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MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS STILL DEADLOCKED DESPITE INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

AS ACCORD ON FINAL-STATUS ISSUES REMAIN ELUSIVE, SECURITY COUNCIL TOLD

Quartet's Credibility at Stake, Under-Secretary-General Warns in Briefing

Despite the international community's recent efforts to resume stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, negotiations were still deadlocked and the goal of reaching a framework agreement on final-status issues remained elusive, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said today.

"We are seriously concerned at the continuing lack of progress in the search for a negotiated settlement," Mr. Pascoe said as he briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. "Peace and Palestinian statehood cannot be further delayed," he emphasized. With the Quartet-supported deadline for reaching the framework agreement and completing the Palestinian Authority's two-year state-building programme just eight months away, the viability of the political process and the Quartet's very credibility were at stake, he warned, announcing that the Quartet principals would meet next in Munich on 5 February.

He said that during the reporting period, several more Latin American countries had recognized a State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, while the President of the Russian Federation had reiterated his country's long-standing support for statehood during a visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. However, the sharp increase in settlement expansion on the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, following last September's lifting of Israel's 10-month partial freeze on building, continued to undermine trust and prejudice final-status discussions, he said. Already, work had begun on 2,000 new West Bank units.

Mr. Pascoe went on to say that the demolition of 30 structures in East Jerusalem and 41 in Area C of the West Bank had displaced 148 Palestinians, giving rise to serious humanitarian concerns and increased tensions. "I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity, in conformity with international law and the Road Map," he said, also expressing "extreme concern" over the situation in Gaza, including a recent heightening of tensions. He added that he could "report no progress" in efforts to further Palestinian reconciliation.

Turning to Lebanon, he said the political crisis there, provoked by differences over the activities of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the 2005 killings of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others, continued to deepen. Mr. Pascoe reiterated the Secretary-General's call on all parties not to interfere with or influence the Special Tribunal's work so as not to prejudice the outcome.

Following the briefing, the Permanent Observer of Palestine said it was "unimaginable" that two years after Israel's military aggression in Gaza, Palestinians were still not allowed to rebuild their communities, Israel had yet to be held accountable for its crimes and Council resolution 1860 (2009) had not been implemented. He called on Israel to lift, immediately and completely, its blockade of Gaza and to allow goods and people to flow freely in and out of the enclave.

He went on to state that Israel's ongoing aggressive illegal campaign to alter the demographic composition, status and Palestinian Arab character of East Jerusalem was destructive and threatened peace. Israel's settlements were an "existential threat" to the two-State solution, seriously jeopardizing almost all other final-status issues, particularly Jerusalem, borders, security and water. "After years of silence on illegal Israeli settlement activities, the Security Council, mandated to address such issues endangering international peace and security, is duty-bound to redress this matter at this critical juncture," he said.

Emphasizing the commitment of the Palestinian people and leadership to peace, he said the second phase of the state-building plan launched by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in August 2009 should be completed by August 2011. He thanked the 107 Member States that had recognized the State of Palestine, calling on the international community to help end the conflict and usher in an era of peace, security and coexistence.

Among the more than 40 speakers taking the floor, Lebanon's representative said that despite international law prohibiting the transfer of populations by an occupying Power and the Council's long-standing declaration that Israeli settlements were illegal, the settler population had doubled in the almost two decades

since the Oslo Agreement, destroying the land and undermining the basis for a two-State solution.

While recognizing the value of international efforts, particularly those of the United States, to encourage negotiations, he warned that if the Council remained ineffective on settlements, its credibility would be damaged since it would be seen to act under a double standard. That was why Lebanon had submitted a draft resolution on settlements, he said, thanking the text's 120 co-sponsors and calling on the Council to adopt it unanimously.

Several speakers condemned Israel's recent demolition of the Shepherd Hotel, a historic landmark in East Jerusalem, and its plans to expand the Gilo settlement by 138 units. The United Kingdom's representative described such actions as "deeply unhelpful".

However, some delegates pointed to positive developments. For example, India's representative said that despite the human suffering and economic distress in Gaza, its economy had expanded 8 per cent in 2010, and there had been fewer violent incidents than in previous years. He and other delegates noted that, according to the World Bank, the Palestinian Authority would be well positioned to create a Palestinian State in the near future if it maintained its current performance in institution-building and public services.

Also speaking today were the representatives of the United States, France, Gabon, Colombia, Russian Federation, China, Germany, South Africa, Nigeria, Brazil, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Jordan, Venezuela, Indonesia, Chile, Cuba, Uganda, Japan, Turkey, Morocco, Malaysia, Tajikistan (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Philippines, Iran, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia (on behalf of the Arab Group), Syria, Algeria, Pakistan, Australia, Sudan and Bangladesh.

A representative of the European Union delegation also addressed the Council, as did the Chairperson of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting began at 10:29 a.m. and suspended at 1:17 p.m. Resuming at 2:40 p.m., it ended at 5:23 p.m.

Background

Meeting to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, the Security Council was expected to hear a briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to be followed by an open debate.

Briefing

B. LYNN PASCOE, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said Israeli-Palestinian negotiations remained at a deadlock, while developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon had heightened tensions. George Mitchell, the United States Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, had visited the region in late December, and Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had held separate consultations in Washington, D.C., earlier this month.

Reiterating the Secretary-General's call on the parties to engage seriously on final-status issues, Mr. Pascoe welcomed the intention of the United States to be a proactive participant, offering ideas and bridging proposals when appropriate. He warned, however, that with the Quartet-supported target dates for reaching a framework agreement on permanent status and completing the Palestinian Authority's two-year state-building programme just eight to nine months away, the viability of the political process and the Quartet's very credibility were at stake.

