



## Security Council SC/11124

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Security Council  
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### **EFFORTS FOR RENEWED ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROSPECTS SHOULD NOT BE NEGLECTED**

#### **AMID 'TURMOIL ELSEWHERE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD', SECURITY COUNCIL TOLD**

##### **Senior Political Envoy Says Diplomatic Engagement Sign of Support for Bold Decision to Hold Direct Negotiations**

Twenty years of endless negotiations and conflict in the Middle East since the signing of the Oslo Accords had undermined the belief that peace was possible, but the same 20 years of peace efforts had also demonstrated that fair, reasonable and legitimate solutions could be found, a United Nations envoy for the region told the Security Council in a regular monthly briefing today.

Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, opened the briefing by acknowledging that developments in the region were profoundly troubling. He noted that the Council had been briefed yesterday on the situation in Syria, but said his briefing today would focus on efforts for renewed peace prospects in the Middle East, which, he stressed, "should not be neglected, even against the background of turmoil elsewhere in the neighbourhood".

Citing the resumption on 29 July of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, he said, "we do not underestimate the challenges ahead and the momentous efforts required to sustain and successfully conclude negotiations within the prescribed timeframe", noting the nine-month deadline set for achieving a peaceful comprehensive settlement on all final status issues.

Mr. Serry acknowledged the diplomatic engagement of regional and international partners, including of the Quartet (United Nations, Russian Federation, United States and European Union), as a sign of support for the bold decision taken by the leaders. On the confidentiality of the negotiations, he said it was understandable that the sceptics continued to question their substance, but the parties' commitment to not reveal their contents should be respected.

The international community had long supported the vision of a two-State solution, but the onus to sustain an enabling environment lay with the parties, he emphasized, saying that both sides should refrain from actions that risked undermining the negotiations' prospects. Concurrently, any substantial political initiative must yield early dividends with tangible improvements to security and socioeconomic conditions for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In that context, he welcomed the decision on 8 September by the Israeli Government to increase the number of work permits for West Bank Palestinians by 5,000 to 50,000. Also noteworthy was the agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian agriculture ministries to revive some of the joint committees first formed in the 1990s under the Oslo Accords. He also noted that next week's ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee was expected to discuss a Palestinian economic initiative, which should reinforce the political track.

Yet, violence continued, he said, highlighting as an example the 282 operations carried out by Israeli security forces, during which five Palestinians died in Jenin and Qalandia refugee camps in August. Two Palestinians had been arrested allegedly for planning an explosive attack at a popular mall in West Jerusalem during the Jewish holidays.

Turning to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, he said that was counterproductive and against international law, and expressed concern over clashes between Palestinians and settlers and over reports of settler attacks against Palestinian farmers, including arson of olive trees. A total of 33 Palestinian residential structures built without an Israel-issued permit had been demolished, displacing 176 people, including 78 children. He stressed the need for Israel to address the urgent housing and development needs of Palestinian communities in Area C and East Jerusalem.

The calm in Gaza had mostly held despite some incidents, he said, adding that the situation in the enclave had been central to his discussions with the Egyptian leadership in Cairo earlier this month. Egypt had intensified military operations in northern Sinai, with smuggling tunnels remaining closed. He condemned the recent attacks in Rafah, which reportedly killed six Egyptian security personnel and injured 20.

While he fully recognized Egypt's legitimate security concern and the need to effectively counter illegal activities in the Sinai and around Gaza, he drew attention to the potential humanitarian impact on Gaza of the restricted crossings. Increased access was important for the delivery of construction material for the approved \$450 million package of the United Nations work, including 3,000 housing units, 67 schools, 8 health clinics, 31 water and 10 electricity-related structures and road rehabilitation.

Turning to Lebanon, he recalled the Secretary-General's strong condemnation of the two car bombings on 23 August outside mosques in Tripoli, which had killed at least 45 people and injured more than 200. There was further cross-border fire from Syria into Lebanon, as well as an exchange of fire between Lebanon and Israel. On the Golan, the security situation remained volatile with heavy clashes between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in the area of separation. Those military activities had the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and Syria and jeopardize the ceasefire.

Lastly, he expressed hope that this month's meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the Quartet would be productive and that Israeli and Palestinian leaders would use the upcoming General Assembly debate as an opportunity to reach out to each other's people in making the case for peace.

The briefing began at 10:08 a.m. and ended at 10:25 a.m.

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