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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL, BRIEFING SECURITY COUNCIL, TELLS OF DEEP CONCERN

OVER PALESTINIAN SITUATION, AMID INTENSIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE

On Lebanon, He Calls Presidential Election 'Essential' after Failure to Hold Vote

The past month had seen the most intensive political dialogue on the Middle East in years, although there was still deep concern over the situation on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the Security Council this morning during his periodic briefing on the region.

He said bilateral talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority had continued and both had tasked their teams to work intensively on a framework document for a serious and substantive exchange during the upcoming international meeting. In those efforts, they had been strongly supported by the Middle East diplomatic Quartet (the United Nations, United States, European Union and the Russian Federation), which had met with the League of Arab States Follow-up Committee in late September.

At the same time, he said, the Palestinian Authority was rapidly developing its reform and development plan to serve as the basis of a funding package for a donor conference scheduled for Paris to help fill a fiscal gap anticipated in 2008. It had also continued its efforts to improve law and order, but faced challenges to its planned deployment of security personnel and other initiatives.

Meanwhile, he continued, Israel's Government had said 24 roadblocks and one checkpoint in the West Bank had been removed, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had reported that the total number of obstacles to movement stood at 562, down by 1 from the previous reporting period. Israel had also issued permits for some 3,400 family reunions in the West Bank – out of a total of 54,000 pending cases — and released a further 86 Palestinian prisoners.

Mr. Pascoe expressed hope that more such confidence-building measures would be forthcoming and strongly encouraged Israel and the Palestinian Authority to enhance cooperation on security, freedom of movement and economic rejuvenation, in close cooperation with the Quartet representative.

However, socio-economic conditions in the West Bank remained a serious concern and could be exacerbated by further planned restrictions, he said. Israel's construction of the barrier continued, as did settlement activity, which contravened the [Road Map](#) and the Fourth Geneva Convention. In addition, strong complaints had been lodged about an order for the confiscation of almost 300 acres of Palestinian land for an alternate road network in the West Bank.

At the same time, 4 people had been killed and 69 injured due to internal Palestinian violence resulting from the continuing factional divide, he said. The Palestinian Authority and Hamas continued to disagree, with the former insisting on a reversal of the latter's measures of the last four months and Hamas indicating its opposition to the dialogue between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert. Hamas continued to clamp down on rival factions, leading to sometimes heavy clashes and allegations of human rights abuses. Such allegations had also been made against the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

In Israeli-Palestinian violence, meanwhile, he said, 31 Palestinians, including one child, had been killed and 153 injured, while one Israeli had been killed and six injured. Two hundred Palestinians had been detained by the Israel Defense Forces, with one prisoner dying from injuries sustained in a prison riot. Israeli army Corporal Gilad Shalit was in his seventeenth month of captivity.

He said 27 rockets and 90 mortars had been fired at Israeli targets from Gaza and one standard Grad rocket had been launched at the city of Netivot, as the Israeli Government claimed that weapons continued to be smuggled into Gaza. Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon continued to condemn all acts of terrorism, as well as all military acts targeting, endangering or harming civilians due to their disproportionate or indiscriminate character.

On humanitarian aspects, he said that, because of Israel's decision last month to designate Gaza a hostile territory, the situation there was deteriorating alarmingly. In June and July, about 100 truckloads of humanitarian goods had been entering Gaza daily; today that number was around 50. Last month, a daily average of five critical medical cases had crossed Erez into Israel for essential medical treatment, compared to an average of 40 in July. Meanwhile, more than 1,000 Palestinians remained stranded in Egypt and one of the two crossings remaining open for humanitarian goods was slated to be closed towards the end of the month. It was difficult to see how security concerns could justify the hardship caused by those measures.

Turning to Lebanon, Mr. Pascoe said Parliament had been unable to vote on a new President and maintained it was essential that a new President be elected in accordance with the Constitution and without foreign interference. The situation within Palestinian refugee camps in the country remained precarious, with occasional armed clashes between Palestinian militias. Tangible improvements in camp living conditions were urgently needed and donors were urged to continue providing vital financial assistance for urgent humanitarian needs and reconstruction.

During the reporting period, he said, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had reported 142 Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory, which constituted serious violations of Security Council resolutions and undermined the credibility of both UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the eyes of the local population. Israel continued to state that its air violations were aimed at countering other alleged breaches of resolution 1701 (2006), including violations of the arms embargo.

Turning back to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said the Secretary-General strongly backed current diplomatic efforts and hoped that an international meeting to deal with the substance of a permanent peace would have broad Arab participation, produce positive results and lead to a serious follow-up process. He encouraged the parties to be bold in reaching understandings on core issues and committing to a clear process, and called for urgent efforts by the parties to build confidence and improve the situation on the ground.

Mr. Pascoe also recalled that the Secretary-General had pledged that the entire United Nations system was committed to doing its part to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. However, he regretted the continued division of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and feared it would become harder to overcome the longer it was left unaddressed.

He concluded by informing the Council that Kevin Kennedy, Deputy Special Coordinator and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, had resigned from the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East, and the Secretary-General was moving quickly to fill both the Special Coordinator and Deputy positions.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and ended at 10:30 a.m.

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