"We are seriously concerned at the continuing lack of progress in the search for a negotiated settlement. Peace and Palestinian statehood cannot be further delayed," he emphasized, adding that the Quartet principals would meet in Munich on 5 February. He reported that several more Latin American countries had recognized a State of Palestine based on 1967 borders, while the President of the Russian Federation had reiterated his country's long-standing support for statehood while on a visit to the Territory.

Further expansion of settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued to undermine trust and prejudice final-status discussions, he said. The sharp increase in settlement construction had continued after the end of the moratorium on 26 September 2010, with work having begun on up to 2,000 new West Bank units. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority continued to make strides in its state-building agenda, but faced a shortfall estimated at \$100 million in external financing or recurrent expenditures from 2010.

The Under-Secretary-General recalled that on 9 January, the Secretary-General had issued a statement deploring the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem. He had also expressed deep regret over Israel's failure to heed growing international concerns over settlement expansion. "I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity, in conformity with international law and the Road Map," Mr. Pascoe said.

He went on to report that Israeli security forces had conducted 486 search operations in the West Bank, seriously undermining the Palestinian Authority when the opposite should be the strategic goal. The deaths of four Palestinians in separate incidents were most worrying, warranting more transparent investigations and a measure of accountability from Israel, he said, calling on the authorities to take greater precautions to ensure the protection of civilians and to refrain from excessive use of force.

Expressing concern over the human rights situation of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, and opposing their forcible transfer, he said that during the reporting period, 30 structures had been demolished in East Jerusalem and 41 in Area C of the West Bank, displacing 149 Palestinians. "This is worrying and gives rise to serious humanitarian concerns while contributing to heightened tensions," he said, also expressing "extreme concern" over the situation in Gaza, including a recent increase in tensions. Calling on responsible parties to cease acts of violence, he said he could "report no progress" in efforts to further Palestinian reconciliation, adding that the United Nations continued to monitor internal tensions.

The Organization also continued to focus on revitalizing Gaza's economy and ending the Israeli closure policy, he continued. Import and export levels had improved from the period before Israel's June 2010 policy adjustment, but remained significantly below pre-2007 levels. Israel had approved \$26.4 million in projects by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on 6 January, including seven more UNRWA schools, bringing the total portfolio of approved United Nations projects to \$136.4 million. The scaling up of goods allowed for export and their swift delivery would remain a key priority for the world body, he said, adding that it would also present the Israeli Government with programmes to revitalize the private sector and rehabilitate public health infrastructure.

Turning to the Syrian track, he expressed regret over the lack of progress in efforts to promote peace between Israel and Syria. While the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained stable, despite continuing settlement activity, resolving the conflict on the basis of the relevant Council resolutions was critical for regional stability, he emphasized.

As for Lebanon, the political crisis provoked by divergent views on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon continued to deepen, he said, recalling that the 12 January resignation of 10 opposition Cabinet Ministers and one from President Michel Sleiman's bloc had forced the collapse of the Government of National Unity. The Secretary-General had called for continued dialogue among the parties and respect for Lebanon's Constitution and laws, while reiterating his full support for the Special Tribunal's independent work. President Sleiman had issued a statement on 13 January, accepting the resignations and requesting the Government to

continue functioning in a caretaker capacity. Parliamentary consultations to designate a new Prime Minister had been postponed until 24 January.

On 17 January, the Prosecutor of the Special Tribunal had announced his submission of an indictment and supporting materials to the pretrial Judge for confidential review, Mr. Pascoe said. The Secretary-General had noted that the filing of the indictment was in pursuit of the Special Tribunal's mandate to end impunity for the crimes that caused the death of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others. The Secretary-General had reiterated his call on all parties to refrain from attempts to interfere in or influence the Special Tribunal's work so as not to prejudice its outcome.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of [Palestine](#), said it was unimaginable that two years after the Israeli military aggression in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian people were still being prevented from reconstructing their communities. There had been no accountability for the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces, resolution 1860 (2009) remained unimplemented and the Israeli blockade of Gaza continued. He called for the immediate and complete lifting of the blockade and the sustained opening of Gaza's border crossings to the movement of people and goods, which would be vital to allowing the reconstruction process to get under way and for economic and social recovery.

Israel continued to carry out illegal settlement activities throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law, United Nations resolutions and its Road Map obligations, he said. Its confiscation of Palestinian land, transfer of more settlers, home demolitions and evictions, construction of the Wall, imposition of hundreds of checkpoints and other colonization measures had not ceased. Thousands of new settlement units had been approved, the historic Shepherd Hotel had been demolished and settler violence against Palestinian civilians and property continued, he pointed out.

He went on to underscore that Occupied East Jerusalem in particular remained the target of an extremely aggressive campaign to alter illegally its demographic composition, status and Palestinian Arab character. "The cumulative impact of this illegal Israeli policy on the contiguity, integrity, unity and viability of the Palestinian Territory has been destructive, with an equally destructive impact on the drive for peace," he said. Once again appealing to the Council to address those violations, he said the occupying Power's intensification of settlement activities required an equally intense response by the international community.

The settlements were linked to, and seriously affected, almost all other final-status issues, particularly Jerusalem, borders, security and water, he emphasized, adding that they were an attempt to impose a fait accompli. Describing the settlements as an "existential threat" to the two-State solution, he said international action to salvage the prospects for peace was thus of the utmost urgency. The draft resolution presented by Lebanon represented a constructive effort to address that burning issue. "After years of silence on illegal Israeli settlement activities, the Security Council, mandated to address such issues endangering international peace and security, is duty bound to redress this matter at this critical juncture."

