an immediate ceasefire, so that aid would reach the civilians; Egypt's invitation to the Israelis and Palestinians for an urgent meeting to ensure that a similar conflict did not recur – discussions that would also consider the causes that led to the most recent conflict, including protecting the border, reopening crossing points and lifting the blockade; and Egypt's renewal of its invitation to the Palestinians for all factions to continue reconciliation talks.

The Secretary of the General People's committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of Libya, Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham, announced that his country had tabled a draft resolution on behalf of the Group of Arab States to be taken up by the Council.

Statements were also made by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, the Secretary of State of the United States, the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria, the Deputy Minister for foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar.

The representatives of Viet Nam, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Japan, Mexico, Uganda and China also took the floor, as did the Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

The meeting started at 5:20 p.m. and was suspended at 9 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met this evening to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Statements

Security Council President BERNARD KOUCHNER, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, also speaking in his national capacity, said that, during the current "grave" moment, the international community was mobilizing. There were hundreds of victims and thousands of wounded, including many civilians. His country was doing its utmost, so that violence would stop. After two days of discussions in the region, the President of France had managed to have the beginnings of negotiations for a ceasefire. A plan had been announced by President Mubarak of Egypt and the French President. The Israeli response was being awaited.

He said a halt to the violence was the immediate priority. His country had condemned the offensive against Gaza, as well as the launching of rockets, and had called for an immediate humanitarian truce. He repeated his appeal for a complete and immediate halt to the launching of rockets and to the Israeli attacks. Among the main elements of a ceasefire were: a permanent opening of crossings; a halt to the smuggling of arms into Gaza; and an international monitoring mechanism. It was essential to return to peace negotiations, working to a solution based on the Annapolis process and a viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel. Europe encouraged inter-Palestine reconciliation. The Council had an essential role to play, which must take into account the reality on the ground, in order to create a lasting ceasefire. He hoped for decisive action supporting Egyptian efforts, as well as of those of the League of Arab States and others.

United Nations Secretary-General BAN KI-MOON said that the presence of the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, as well as other high-level representatives, was a reminder that "we must move from debate to action, and must do so immediately". The Israeli military operation, with the stated purpose of bringing an end to rocket attacks by Hamas militants and a change in the security conditions in southern Israel, was in its eleventh day. Intensified attacks had caused damage and destruction to Hamas militant facilities and to public infrastructure, mosques, schools and homes. Rockets had continued to be fired at Israel by Hamas militants. Israeli troops had entered the Gaza Strip and there had been fierce clashes in heavily populated areas.

He said that, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health and media sources, over 570 Palestinians had already been killed and over 2,700 injured. Israeli sources had confirmed the deaths of five soldiers and another 50 injured, in addition to four civilians killed and dozens injured in the more than 500 rocket attacks launched in the last 11 days. He said he had repeatedly condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and the excessive use of force by Israel. He had called for an immediate end to the violence and had warned that, if those appeals went unheeded, civilians were inevitably going to continue to be killed in large numbers. That was exactly what had happened.

Three schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), set up by the United Nations as places of refuge for civilians, had been hit, he said. The third strike, at a school in Jabalia refugee camp, had killed dozens of civilians. Those attacks, which endangered United Nations facilities acting as places of refuge, were totally unacceptable and should not be repeated. Equally unacceptable were any actions by Hamas militants that endangered the Palestinian civilian population. "Today's events underscore the dangers inherent in the continuation and escalation of this conflict. I call once again for an immediate ceasefire."

In the midst of the fighting, he said, the civilian population of Gaza faced a humanitarian crisis. Entire families had perished, as well as United Nations staff and medical workers. Food and fuel supplies were insufficient. A quarter of a million people had no running water. The only answer was an end to the violence. "Whatever the rationale of the combatants, only an end to violence and a political way forward, could deliver long-term security and peace." He said he had been actively engaged with regional and world leaders, including President Bush of the United States, and Arab leaders, including President Mahmoud Abbas, who was recognized by the Organization as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. He intended to travel to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory next week, as well as to regional capitals. "But I do not believe we can wait until then to end the violence," he said. "We must achieve that now."

He said there must be an immediate ceasefire, durable and respected fully by all sides. Immediate humanitarian measures, including open crossings for humanitarian assistance, should be ensured. A viable international mechanism would be required to ensure that borders were properly functioning. That must include a plan to ensure that the crossings operated as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, and that smuggling from any direction was being addressed.

Gaza's enormous social relief and reconstruction needs must also be addressed, he said. To that end, a consolidated account of the current humanitarian needs had been issued and he urged all Member States to respond generously to that appeal. Palestinian unity and the reunification of Gaza with the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority were also urgent, as were negotiations for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "I hope that the Council will act swiftly and decisively to put this crisis to an end."

MAHMOUD ABBAS, President of the Palestinian National Authority, said that he had come to the Council bearing a message from a wounded people, who were suffering an unrelenting siege that disrespected human rights. The attacks on United Nations schools in Gaza today was a prime example of the tragedy of the

events in the region. Death was spreading in every village and every camp, even as the cries of mothers and children spread through Gaza. The "Israeli machine" was continuing its 60-year-old campaign of rampant destruction, he said, calling on the international community and the Security Council to "save my people" in Gaza by pressing for an immediate and full cessation of Israeli aggression.

