



## Security Council SC/10497

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Security Council  
6692<sup>nd</sup> Meeting (AM)

### **QUEST FOR ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE REMAINS ELUSIVE AMID DEEP MISTRUST.**

### **'VOLATILE REGIONAL DYNAMICS', ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL**

#### **Escalating Tensions, New Construction Plans, Violence By Settlers Offset Tax-Revenue Transfer, Second Round of Prisoner Releases**

Delivering the year's last scheduled Security Council briefing on the Middle East situation, a senior United Nations official said today that "credible progress in the search for peace between Israel and the Palestinians is more urgent than ever, but remains elusive in a context of tensions on the ground, deep mistrust between the parties, and volatile regional dynamics".

Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, reiterated "our worry that as the year draws to a close, the situation on the ground is deteriorating and the path towards peace remains dangerously uncertain". Those negative dynamics must not be allowed to prevail, he emphasized. Too much was at stake.

Another source of "deep and growing concern" for the United Nations was the situation in Syria, he said, recalling that on 12 December, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay had briefed the Council on continuing widespread human rights violations in that country. In recent days, popular protests had been met by "violent repression", resulting in numerous deaths, injuries and detentions, he said, adding that there had also been a growing number of armed confrontations between Government forces and the opposition.

Turning back to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he urged the parties to use the opportunity provided by the Quartet-approved framework to de-escalate the situation, return to direct talks with serious proposals on borders and security, and stop provocations. The Quartet remained focused on achieving progress in the coming period, and the parties could be assured that the United Nations would continue to play its role in support of their efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, he said.

Over the past month, however, violent incidents had erupted at a worrisome rate, the Assistant Secretary-General noted, adding that another dangerous round of escalation had occurred in Gaza. The realization of a two-State solution had not advanced, and that had eroded hopes while underscoring the urgent need for both sides to engage, without further delay, in serious substantive negotiations to resolve all permanent status issues.

Efforts to help the parties resume direct talks continued, he said, noting that on 14 December, Quartet envoys and its representative, Tony Blair, had held a third round of separate meetings with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. They had called on the parties to create an environment conducive to restarting talks and urged both sides to refrain from provocative actions. "De-escalation is necessary to facilitate the resumption of direct meaningful engagement between both sides," he stressed. It was encouraging that, at their last meetings with the Quartet envoys, both the Israeli and Palestinian sides had signalled a willingness to think constructively about reciprocal actions that might help reduce tensions.

Reporting on positive developments, he said it was worth noting the raising of the Palestinian flag at the Paris headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 13 December, and the fact that the Palestinian Authority had taken no further steps in pursuit of membership in other organs or specialized agencies of the world body. In addition, the Government of Israel had decided on 30 November to renew the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Authority, having withheld them after the UNESCO vote to admit the Palestinians. On 18 December, Israel had released 550 prisoners, including 55 minors and six women, as part of the second phase of the agreed swap for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Palestinian security forces, for their part, had been working to uphold law and order in the West Bank, he said, noting that they had seized and defused unexploded ordnance.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco went on to report on a series of developments causing continuing concern. Among those were Israel's announcement of plans to build several new settlements, including in the West Bank, and the advancement of construction permits in East Jerusalem. On 17 December, the Israeli Government had announced its intention to issue construction tenders for 1,028 housing units in the settlements of Har Homa, Beitar Illit and Givat Ze'ev. As reaffirmed by the Secretary-General on 12 December, "all settlement construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is contrary to international law and Israel's obligations under

the Road Map, prejudices final status negotiations and should stop”.

Additionally, 57 Palestinian structures, comprising 28 residences, had been demolished in the West Bank during the reporting period, he continued. Recalling that the Secretariat had repeatedly warned throughout the year about the increase in settler violence, he said it was deeply troubling that such attacks on Palestinians and their property “have become a systematic occurrence”. He welcomed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s strong condemnation of such violence acts and his stated intention to prevent their recurrence.

Meanwhile, demonstrations against the barrier in the occupied West Bank continued, some with fatal results, he reported, while stressing that the right of peaceful protest must be upheld and that protests should be strictly non-violent. In addition, Israel Defense Forces, citing security reasons, had conducted more than 300 operations in the West Bank, injuring 154 Palestinians, including six children. The operations had resulted in the arrest of 233 Palestinians.

In East Jerusalem, Palestinian residency rights remained a “serious human rights concern”, he continued, adding that here in Gaza and southern Israel, there had been a “dangerous deterioration” in the security situation. He condemned in the strongest terms any indiscriminate firing of projectiles towards civilian areas, while calling on Israel to show “maximum restraint”. Obligations under international humanitarian law must be respected for civilian protection, he added.

The Assistant Secretary-General said implementation of United Nations projects in Gaza was ongoing, with construction materials entering through the Kerem Shalom crossing. However, extensive restrictions remained, he said, calling again on Israel to liberalize fully the importation of building materials. It was also important that exports be allowed to resume at scale, including transfers to the West Bank. Those changes could be applied with due consideration for Israel’s legitimate security concerns, while making a significant difference in the lives of many Gazans, he said. Also concerning was the intention of the de facto authorities to tax the Bank of Palestine and the Palestine Islamic Bank, as well as their subsequent imposition of travel bans on senior bank staff.

This week, he informed the Council, a series of meetings had been held in Cairo among the Palestinian factions in an effort to advance Palestinian reconciliation. Finally, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank La Rue, had visited the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel from 6 to 17 December. That had been the first such visit. He had shared his initial findings and recommendations in Jerusalem on 18 December.

Turning to Lebanon, he said several incidents in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had raised concerns since the last Council briefing. Detailing those, he said the Secretary-General had condemned all indiscriminate rocket attacks and urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint. He had reminded them of their obligation to adhere fully to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and to respect the cessation of hostilities. The Lebanese authorities and politicians across the political spectrum had also condemned the incidents, he added.

In a positive development, he noted, Prime Minister Najib Mikati had announced on 30 November that he had transferred his Government’s share of the 2011 budget for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The meeting began at 10:18 a.m. and adjourned at 10:38 a.m.

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