He said the Palestinian people and leadership remained committed to peace. The state-building plan launched by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in August 2009 was moving towards implementation of the second phase, "Homestretch to Freedom", and should be completed by August, when national efforts for independence would converge with international efforts. Expressing gratitude to the 107 Member States that had recognized the State of Palestine, he called on all members of the international community, including the Council, to help end the long and tragic conflict and usher in an era of peace, security and coexistence for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples as well as the Middle East region as a whole.

ROSEMARY DICARLO ([United States](#)) called on both parties to return to good-faith negotiations towards a two-State solution, emphasizing that there was no better alternative. Settlement building was corrosive and the United States did not accept its legitimacy, although the status of existing settlements would remain subject to negotiations. However, she expressed particular concern over the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel and Israeli announcements that new units were to be built.

Pledging to continue pressing ahead, with the parties, for the resolution of core issues, she said those could only be resolved through negotiation, not Security Council action. That was why the United States opposed certain Council actions, she explained. Calling for an end to rocket attacks by Palestinian militants, the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit and the lessening of restrictions on Palestinian civilians, she said she was pleased with Israel's decision to allow exports from Gaza and its approval of construction projects there.

Turning to Lebanon, she welcomed the Special Tribunal's indictments and urged all parties to allow the constitutional process to determine the next Government. The United States commended international actors working to maintain calm and to ensure that the Special Tribunal's work remained unimpeded. Finally, she expressed her country's support for the acquisition of rights in Tunisia and urged all parties there to proceed calmly towards free and fair elections.

NAWAF SALAM ([Lebanon](#)), citing international law prohibiting the transfer of populations by an occupying Power, said the Council had also declared the illegality of Israeli settlement activity for some 40 years. Yet settlement activity continued and the settler population had doubled since the Oslo Agreement, he pointed out. Since the lifting of the partial freeze, settlement activity had accelerated even more, challenging not only international law, but also destroying the land and undermining the basis for a two-State solution.

Saying he recognized the value of international efforts to encourage negotiations, particularly those of the United States, he warned, however, that if the Council remained ineffective on the question of settlements, its credibility would be damaged as the Council would appear to operate under a double standard. That was why Lebanon had submitted a draft resolution on settlements, he explained, expressing gratitude to the 120 States that had co-sponsored the text. He called in Council members to adopt it unanimously, "with a single voice".

GÉRARD ARAUD ([France](#)) said there was a need to create conditions, politically and on the ground, for negotiations to take place, adding that it was also necessary to call on the parties to state their positions on the main final-status issues, as the United States Secretary of State had urged. The international community and the parties must be able to support all efforts, he said, noting that his country's Foreign Minister would visit the region from 19 to 23 January, when she would tell the parties that the support of States in the region, based on the Arab Peace Initiative, was crucial.

There would be no solution to the conflict until all settlement activity ended, including natural growth of existing settlements, he stressed, condemning also the recent demolition of the Shepherd Hotel to make way for a new settlement. The situation on the ground was likely to undermine implementation of the Fayyad Plan, which was a tangible achievement for shoring up Palestinian institutions, he said, adding that France was willing to organize a second donors' conference in Paris later in 2011.

He expressed support for the Lebanese authorities, saying his country remained committed to respecting Lebanon's institutions, democratic principles and sovereignty. France encouraged the parties to find a solution through dialogue, he said, noting that President Nicolas Sarkozy had proposed an international consultation in that regard. France also supported the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and called on all parties to respect its independence and refrain from obstructing its work.

ALFRED ALEXIS MOUNGARA MOUSSOTSI ([Gabon](#)) urged both parties to resume direct dialogue with the objective of creating a viable Palestinian State within safe, internationally recognized borders. He lauded the efforts of the United States, the Quartet and countries in the region to renew direct peace negotiations, stressing that the effective involvement of regional countries in the peace talks was essential for achieving peace objectives. Turning to Lebanon, he said the country's political leaders should engage in dialogue and pursue national reconciliation in a comprehensive regional peace process. He renewed support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to ensure full implementation of Council resolution 1701 (2006).

NÉSTOR OSORIO (Colombia), recounting his country's long commitment to a two-State solution and praising the contributions that both Jewish and Palestinian migrants had made to Colombia, said he was interested in all approaches aimed at achieving and consolidating a lasting peace in the region. The peaceful settlement of disputes, the non-use of force in international relations and self-determination were fundamental principles for Colombia. Israelis and Palestinians could no longer remain in confrontation and mistrust, he stressed, calling on both parties to seek a peaceful and respectful approach on the basis of mutual respect and recognition of the identity and rights of each people. He pledged his country's support for every possible approach aiming to promote sustainable and balanced solutions in the Middle East.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said President Dmitry Medvedev was in the region urging the parties to abide by their international obligations in order to ensure the resumption of negotiations. Israeli settlement activity made resumption more complicated, he said, adding that other crucial issues included ending rocket attacks, restoring intra-Palestinian unity and ending the blockade of Gaza. Expressing hope that the next Quartet meeting, convened on a Russian initiative, would bring the negotiations closer to a viable Palestinian State, he said the Russian Federation's proposal for an international conference on the issue remained on the table. Turning to Lebanon, he said recent events there were also of great concern. All action should remain within the constitutional sphere with the aim of finding solutions to all contentious issues through dialogue, he emphasized. Hopefully, the Special Tribunal would be allowed to act on the basis of evidence rather than political pressure.