"Let the cannons fall silent," so the voices of peace, dialogue and settlement might rise, he continued. Any procrastination at ending the fighting and killing would only deepen the tragedy of the past few days. Any delay would lead all the peoples of the region, especially youth, to believe that peace was only a mirage. The choice for the Council was clear: it must show that the United Nations would not ignore the tragedy of the Palestinian people nor would it leave the Middle East "a whirlpool of destruction during this new round of violence and hatred". The Palestinian people and the wider international community would accept nothing less of the Council than to immediately stop the violence and suffering.

He said that there was an urgent need to lay a firm foundation on which could be built a sustainable solution to the destructive problem. The provision of effective and sufficient protection required the creation of an international force that would ensure peace and bring an end to the unjust siege that had afflicted Gaza for so long. Such a plan and force would also see the opening of all closed points of entry, in Israel, as well as Egypt. It should also ensure "an immediate and mutual ceasefire". He supported the plan set out earlier today by Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Nicolas Sarkozy.

Enough suffering had been meted out by Israel. Indeed, the separation wall, the checkpoints, detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners must end. "Enough," he declared, stressing that the Palestinian people believed in and defended the policy of international legitimacy. The Council must put an end to Israel's "stranglehold on our future", he said. "We want no one's security threatened. We want no one to threaten ours," he said.

Continuing, he said that all elements of a normal life were being denied in Gaza. Indeed, how could any people survive being denied food, electricity, water and other vital necessities? Lifting the siege was non-negotiable and essential for peace to prevail. When the siege was lifted, he said, the Palestinians would work strenuously to overcome internal differences among Palestinian factions, in line with the resolutions adopted by the Arab League, which called for a broad national unity Government and dialogue. To that end, he appreciated the efforts of Egypt to promote national reconciliation among the Palestinian people. He added that Palestinians would not accept any plan that proposed to separate Gaza from Palestinian lands.

Finally, he praised the work of the United Nations, especially UNRWA, as well as other organizations working in the Occupied Territory to save the Palestinian people. He thanked all Arab and other friendly countries that had done likewise. He hoped such support would expand to contain the massive destruction in Gaza. Experience had proved that military aggression, no matter how massive, could not achieve a viable solution to differences and conflict. The Palestinian people would not kneel. They would accept nothing less than freedom and justice, like any other people.

He said the Palestinian Authority was committed to the political process, a balanced solution set on in the Arab peace plan, international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. He was aware that there were those who wished to abort the two-State solution, but the Palestinian Authority put its trust in the Council to prevent such efforts from taking hold. Any resolution adopted by the Security Council must include the need for the political process to continue under effective international supervision, towards the creation of a Palestinian State on the borders of 1967, and that all Palestinian detainees would be released. "Give [the Palestinian people] the peace they deserve today and put an end to genocide and destruction; don't let one more Palestinian mother cry for her children. Let my people live," he said.

GABRIELA SHALEV ([Israel](#)) said that for eight years the citizens of her country had suffered the trauma of almost daily missile attacks from Gaza. During that time, some 8,000 rockets and mortar shells had targeted Israeli towns and villages. The residents of those towns generally had 15 seconds to rush, with their children and elderly, for cover. That was not enough time to give Council members time to clear the Chamber. "No State would permit such attacks on its citizens. Nor should it," she said, stressing that Israel had sought in every way to avoid the current conflict. In 2005, Israel had removed every one of its soldiers from Gaza, as well as all Israeli citizens, homes, schools, synagogues and cemeteries. "We did this to try to create an opening for peace and for the Palestinians to build a prosperous society," she said.

However, the Hamas regime that brutally seized control of Gaza, murdering scores of fellow Palestinians, had no interest in peace and prosperity. "It is vehemently opposed to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians," she continued, adding that Hamas also rejected the Annapolis process, which had been strongly supported by the Security Council. "For Hamas, peace is the enemy. Its only interest is in establishing tyranny for Gazans and terror for Israelis." She said that Hamas liked to tell the Palestinians that it was terrorism that had brought Israel to withdraw from Gaza three years ago, when the truth of that action was plain to see: Israel's hope for peace had led to the withdrawal and Hamas' terrorism had compelled Israel to re-enter.

She went on to say that, in its effort to avoid confrontation, Israel had agreed six months ago to an Egyptian-brokered "situation of calm". Hamas had violated that agreement on a daily basis, as over 350 rockets and mortar shells had been fired into Israel during that period. All the while, Hamas had used the "calm" to build up its supplies of weapons and rockets, smuggled through tunnels into the Gaza Strip. Israel had, meanwhile, restrained itself until Hamas had announced an end to the period of calm and began to wage a new campaign of rocket attacks against it. "With its new Iranian-made missile, Hamas is now able to reach as far as the cities of Ashdod and Beer Sheva, placing over 1 million Israelis in the shadow of terror," she said.