WANG MIN (China), noting that the question of settlements was the greatest obstacle to the resumption of direct peace talks, urged Israel to cease completely all settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Stressing the need to create the requisite conditions for building mutual trust, he welcomed all efforts towards resuming dialogue and expressed hope that the parties would make common efforts for the early resumption of talks. The humanitarian situation remained harsh and serious, he said, adding that it was not conducive to the peace process. It was to be hoped that the parties concerned would implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and that Israel would lift the Gaza blockade, he said, urging the international community to provide the necessary support to the Palestinian people.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) noted that 2011 marked 20 years since the launch of the Middle East peace process at the Madrid Conference. "The goal of the international community should be to ensure that this is the last year of process and the beginning of a lasting agreement between the parties," he stressed. The current stalemate was deeply damaging, and it was critical to find a way to restart negotiations, which were the best way to achieve a sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian State. For renewed negotiations to succeed, he said, the parties should be clear on the parameters: a two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States, and a fair settlement of refugees. All parties must refrain from unilateral action that thwarted peace, such as the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel as well as plans to expand the Israeli settlement of Gilo by a further 138 units, he said. "Pushing ahead with settlement activity is a deeply unhelpful move."

He expressed increasing concern over the recent incidents in Gaza and strongly condemned the continuing rocket fire by militants in Gaza. A durable solution was needed for Gaza, he said, noting that, despite some progress, such as an increase in import volume, more fundamental changes were needed for the enclave to achieve pre-2007 trade levels. The United Kingdom was doing its part, through a package of proposals to expand the infrastructure of Kerem Shalom, provide security equipment to facilitate exports, and extend the role of the European Union police mission in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to provide training in border and crossing management for the Palestinian Authority. Progress must be judged by impact on the ground rather than truck numbers, he emphasized. On Lebanon, he condemned attempts to undermine the Special Tribunal, stressing that justice must be achieved and impunity for political assassinations ended.

PAUL WITTIG (Germany) said there was no viable alternative to the two-State solution, an objective shared by practically the entire international community and endorsed by the parties themselves. In order to make progress towards that goal, both parties were urged to return to direct negotiations and to engage in substance on final-status issues. Both sides, therefore, must abide by international law and the Road Map's provisions. The continuation of settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was illegal and an obstacle to peace, and must stop. The Palestinian side must refrain from incitement and violence, and Palestinian state-building must continue. Progress had been achieved in institution-building, including implementation of the Fayyad Plan.

He said that in order to prevent further isolation and radicalization of the population in Gaza, the policy of closure must end. Israel's decision to ease access to Gaza and allow exports must be fully implemented. Complementary measures were necessary to allow for Gaza's economic recovery, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Calling for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), he said the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit must be released without further delay. The international community's strong support was crucial for progress in the peace process, and an even more active role of the Middle East Quartet was needed.

Turning to the issue of Lebanon, he called on all parties to abide by their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). Recalling that the Special Tribunal had been established at the request of Lebanon in order to bring stability to the country and to end impunity, he said the reasons for establishing the Tribunal remained valid. He called on all parties to support the court's important work, to respect its independence and to refrain from political interference and coercion. Germany would continue to support the Tribunal, and while regional efforts aimed at stabilizing the situation were welcome, "at the same time, we cannot compromise when it comes to justice", he said.

BASO SANGQU (South Africa) said the Council should recommit to its mandate to address all matters of international peace and security without exception, emphasizing that it could not "outsource" the responsibility to address the situation in the Middle East. The continuous settlement construction, the freezing of which was a Palestinian condition for returning to the negotiating table, seemed to be a major setback for the peace talks, he said, pointing out that since the signing of the Oslo Accords more than 16 years ago, there had been more displacement of Palestinians, more curtailment of movement and access, and the building of many more illegal settlements. The creation of a viable Palestinian State within a peaceful environment was in Israel's interest, as its security could only be achieved through peace, he stressed.

The continuing blockade of Gaza had contributed directly to increased unemployment and poverty and had caused delays in the provision of humanitarian assistance, he said, calling on Israel to end the blockade, which was illegal in terms of international humanitarian law, including article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and myriad Council resolutions. He also condemned the continued shelling of Gaza by Israeli forces, and concomitantly called on the people of Gaza to refrain from indiscriminately firing rockets into Israel. Noting that more Member States had recently recognized the State of Palestine, he said: "We cannot avoid the reality of an independent State of Palestine. Our responsibility remains to ensure that it is viable, contiguous and sustainable, and be in a position to exist peacefully with its neighbour, the State of Israel."

U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria) said it was important to reflect soberly on the circumstances hindering the resumption of direct negotiations. Expressing her country's support for the two-State solution, she said it was important that the Council speak with one voice in calling once again on the parties to resume direct talks on all final-status issues without further delay. She urged Israel to take concrete steps to freeze all settlement activities, saying that new construction approvals were counter to the objective of building confidence, as was yesterday's incursion into Gaza, in response to militant attacks, which had resulted in the death of a Palestinian man.

It was also important for the Palestinians to enhance efforts to forge internal unity and deal with acts of militancy, she said. Leaders of both sides must endeavour to overcome all obstacles and demonstrate a strong desire to engage in a speedy negotiated settlement of all core issues, she said, adding that the international community should also remain engaged. Nigeria commended Israel's announcement of further measures to ease the blockade of Gaza, and hoped a complete lifting would come sooner rather than later. On Lebanon, she stressed the need for calm, restraint and dialogue, and called on all concerned to support that country's independence and territorial integrity as well as the mandate of the Special Tribunal.

MARIALUIZA RIBEIRO VIOTTI (Brazil) said the construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, which had gained pace since the settlement moratorium had not been renewed, was not only illegal but also undermined the peace process, poisoned the political environment and potentially exposed Israeli settlers to danger. It might risk rendering the two-State solution politically very difficult to implement. Settlement activity, therefore, must cease immediately and completely. She called on both parties, in particular Israel, not to miss any opportunity to make strides towards the resumption of substantive and action-oriented negotiations. Brazil had decided to recognize the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders. Adoption of the draft resolution on the Israeli settlements, so far co-sponsored by more than 120 delegations, would send a signal to the parties that the international community was serious in its attempt to help ensure the long-term feasibility of the two-State solution.

Welcoming Israeli measures to ease the blockade on the Gaza Strip, especially regarding exports of agricultural products, textiles and other goods, she said that overtone should be turned into new development projects. The "IBSA Forum" (India, Brazil and South Africa) had approved the project for the partial reconstruction of the Red Crescent Al-Quds Hospital in Gaza. Easing the blockade, however, was no substitute for fully lifting it. The collective suffering imposed on Gaza's entire population, apart from being unacceptable, played a questionable role as part of an effective security strategy. Brazil insisted that freedom of movement for people and goods should be ensured while taking into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. Also unacceptable was the launching of rockets and mortars from Gaza into southern Israel.

Turning to Lebanon, she said the international community must come together in support of dialogue and foster the spirit of reconciliation and justice. She urged all political groups in Lebanon to refrain from provocations and violence and to abide by the relevant Council resolutions.

JOSÉ FILIPE MORAES CABRAL (Portugal) said strong political motivation from all sides, as well as the strong involvement of the international community, would ensure the conditions and support for political solutions that would bring peace, stability, security and economic and social progress to the Middle East. Portugal supported United States efforts to relaunch a credible peace process. Nonetheless, developments on the ground continued to seriously undermine confidence in the process, thwart attempts to advance negotiations and erode the prerequisites for the two-State solution. Portugal deeply regretted Israel's decision not to extend the settlement moratorium, as well as the resumption of settlement activity as soon as the moratorium ended. It called upon the Government of Israel to reconsider its decision and to abide by its international obligations and its commitments under the Road Map, including dismantling all outposts erected since March 2001. In that vein, he recalled that the Fourth Geneva Convention applied to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

He said his country condemned all actions that undermined trust and opposed all unilateral actions that prejudged the outcome of negotiations on permanent-status issues, including Jerusalem. It also unequivocally condemned the indiscriminate firing of mortars and rockets by extremist groups in Gaza against civilian populations in Israel, and called for their immediate halt. His delegation was deeply concerned with the escalation of those terrorist attacks during the last month. Taking note of some progress in the situation in Gaza, Portugal nevertheless called upon Israel to allow the immediate and sustained opening of the crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Prime Minister Fayyad and his Government were progressing steadily in preparing Palestinian institutions for statehood, and he called upon Palestinian and Israeli leaders to respond positively to efforts to relaunch meaningful negotiations on all core issues.

Regarding Lebanon, the Secretary-General had rightly emphasized the importance of maintaining calm, he said as he called on all Lebanese political forces to refrain from actions that might escalate tensions, and to seek a negotiated political solution to the current situation. Portugal reiterated its full support for the work of the Special Tribunal and that of UNIFIL — in which it participated — and its commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence.

HARDEEP SINGH PURI (India) described as discouraging the stalled talks, the resumption of settlement activity and the human suffering in Gaza over the last few months, noting, however, that despite the Strip's difficult situation, its economy had grown by 8 per cent in 2010. The World Bank had reported that if the Palestinian Authority maintained its current performance in institution-building and public services it would be well positioned to establish an independent State. There had also been less violent incidents in 2010 than in previous years, he said, warning, however, that the current impasse could fuel the already combustible situation in the region.

He recalled that during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had reiterated his unwavering support for the Palestinian struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State. India had long contributed to the building of Palestinian capacity and institutions through material and technical aid programmes, he said. Resources from the IBSA Fund were being used to partially reconstruct the Al-Quds Hospital in Gaza and to build an indoor multipurpose sports complex in Ramallah. Genuine peace in the region required the resolution of other issues, including the restoration of other Arab lands under Israeli occupation, he said.

Council President IVAN BARBALIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina), speaking in his national capacity, said his country did not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem, adding that the Holy City of the three great monotheistic religions — Christianity, Judaism and Islam — should be the symbol of peace, freedom of religious expressions and human rights. Underlining the illegality of all settlement on occupied land, as well as their contravention of Israel's obligations under the Road Map, he condemned the destruction of the Shepherd Hotel and the planned construction of a new illegal settlement in its place.

On Gaza, he took note of the increased flow of food and consumer goods into the enclave, but called for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings to humanitarian aid, commercial goods and people moving to and from Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). Israel's security concerns, including a complete stop to all violence and arms smuggling, must also be addressed, he stressed, reiterating his call for an immediate end to all violence and urging all parties to observe restraint and avoid further escalation.

Turning to Lebanon, he said a functioning Government of National Unity was the best guarantee to preserve stability and promote dialogue in the country. It was therefore essential that Lebanese leaders did their utmost to prevent a political crisis and find a negotiated solution to the current situation, he emphasized. Expressing full support for the work and independence of international criminal courts and tribunals, he called upon all parties to refrain from interfering in the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and from prejudging its outcome.