In the face of such terrorism, Israel had no choice: it had defended itself, not from the Palestinian people, but from the terrorists that had taken them hostage. Israel was not acting to gain territory or power, but to demonstrate that its restraint was not weakness and to give its citizens a normal life. She said that Israel's campaign had dealt Hamas a "major blow". Dozens of its terrorist factories and training bases had been destroyed and its stockpiles of rockets had been significantly depleted. Some had called Israel's actions "indiscriminate", but Hamas' attacks over the past few weeks had been "very discriminate" – directed deliberately at innocent civilians, even targeting an Israeli school and kindergarten.

Hamas showed similar disdain for the Palestinian people, she said. It had adopted a terrorist tactic – "a coward's tactic" – of using civilians as shields, while its leaders fled from combat. Hamas also hid missiles and terrorist bases in homes, hospitals and mosques. For Israel, every civilian death – Israeli, as well as Palestinian – was a tragedy. Israel had, therefore, taken steps to show respect for all human life. It had taken every measure to limit civilian casualties. The Israel Defense Forces had dropped tens of thousands of leaflets and made thousands of phone calls to Palestinian civilians, beseeching them to leave areas of terrorist operation to avoid harm. "But let it be clear: failing to respond to terrorists simply because they are using civilians as cover is not and cannot be an option," she said, stressing that to do so would broadcast a message to every terrorist group to set up shop in a hospital or kindergarten.

She went on to say that, while Israel was working hard to uphold its humanitarian commitments, having facilitated the entry into Gaza of some 540 trucks bearing relief supplies since the start of the fighting – it was time for the international community to place responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Gaza where it lay, on the shoulders of terrorists that had chosen violence over peace. Hamas leaders, holed up in luxury hotels in Damascus, had abandoned the people of Gaza, she said. There was no similarity between the actions of Israel and that of the terrorists it was confronting. There was no similarity between military commanders that worked hard to ensure their operations were carried out in accordance with international law and those that filled homes with missiles.

Finally, she said that there was certain to be much discussion today about the Security Council's credibility and the need for a resolution. Was the Council's credibility strengthened if it called for a ceasefire that "effectively equates a terrorist group with a State defending itself against it"? Moreover, did anyone really believe that Hamas would heed the Council's words? It was not about a ceasefire; it was about ensuring the end of terrorism from Gaza, and the end of smuggling weapons into Gaza so that there was no longer a need for Israeli defensive operations. The international community must stand unified against terrorism. Anything less would only embolden Hamas, lengthen the current round of the conflict and accelerate the next, she said, adding: "It is not enough to speak of peace; we have to confront those who work to destroy it. For this reason, the current campaign is not an obstacle to peace, but a prerequisite for it."

DAVID MILIBAND, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, said there could be no greater contrast between the United Nations diplomacy here, and the day-to-day reality of death and destruction in Gaza. The crisis in Gaza was an indictment of the collective failure of the international community, over a long time, to bring about the two-State solution. All efforts must be supported to achieve an immediate ceasefire and to get back to the road set out in resolution 1850 (2008). New initiatives were under way, including a proposal by Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Nicolas Sarkozy.

He said the immediate trigger to action was the end of the truce, which had never been a total truce. Hamas had made a choice to target negotiations by starting to fire rockets. The immediate consequence of the Israeli military actions was also clear: the horror of war piled upon months of deprivation. He asked for an immediate ceasefire. The Council must focus on the substance and permanence of a ceasefire, as well as its timing. The flow of arms in Gaza was a threat to Israel and controlling that would be a complex task. Opening the crossings would help the people and undercut smuggling. The unity of Palestine was essential, and a precondition for a democratic policy of consent.

ALI BABACAN, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, said the international community was today confronted with a "tragic situation" as the attacks against Gaza were entering their eleventh day, and Israel's ground offensive was entering its third day. Civilians continued to bear the brunt of the offensive, and each push deeper into Gaza pushed in turn the hope of peace that much farther away. Further, he said that the people of Gaza faced a shortage of basic necessities and medical supplies. "What we are facing is a human tragedy," he said, stressing that Israel's "excessive and inappropriate" use of force must be stopped.

Indeed, Israel's punitive measures would do nothing but generate further enmity in the occupied territories and wider region, he continued. He urged the Council to remember that the Palestinians under attack today would be Israel's neighbours forever. The Council must shoulder its responsibility. It must act, otherwise the responsibility of inaction and indifference would soon be impossible to bear. At the same time, he said the tragedy in Gaza would have ripple effects throughout the region. With all that in mind, he urged all sides to "act with restraint and in a responsible manner". No one had anything to gain by continued fighting.

He said that Turkey would continue to support and work closely with all interested parties to end the violence. The priority must be to ensure full cessation of hostilities, as well as a sustainable ceasefire. The Council and the wider international community must also do everything possible to address the pressing humanitarian needs of the people in Gaza. For its part, Turkey had stepped up its efforts to that end, but more must be done. Israel must move quickly to allow the delivery of humanitarian goods and open border crossings. At the same time, the Palestinian factions must renew reconciliation efforts.

Finally, all efforts must be based on the principles set out by the diplomatic Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative, and in the Annapolis process. Only cooperation would bring true peace. He noted that the Council might also consider deploying an international monitoring mission to the region. Turkey understood that the parties' agreement to a ceasefire rested on the international community's ability to guarantee it. The Council must move quickly.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE, Secretary of State of the United States, said the United States was deeply concerned at the situation in Gaza and had been working "around the clock" to try to end the violence. The ongoing attacks against Israel showed that new arrangements were necessary, not a return to the status quo ante. Any ceasefire must ensure the safety of Israelis and Palestinians alike. The former situation had not been sustainable. No country would have been willing to tolerate the rocket attacks. The living conditions of people in Gaza had grown more dire because of Hamas' actions.

She said a ceasefire was necessary that could bring real security, bring a period of true calm, and bring an end to the rocket attacks. It must also bring an end to arms smuggling. The crossings should be opened, on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The goal must be a normalization of life in Gaza. The 26 November Arab League statement would serve as an important guide to efforts led by Egypt. The international community should assist in the reconstruction of Gaza.

While welcoming the statement by the President of Egypt, she said the United States was concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza. She had discussed that difficult situation with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who had informed her that Israel would open a humanitarian corridor tomorrow. The problem was that, even if goods got into Gaza, it was not possible to distribute them. The United States would actively work to relieve those circumstances. Apart from the \$85 million her country had already contributed, it would contribute more emergency aid, if needed.

She said a solution must be found on the short term, but it must be a solution that did not allow Hamas to use Gaza as a launching pad. It must also be a solution that allowed for opening the crossings. The time had long since come when Palestinians, who deserved to live in their own State, would get their State, and that Israelis who wished for peace and security, would have that peace and security. Although the challenges of the moment in Gaza must be resolved urgently, there must also be a focus on creating the conditions that would ultimately lead to a real peace.

ABDURRAHMAN MOHAMED SHALGHAM, Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of Libya, said that Israel had begun its current attacks on Gaza after Israel had laid siege to and starved the people of Gaza, in the face of "astonishing silence" from the Council. While Israel claimed it was responding to the breach of the ceasefire, Israel itself had breached the ceasefire numerous times. Israel seemed to be acting as if it were not party to the agreement.

In full view of the international community, Israel had continued its pressure on Gaza. It had sealed borders, erected more checkpoints and blockades and hindered delivery of humanitarian supplies, even those provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Indeed, many people in Gaza had died because they had no access to medicines and medical supplies. Many people in Gaza had access to water only once or twice a week. The fallout from Israel's blockade was well known and had taken place in full view of the Security Council.

"Yet, this Council has failed to move," he said, even as Israel continued to carry out crimes against humanity and war crimes. That fact had strengthened Israel's resolve to carry out air and land raids in Gaza. Israel had rejected appeals for the creation of a humanitarian passageway to provide some relief to the people of the region. Now, with its current destructive ground offensive, Israel had once again proved that it was not concerned with peace; it was only concerned with its own territories. The Council's hesitation was allowing Israel to continue its destruction of Palestinian lives and infrastructure, including mosques and schools. The deterioration in the humanitarian situation was "astonishing", he added.

With all that in mind, he said that the Security Council must not only ensure an immediate end to Israel's aggression, it must ensure that the "criminals" perpetrating heinous acts in the Occupied Territory were punished. Libya had, therefore, submitted a draft resolution that it hoped the Council would urgently adopt. Each minute that passed without action by the Council would lead to more destruction, hatred and the feeling of the need for vengeance.

MICHAEL SPINDELEGGER, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria, said that his country had repeatedly condemned the rocket attacks by Hamas from Gaza on Israel and respected the right of Israel to safeguard the security of its citizens. But, he also believed that the military operations under way were clearly disproportionate and continued to inflict an unacceptable toll on Palestinian civilians. He, therefore, called on both sides to adhere to an immediate and permanent ceasefire that needed to be effectively monitored. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action. He also called on all parties to take all necessary measures to alleviate the serious humanitarian situation on the ground and to ensure continuous provision of humanitarian supplies to Gaza, including through a lasting and normal opening of all border crossings. An effective end to the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip were indispensable prerequisites, in that regard. He also called upon all parties to strictly observe the rules of humanitarian and human rights law.

If the violence was not brought to an end, a resumption of the diplomatic process towards a political solution would become more and more difficult, he said. Continuing violence would have a lasting negative effect not only on the follow-up to Annapolis, but also on other developments, in particular along the Israeli-

Syrian track, towards comprehensive regional peace. The Security Council must remain actively engaged in encouraging and accompanying all efforts to end the conflict and bring about what the peoples in the region had been yearning for for decades: the creation of a viable, independent, democratic and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace with Israel within secure and recognized international borders.

At the current stage, the priority of the Security Council must be a rapid resolution of the current crisis, based on a call for an immediate, permanent and fully respected ceasefire; free access for humanitarian supplies into Gaza, including through the opening of the crossings; an effective end to the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip; a call for all parties to fully respect their obligations under humanitarian and human rights law; full support for the regional and diplomatic efforts under way; and a call on Israelis and Palestinians to continue negotiations for a comprehensive solution, as envisioned in Council resolution 1850 (2008). Austria would do everything possible to support rapid action by the Council along those lines.