MAGED ABDELAZIZ (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the international community must work collectively and speedily to establish an independent and viable Palestinian State by addressing all six core final-status issues. Unfortunately, all efforts to ensure the continuity of direct talks had failed owing to Israel's illegal settlement activities. The Non-Aligned Movement therefore called on the Council to be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its obligations under international law and previous agreements. Strongly condemning the imprisonment of nearly 10,000 Palestinians, he called for their immediate release and for proper international inspection of their current condition. He went on to reiterate that the illegal blockade of Gaza must end, re-emphasizing the urgent need for reconstruction.

Turning to Lebanon, he condemned Israeli violations of that country's sovereignty, calling on all concerned parties to implement fully Council resolution 1701 (2006). He reasserted that all Israeli actions to alter the occupied Syrian Golan were null and void, and had no legal effect, demanding that Israel withdraw. Finally, he welcomed the international solidarity in condemning acts of terrorism that had occurred in his country, but totally rejected their characterization as attacks against minorities.

ZEID RA'AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan), citing the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, said the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel last week could neither change the legal status of East Jerusalem as occupied territory nor turn it into Israeli territory. Israel was virtually alone in recognizing the legality of such actions, he said, pointing out that it was not Israeli law that applied in Occupied Palestinian Territory, but international humanitarian law, as the International Court of Justice had affirmed.

For Israel to offer to hold talks while allowing the continuing usurpation of Palestinian lands was contemptible, he said, noting that there were now fears that no comprehensive peace agreement could reverse the entrenchment of settlers in East Jerusalem, making a durable peace impossible. Settlement activity must therefore be stopped and a Palestinian State brought into being, he said. Jordan's condemnation of settlement building was not founded on enmity towards the Jewish people, he stressed, but on a three-decade-long violation of international humanitarian law, as confirmed by the International Court of Justice.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) said Israeli settlement building and home demolitions continued without effective United Nations measures to prevent such abuses. All Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was illegal and a major obstacle to regional peace. The international community must demand an immediate end to it, he stressed, adding that his delegation was one of the co-sponsors of the draft resolution before the Council. The United Nations should categorically condemn Israel's repeated violations of international law and take practical steps to prevent them, he emphasized, welcoming the growing number of countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, to have recognized Palestine as a free, independent State.

He underlined the importance of next month's meeting in Cairo of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, particularly with regard to the difficult situation of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres. That commendable initiative created an opportunity to address repeated human rights violations, he said, adding that the daily suffering of Palestinians in Gaza could not be ignored and should lead to the immediate lifting of Israel's blockade. He also called on Israel to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and avoid conflicts like that of July 2006. Venezuela encouraged direct negotiations between the parties, as called for in Council resolution 1701 (2006), he said, urging Member States also to call on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan.

HASAN KLEIB (Indonesia) said illegal Israeli settlements undermined all efforts to restart the peace talks, jeopardized the vision of a two-State solution and exacerbated regional conflict. The Council must regain its role in resolving settlement issues, as it had done in 1980 and as mandated by the United Nations Charter. Indonesia would co-sponsor the draft resolution on Israel's illegal settlement activity and hoped it would reverse the Council's inactivity over Palestinian suffering, he said, adding that Council must positively influence the Middle East peace process. He expressed support for the current surge in diplomacy aimed at relaunching negotiations and jumpstarting a comprehensive peace process, including the ongoing efforts of the United States. There must be an alignment between the peace process and a peace settlement, he said, pointing out that a forced settlement would be short-lived and hazardous. The need for a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict was critical.

OCTAVO ERRÁZURIZ (Chile), endorsing the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, recalled that his country had long supported a two-State solution. Chile lent its resolute support to reinvigorating negotiations on a comprehensive peace agreement. Calling for the immediate suspension of Israeli settlement activity, he noted that the Chilean Government had recognized Palestine as an independent State.

PEDRO NÚÑEZ MOSQUERA (Cuba), supporting the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the international community must ensure that Israel ended its cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza. He condemned the settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and demanded that they end immediately, along with the eviction of Palestinian residents, the construction of the separation wall and the destruction of Palestinian buildings. The Council's silence on such matters over the past two years had allowed Israel to continue its practices, he said.

Direct talks had lasted for less than a month due to the illegal and destructive practice of settlement construction, he continued. Any measure or action that Israel took in order to change the democratic and institutional character of the occupied Syrian Golan were null and void, he said, demanding Israel's withdrawal from the area. The Council must shoulder its responsibility to ensure peace and security in the region, he said, adding that it was imperative that a peace agreement be reached in 2011, guaranteeing the Palestinian people's exercise of self-determination.

PATRICK MUGOYA (Uganda) urged both Israelis and Palestinians to summon the necessary courage to engage, without delay, in substantive negotiations on all core issues, including security, borders, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem. That negotiation process would require courageous decisions and concessions by both parties. He was deeply concerned about recent developments that had resulted in stalling the talks. The continued settlement activity by Israel was a recipe for conflict. The recent demolition of the Shepherd Hotel and the planned construction of a new settlement were not conducive to negotiations. He called upon Israel to freeze all settlement construction, including for natural growth.

He said that under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, the Palestinian Authority had accomplished significant progress towards fulfilling its obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the security sector, institution-building and economic development. Calling for the complete lifting of the blockade on Gaza, he said that while the easing of the blockade was welcome, it was evident that humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts continued to be hampered. It was essential that both parties exercise maximum restraint and adhere to the ceasefire in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

KAZUO KODAMA (Japan) said the only way to achieve durable peace was to achieve the two-State solution through sincere negotiations. As there was a lack of mutual trust that prevented restarting direct negotiations, he called on both sides to take steps to create an environment conducive to direct negotiations. The two parties must abide by their obligations under previous agreements, most notably, the Road Map. He called on Israel to freeze its settlement activities in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and he condemned the demolition of a part of the Shepherd Hotel. Japan did not recognize any unilateral measures that would prejudice the outcome of final-status negotiations. He called on the Palestinian Authority to improve security and fulfil its commitment to cease violence and incitement, and he strongly condemned the rocket attacks into Israel.