LE LUONG MINH (Viet Nam) said he his country was concerned at the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza as a result of the Israeli actions, the closing of crossings and the obstruction of humanitarian aid. Any attacks on civilians were unjustified. He called upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint, cease all violence and return to the negotiating table. He urged Israel to stop the use of excessive force and withdraw forces from Gaza. He appealed to both parties to comply with international humanitarian law, including the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and underlined the urgent need to open the border crossings.

He said every opportunity must be used to make peace and he expressed his country's support for the intensified efforts of the international community to establish an immediate, lasting, effective and monitored ceasefire. The Council could play a role in finding a solution to the crisis by adopting a resolution that would call for an end to the killing of civilians and bring the peace process back on track. He would, therefore, work constructively with others on the draft resolution proposed by Libya on behalf of the Arab States.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) said the unprecedented mobilization of the international community around the issue clearly reflected the seriousness with which it took the situation in Gaza and the need to find a sustainable solution. Burkina Faso was keenly aware of ongoing hostilities between the parties, he continued, noting that, while there might be differences of opinion about the actions of those parties, it could not be denied that the use of force, by either side, could only make the situation worse. That was why Burkina Faso would continue to call for a cessation of hostilities backed by a durable, sustainable peace process.

He went on to say that that Security Council must to take action quickly. It owed such speedy action to the long-suffering people of Gaza and the people of Israel living under threat of rocket attacks, as well as to the cause of wider international peace and security. The Council's efforts must be followed up by a firm commitment by all parties to pursue the aims of a lasting solution. To that end, the parties and the Security Council must take into account the path laid out by the Arab Peace initiative, the "Road Map" peace plan, and relevant Security Council resolutions. At the same time, the parties needed to demonstrate the great political will needed to achieve a durable settlement. To that end, he called on Israel to end its ground offensive and open humanitarian borders. At the same time, rocket attacks against Israel must end. The Council must move quickly to address the current situation and avoid a recurrence of such violence, he reiterated.

JORGE BALLESTERO (Costa Rica) said that his country, as a member of the Council, had advocated for the Council to play a significant role in one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. His country had, however, not been as successful as it had hoped. Resolution 1850 (2008) had broken the silence of the Council, however, and the purpose of that resolution, according to United States Secretary of State Rice, had been to describe the contours of the negotiations and define the role of the international community, which would prevent a return to violence and hopelessness. Today, the situation on the ground had shown that resolution 1850 (2008) had not been sufficient to attain the lofty aims.

Today's meeting should not remain a listing of good intentions, he said. The political process and the situation on the ground were linked. There was a need for a halt to all military action and, to that end, the Council must use all options set out in the Charter. On 16 December, Costa Rica had stated the absolute need for respect for humanitarian law and condemnation of terrorism and collective punishment. He was prepared to agree on a resolution calling for a cessation of hostilities, establishment of a lasting truce and opening of all crossings, in order to return to negotiations leading to a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel.

NEVEN JURICA (Croatia) said that his delegation shared the sense of urgency that had brought the international community together today. He urged all sides to end the violence and to adhere to the tenets of international law. It was essential to achieve an immediate and sustainable ceasefire that would be acceptable by all. Such a ceasefire must end rocket attacks into Israel and must address the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The international community must understand that Israel had the right to protect itself in the face of the actions of parties that refuted its right to exist. At the same time, Israel's actions must take into account the situation of civilians.

The Security Council must act speedily to address the situation in all its aspects. He went on to call for the crafting of a comprehensive response that did not ensure a return to the status quo. Indeed, such a response must not only address urgent humanitarian concerns, it must ensure that weapons smuggling into Gaza would not be tolerated and that rocket attacks would end. At the same time, diplomatic efforts to address the situation meant that Hamas must recognize Israel's right to exist.

YUKIO TAKASU (Japan) expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation in and around the Gaza Strip, including the continued Israeli ground operations there and the number of Palestinian civilian casualties. At the same time, he deplored the rocket attacks on Israel that preceded the crisis and were still continuing and seriously harming civilian life. Urgent efforts must be made, he said, to achieve an effective ceasefire, which must be immediate, permanent and fully respected.

He called on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint, noting the contacts between his Foreign Minister and Prime Minister with their counterparts in Israel urging a ceasefire. He also strongly called on Palestinian militants and Hamas to stop attacks against Israel. In that light, he expressed appreciation for bilateral and multilateral efforts to achieve the cessation of violence. Sympathizing with the Palestinian victims of the violence, he called for humanitarian supplies to be allowed into Gaza and said his country would provide \$10 million in aid, of which \$3 million would be provided through UNRWA immediately. Crossings, he said, must be reopened, with effective measures to prevent arms smuggling. He stressed the urgency of forging a unified Council voice on the situation, and expressed support for efforts to achieve a lasting peace through the principles of Council resolution 1850 (2008).