He said that Israeli measures to ease the Gaza blockade was a positive step, but concerns about the humanitarian situation remained. He stressed the importance of further easing the blockade while preventing the inflow of weapons into the Gaza Strip. He welcomed Israel's easing of restrictions on movement in the West Bank, which had contributed to the development of the Palestinian economy, and he sought their further easing.

Concerned about the situation in Lebanon, he expressed his country's support for the efforts of President Michel Sleiman towards the early establishment of a new Government and the maintenance of democratic institutions. The Special Tribunal was an independent, international and judicial organization whose work would enhance the rule of law and contribute to ending impunity. The Tribunal should continue to carry out its mandate without any interference.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) said the ongoing state of flux was not at all conducive to addressing the complex issues involved in the Middle East. An impasse in which one side undermined the possibility of talks was not tenable. Israel was imposing its will on the Palestinians through settlements, evictions, demolitions and similar actions. It was high time for the Council to make a statement on such unilateral Israeli actions. Meanwhile, the Palestinians were well positioned to establish their State in the near future based on 1967 borders.

He said that, despite the diplomacy of the past two years, conditions in Gaza remained appalling due to the blockade, and Israel had yet to provide a satisfactory report on the attack on the aid convoy to the area. He pledged Turkey's support for all initiatives that could help bring about a fair and peaceful solution.

MOHAMMED LOULICHI (Morocco) stressed the importance of maintaining the momentum that had resulted in the resumption of direct negotiations in Washington, D.C., where the Palestinian side had expressed its desire to continue on a path to peace and stability. He welcomed United States President Barack Obama's statements on achieving an independent Palestinian State in a timely manner. The Palestinian side had taken significant steps to build such a State and to fulfil its obligations. Israel, on the other hand, had taken unilateral measures to obliterate the Palestinian presence in the Occupied Territory.

Describing recent Israeli settlement activity, he said his country and its King, who was the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, condemned all efforts to change the nature of Jerusalem. Peace was an urgent requirement in the Middle East, and settlement activity was

impeding it. The two-State solution was the only means to end decades of conflict. In order to meet that goal, all avenues to restart negotiations should be pursued, along with efforts to create conducive conditions for their success, and as a way of averting further violence.

HAMIDON ALI (Malaysia), aligning his delegation with the statements by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that the continued occupation of Palestinian territory was unacceptable and Israel had time and again put itself on the wrong side of history, with impunity. He welcomed international recognition of the illegality of Israeli settlement activity as a reminder to Palestinians that the world had not forgotten them and that Israel must fulfil its legal obligations.

On Gaza, he reiterated his call on Israel to lift the blockade and to expedite the approval of United Nations projects. Provocative actions, such as the shooting of Palestinian civilians, must stop. Resolving such issues required the international community to focus all energy on achieving a comprehensive peace in the region and restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to an independent State. All parties must act sincerely to achieve those objectives. He urged the Council to act by bringing into effect its own resolutions on Palestine and the Middle East.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO (Senegal), Chairperson of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said continued Israeli activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was the main obstacle to renewed peace talks. He called on Israel to completely cease all settlement activity, which ran counter to the goal of achieving success in the final-status negotiations. Since the expiration in September of Israel's settlement moratorium, it had built more than 1,600 units in the Palestinian Occupied Territory, notably in East Jerusalem. The recent Israeli Government decision to invest more than \$500 million to expand settlements in 2012 showed its intention to continue illegal settlement activity. It would be useful for the Council to reaffirm its position on settlements and its intention to have international law and legitimacy prevail. It behoved the Council to intervene urgently to prevent the situation from deteriorating.

He expressed hope that the draft resolution on settlement activity would be unanimously adopted by the Council. The Committee asked the Israeli Government to extend the settlement moratorium indefinitely, as doing so would enable the parties to renew serious and direct negotiations. He urged the Council and the Quartet to reaffirm their principled position on the settlements, as the future of the peace process was at stake. The Council must send a message that settlement activities were illegal and incompatible with peace, and therefore must stop.

SIRODJIDIN ASLOV (Tajikistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said that Israel, the occupying Power, had methodically intensified its violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through, among other things, confiscating lands, building illegal settlements, constructing the apartheid wall, erecting checkpoints and imposing the unjust blockade on Gaza. Al-Quds al-Sharif remained an integral part of the Palestinian Territory and its illegal annexation by Israel had been rejected by the international community.

He said that Israel, however, continued to pursue a systematic process of altering the historical Arab-Islamic identity of the Holy City and changing its demographic composition. Settlement construction, if allowed to continue, would make Jerusalem the "capital of hatred, fanaticism and violence" instead of the "capital of tolerance and coexistence". Such illegal Israeli practices would definitely undermine the diplomatic efforts to restart constructive negotiations. The international community was required to bring a decisive end to the Israeli settlement policy on Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem. Israel must comply with the will of the international community and abide by international law. It must stop building and expanding illegal settlements.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, he said, remained deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and called on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Sheba'a Farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills and the northern part of al-Ghajar village. The Organization of the Islamic Conference also reaffirmed that all actions by Israel to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, were null and void and had no legal effect. The Organization of the Islamic Conference demanded that Israel abide fully and immediately with Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967.