CLAUDE HELLER (Mexico) condemned the excessive use of force by the Israeli military forces in Gaza, as well as the launching of rockets into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. It was necessary to break the vicious cycle of violence that, far from favouring a heightened security and solving the root causes of the conflict, would only contribute to increased uncertainty and fear. Mexico called for an immediate end to hostilities and all military activities in order to address the humanitarian crisis on the ground, which should include the opening of border crossings to secure the inflow of humanitarian supplies and to generate the minimal necessary conditions for peace talks in the region.

Continuing, he made an urgent call for the facilitation of access for international and humanitarian organizations to avoid further loss of human lives and guarantee security of the civilian population, as the United Nations agencies had demanded. Peace in the Middle East depended on the implementation of relevant Council resolutions. The search for a comprehensive solution of the conflict was not to be found in the use of arms, but in a political response based on a constructive dialogue, according to international law and the principles of the Charter. Resolution 1850 (2008), which had been adopted on 16 December, clearly established that a lasting peace could only be based on a permanent commitment by the parties to mutual recognition, without violence, instigation of violence or terrorism, as well as bilateral negotiations, inspired by the agreements and obligations contracted previously.

All States had the right to safeguard their security and, even more so, had the obligation to guarantee it for the benefit of its citizens. However, their actions must abide by international humanitarian law, without which civilized coexistence was impossible. All terrorist activities contrary to the achievement of a political solution must be stopped. It was thus indispensable to put an end to illegal arms trafficking and all activities that fostered terrorism.

The Council must contribute decisively to a solution to the conflict, support the peace process and strengthen the trust in the search for a political solution, he said. Its credibility and effectiveness hinged on that. It must provide in a constructive way the guidelines that would establish a more favourable environment for negotiations and must not be restricted to reacting to arising events. Given continued aggravation of the situation, including the strike on a United Nations school today, the efforts of the international community must converge in an operative resolution oriented to reaching a political solution that would include all the aspects of the conflict. That would require the creation of a monitoring mechanism that would guarantee the observance of the ceasefire by all parties, as well as other commitments, seeking to reach a constructive environment for a lasting peace. Mexico was willing to support a Council resolution containing those elements.

FRANCIS BUTAGIRA (Uganda) said the escalation of violence had had a disastrous impact on the civilian population and the unfolding, shameful humanitarian tragedy must be stopped. The immediate cause of the escalation should also be addressed. There should not be silence on the issue of rockets being fired into Israel. At the same time, one should not turn a blind eye to the Israeli response. The international community and the Council should remain firmly engaged in working with the parties to find a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. He also called for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, national dialogue and unity.

He said that, given the current escalation, the first priority was an immediate end to the violence. He called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the implementation of which should be monitored. He supported those who had called for a ceasefire that was durable and sustainable. The ceasefire must not be abused for those who wished to cause violence. There was also an urgent need for the access of humanitarian assistance into Gaza. The border crossings should be opened to improve the humanitarian situation.

ZHANG YESUI (China) expressed grave concern over the flare-up of violence and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He said that the top priority now was an immediate ceasefire to avoid further civilian casualties. He urged Israel to halt its military operation immediately and open all the border crossings to ensure unfettered access of humanitarian supplies to the area, also urging the international community to provide further aid. The armed Palestinian faction also needed to stop its rocket firings, he said.

Regretting that the Security Council had not achieved results in three emergency meetings, he expressed hope that the body would respond to the will of the international community and the appeal of Arab States and take swift action to adopt a resolution and push for an immediate ceasefire, sending a clear signal to the parties. His country, he said, opposed the use of force to settle disputes and condemned all violent activity against civilians. He expressed hope that the parties would exercise restraint, courage and wisdom and resolve their differences through dialogue. He called on the international community to make vigorous efforts to bring the parties back to the peace process based on the Annapolis conference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

ALEXANDER YAKOVENKO, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said that his delegation, like others, was seriously concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip. The current hostilities would only lead to further destabilization of the situation in the occupied territories and the wider Middle East. It was necessary to grant broad humanitarian access into the area to provide relief and evacuation of the wounded. At the same time, such access could not be guaranteed as long as military operations were ongoing.

He said that the Russian Federation agreed with the international community that any decision reached must not only seek a durable solution, but must also ensure that hostilities did not resume. Any decision reached must adhere to all relevant international resolutions. The Council must address the Gaza crisis through political means and, to that end, the Russian Federation was closely following the progress of negotiations in the wake of the peace initiative put forward earlier today by Egyptian President Mubarak and French President Sarkozy.

SAUD AL-FAISAL, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, said the people in Gaza continued to suffer from unrelenting and savage violence at the hand of the Israeli military. It was a human catastrophe. Israel's munitions had turned Gaza into an unbearable hell on the ground. The unarmed people were besieged from the air, the land and the sea. The violence had not been sufficient, however, to have the Council move quickly to prevent further death. The Council was the body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. Although the Charter stated that, once there was fighting, the Council's priority must be to end the fighting, the Council had seemed to have set that obligation aside. That put a big question mark beside the credibility of the Council. In Georgia, however, the international community had moved most urgently and effectively.

War no longer invoked glory and pride, but only rage, he said, as well as condemnation by the international community. What was happening in Gaza was a horrendous human crime that would only invoke more violence and extremism. The security of Israel could only be achieved through a just peace that responded to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Israel was fully responsible for the fierce siege of the Palestinian people and the closing of crossings, as it had violated the truce that had called for a cessation of rocket fire in exchange for opening the crossing. The Palestinian side had fulfilled its obligations, while Israel had continued its stranglehold on 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza.

He said the objective was to work for a ceasefire that would end the armed conflict. There was no way out except through a clear and explicit resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and lifting of the siege. The Arab League had presented to the Council the resolution of its ministerial meeting on 31 December, which among other things called for an immediate halt to violence, lifting the siege and termination of the policy of collective punishment. It also aimed at dealing with the root causes and called for a monitoring process. All of that would meet Israeli security concerns. It would lead the way to a lasting peace, with an end to occupation and a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel.

AMRE MOUSSA, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, said that Israel's air, land and sea bombardment of the Gaza Strip had been under way for some 11 days now, under the pretext of self-defence – that occupied peoples were firing rockets and threatening the welfare of their occupiers. That view seemed to ignore the fact that people of Gaza were also under attack and had been for some time. The League of Arab States called for an end to such hostilities at the same time as it called for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. How could the international community believe Israeli propaganda about the psychological effects of the rocket attacks on its territory, and ignore the effects of Israel's destructive ongoing stranglehold on, and oppression of, the entire Palestinian population?

The entire world wanted to see an end to the occupation, which had generated feelings of anger throughout the Arab world. He said that, while the Arab League rejected civilian casualties on all sides, it stressed that the facts indicated that civilian Palestinian victims were now numbering in the hundreds, while Israeli casualties remained low. He hoped that 2009 would mark a new beginning to the peace process, which should include renewed effort to end the occupation and rejection of the creation of a Palestinian State. It was time to put an end to procrastination, blockades, aggression and partition of land. All those could not lead to a "healthy situation", he added.

The Council must put an immediate end to the current hostilities. The 15-member body's credibility, as well as that of the wider United Nations, was at stake today. The Council must take action in a comprehensive and impartial manner. The Arab League and others had repeatedly expressed concern at the Council's lack of serious action to deal with certain situations, including Israel's aggression against Lebanon just two years ago. He said that Arab delegations would be in New York for the next few days and were prepared to help the Council craft an immediate response.

At the same time, the Council must not wait for Israel to achieve its stated objectives. He urged the Council to adopt the draft resolution proposed by Libya. "The situation cannot wait. The Council cannot continue to procrastinate," he said, stressing that such procrastination had led the Presidents of Egypt and France to

craft a response. The Arab League, likewise, called for an immediate ceasefire and an end to all hostilities, including rocket fire, ending blockades and border closings. It also sought safe passage for humanitarian assistance, fuel, medical staff and supplies. The League of Arab States also called for a monitoring mechanism for any agreement reached and, especially, on the situation of civilians.

JONAS GAHR STØRE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, said he supported an immediate, effective ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. The firing of rockets by Hamas must stop, as must the Israeli military operations. The escalation did not lead to peace and security, but was a recipe for revenge and more terror. The Council had, so far, been incapable of making any decision in the matter. That was hard to explain to his people in Norway and to the people of the world. He hoped the France-Egypt initiative for an immediate ceasefire would succeed and would be endorsed by the Council.

As Chair of the donor support group of the Palestinian Authority, he said the Paris donor conference had been very successful and the donor community had made significant pledges. Progress had been reviewed in London and New York. Gaza had been a major concern, because of internal strife and the Israeli siege. The social and economic fabric had been undermined. The population had been caged and traumatized. The disaster must be addressed. He, therefore, wanted to convene a meeting of the group as soon as possible, combined with a donor conference. Before that, there should be a fact-finding mission by the World Bank and the United Nations.

He said civilians should and must be protected. It was unacceptable that Hamas exposed civilians by taking its fighting into densely populated areas. He called on Israel to guarantee the access of humanitarian assistance. Since the beginning of hostilities, independent reporters had been denied access into the war zone. That was unacceptable. The division among Palestinians was a tragedy. The question of the governance of Gaza must be addressed.

ACHMED ABOL GHEIT, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, said that Israel's destruction, killing and targeting of innocent civilians in Gaza had been under way for more than 10 days now. During that time, the "horror of the Israeli war machine" had operated in full view of the Security Council and the wider international community. The media had closely followed the situation, as the casualties had mounted and the destruction had continued. What did the Council need to see before it stopped Israel's aggression? Did it need to see more civilians die? Did it need to give Israel more legitimacy to achieve its objectives? The Council's stalling had seriously eroded its credibility.

He said that Egypt was playing a unique role in sponsoring Palestinian reconciliation, among other ways. Further, earlier today, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, along with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, had outlined a proposal for a ceasefire, which had included elements that called for Israel and Palestinian factions to accept an immediate ceasefire, so that aid would reach the civilians. It also included Egypt's invitation to the Israelis and Palestinians for an urgent meeting to ensure that a similar conflict did not recur – discussions that would also consider the causes that led to the most recent conflict, including protecting the border, reopening crossing points and lifting the blockade. Finally, it renewed Egypt's invitation to the Palestinians for all factions to continue reconciliation talks. He hoped that all sides would live up to their responsibilities.

He reaffirmed that the Gaza Strip was an indivisible part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. He also said that, since the beginning of the aggression, Egypt had made extensive efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the people inside Gaza. To that end, Egypt had used the Rafah crossing to supply 120 tons of medicines and other supplies and foodstuffs. Egyptian hospitals were also caring for some 120 civilians injured in the fighting. He said that Arab delegations had come before the Council to end the suffering of the Palestinian people. At the same time, the need to end Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian land, which was at the heart of the matter, must not be overlooked.

SALAH BASHIR, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, said his country felt deep pain and grave concern at the escalation of violence and deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as a result of the Israeli military aggression. The stability of the region was also threatened. While condemning the aggression, he called on the Council to assume its responsibilities by adopting a resolution that would force Israel to stop its aggression and end the policy of collective punishment. The military operations were a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

He said peace and stability could not be realized through military operations against an already weakened population. Such actions would only stir anger among Arabs all over the world. Israel could not attain security by killing innocent and unarmed civilians and targeting schools and houses of worship. The Arab States had tabled a draft resolution calling for a ceasefire. It would be illogical for the Council not to adopt such a resolution. The international community was required, today, to impose a ceasefire and must establish arrangements to alleviate the humanitarian problems. Crossing points must be opened, and humanitarian and medical assistance and evacuation of the wounded must be allowed. There was also a need for an international monitoring mechanism to monitor the ceasefire.

A return to negotiations was the only way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said. Israel's use of military force not only threatened stability in the region, but also threatened the entire peace process. A two-State solution was the only way to realize peace and security in the region.

FAWZI SALLOUKH, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon, said that his delegation had come to speak to the Council on behalf of the thousands of civilians that had fallen in Gaza at the hands of Israel's aggression. Lebanon was speaking on behalf of all those innocent civilians in Gaza that had, indeed, lived under Israeli siege for years. As the Council worked to craft a durable solution towards a lifting of the siege and opening of humanitarian thoroughways, it must not be forgotten that the Israeli siege had not begun just a few days ago. It had been going on for years, as occupation was a primary form of oppression. Such occupation served to destroy the hope of a better life for all the people of Gaza.

The Council must also note that, no matter what Israel's claims might be, the Palestinian people were unarmed and undermanned in the face of the "Israeli war behemoth". He urged the Council not to replay past missteps, including those in 2006, when it had failed to act quickly in the face of Israeli aggression against Lebanon. The need to act quickly had been made even more urgent today, in the wake of Israel's indiscriminate destruction of schools in the Gaza Strip.

TAB FASSI FIHRI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, said the last four days had shown an escalation, with air, land and sea operations unleashing indiscriminate lethal weapons, exterminating entire families. Neither mosques, nor schools, nor funeral houses, nor ambulances had been spared by the military onslaught. The high-level representation of the Arab Group and the mandate it had been given was a clear expression not only of the grave concern of the Arab people about the seriousness of the situation in Gaza, but also of the concern that responsible solutions must be found and implemented.

The world hoped the Council would assume its responsibilities and compel Israel to end its military activities immediately and lift the siege on the Palestinian people, he said. Israel must be deterred by the Council from continuing its aggression. The Arab Group was open to all reasonable elements being tabled in response to the proposed draft resolution, and called on the Council to respond positively to the elements contained in the text.

He said the Palestinian territories had been suffering for years from a siege and from settlement policies. The Islamic features of Jerusalem were being wiped out. It was high time that the international community assumed its responsibilities to the Palestinian people and helped them to create an atmosphere conducive for negotiations, in order to reach a comprehensive solution, including an end to the occupation and establishment of a Palestinian State – a State that was independent and viable, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace.

AHMAD BIN ABDULLAH AL-MAHMOUD, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, said that he would not recount the atrocities committed by the unremitting Israeli war machine perpetrated against the unarmed people of the Gaza Strip, in full view of the international community and in abrogation of all rules of international law. While Qatar had hoped that the new year would bring about a period of calm in the region, apparently Israel had other ideas. His delegation had come to the Council with other peace-loving Arab States to urge the Council to end Israel's aggression against the people of Gaza and to ensure that all Palestinian people could exercise their inalienable rights. Qatar demanded that the Council do more than adopt statements. The Council must demand that

Israel end its aggression, open blockades and protect civilians in and around the Gaza Strip.

He said that the Council's stalling had spotlighted the fact that the 15-member body was in serious need of reform. The Council's credibility was at stake and its failure to act would only embolden Israel's destructive campaign in Gaza. The world had not forgotten the Council's hesitance to stop Israel's destructive campaign against Lebanon in 2006. The killing of innocent civilians would not bring security to Israel, but would only make the situation worse. Did the architects of the latest round of aggression stop to consider the effects of the siege on generations of Arab Palestinian youths, who were watching Israel's indiscriminate destruction of their long-besieged homeland? "The pretext of Israel concerning Palestinian rockets cannot deceive people," he said, stressing that the occupation of Palestinian territory was the cause of the rockets. Consequently, ending the occupation was necessary to restoring calm.

* *** *

For information media • not an official record