PEDRO SERRANO, Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union, noted with regret that direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians had halted since the Council's last discussion on the Middle East in October 2010. The Union reaffirmed its readiness to contribute to a negotiated solution on all final-status issues within the 12 months set by the Quartet, and supported the idea of a Quartet meeting in the coming weeks. The Union reiterated its call on Israel to end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem. As stated by Union Ministers in December 2010, such settlements were illegal under international law and were an obstacle to peace. In that context, the Union strongly condemned the latest developments in East Jerusalem, most recently the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel on 9 January and the planned construction of a new illegal settlement.

He noted that the Union's High Representative, Catherine Ashton, had visited the region in the first days of 2011, where she had met with representatives of both parties and discussed with the Palestinian Authority the implementation of its state-building plan. Political and financial support from the international community was "essential" in that regard and the Union urged those who had made financial commitments to deliver on their promises.

The Union remained extremely concerned, he said, about the prevailing situation in Gaza and firmly reiterated its calls for the full implementation of Council resolution 1860 (2009), as well as for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods and persons from the West Bank. The Union renewed calls on, among others, those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay. The delegation welcomed the announcement by the Israeli Government concerning new measures to facilitate exports out of Gaza, and encouraged its swift implementation. It stood ready to work with both parties towards reaching pre-2007 levels of exports in 2011.

He also reiterated the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks, as well as the Union's support for the Lebanese authorities. In particular, he renewed the delegation's support for the Secretary-General's recent unequivocal statement reaffirming the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and his appeal for calm. The delegation finally underlined the fundamental importance to respect and ensure promotion and defence of human rights and stressed that human rights violations must be effectively remedied.

LIBRAN N. CABACTULAN (Philippines) pointed out that, as a major source of oil and a big market for exports and services, the stability and progress of the Middle East was essential for world peace. With some 2 million of its citizens living and working in the region, the Philippine Government attached great importance to the security and safety of every one of them. He called for the complete and unconditional lifting of Israel's blockade of Gaza, saying it was counterproductive and served only the collective punishment of hapless civilians, particularly women and children.

A nuclear-weapon-free Middle East would be an important building block for lasting peace and stability in the region, he said, recalling that the 2010 Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons had considered how to make progress on the 1995 General Assembly resolution calling for the establishment of such a zone. It had agreed that the Secretary-General and the resolution's co-sponsors would convene a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East. With 2012 "just around the corner", and in order for the conference to be successful, all nations in the region must attend and negotiate in a forthright, give-and-take manner. The conference should not be turned into a "blaming and naming forum", he emphasized, noting that it would present a rare chance to show the seriousness and goodwill of all stakeholders.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI (Iran) said the occupation of Palestine was the most painful and biggest human tragedy in modern history. More than six decades of homelessness, massacres, house demolitions and a host of other crimes were all sufficient for the international community to take decisive measures to stop the brutalities and bestow upon the people of Palestine their legitimate rights. It was particularly urgent that the international community take Israel's accelerated settlement activity more seriously than ever, he stressed, welcoming the draft resolution before the Council.

He emphasized that his country's support of the text was without prejudice to its non-recognition of the Israeli regime's legitimacy. Iran called on all States to

support a final solution to the "great historical tragedy" through a general referendum in which all Palestinians would participate, regardless of where they lived, in order to determine the kind of system they desired. As for Lebanon, he said the use of political pressure for the issuance of a politically motivated verdict by the Special Tribunal would discredit international justice and negatively impact the region's stability. Instead, regional initiatives should be pursued, free from the intervention of big Powers, he added.

MORTEN WETLAND (Norway) said 2011 would clearly be a critical crossroads in the peace process. By August, the Fayyad Administration would be set to complete its two-year plan for Palestinian state-building and the agreed time frame of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations would end. Now was the time to seize the opportunity as the prospect of a negotiated two-State solution was at stake. Everyone must stand firm behind the stated goal of negotiating a framework agreement on permanent-status issues and a subsequent comprehensive peace treaty, within the agreed timeline. Norway was greatly encouraged by the World Bank's assertion in New York last September that the Palestinian Authority stood ready to create a State in the near future, he said.

By September, however, there must be a substantial breakthrough on the political track, he stressed, pointing out that the bottom-up approach to Palestinian state-building was not sufficient in itself. Questions would arise in earnest regarding the sustainability of such a State beyond 2011 unless there was a decisive top-down push. The Palestinian State needed the right political and economic conditions to break away from its dependence on donors, he said. Restricted access for Palestinians to resources and markets in Area C and East Jerusalem as well as foreign markets was a major barrier to economic growth in the private sector. That potential must be tapped to fuel the drive to independence. Norway was deeply concerned about the fragile state of the peace process, he said, calling urgently on the parties to return to negotiations in good faith.

KHALID ABDALRAZQA AL-NAFISEE (Saudi Arabia) said the Arab demand had been and still was the enforcement of international legitimacy, starting with implementation of Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of "land for just and comprehensive peace". That required full withdrawal from occupied Arab territories to the 1967 borders, return of Palestinian refugees with full recovery of their rights and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. It also required Israel's withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese Sheba'a Farms.

He said that in the absence of the international community's will to shoulder its responsibilities to establish peace and security, the Israeli occupation forces applied such policies as building the apartheid wall, constructing and expanding settlements and financing, protecting and arming settlers. The indiscriminate demolition of houses — including the demolition of the historical Shepherd Hotel — would scuttle all peace initiatives, as the wall and those settlements made it almost impossible to establish a contiguous, viable Palestinian State. He, therefore, called on the international community, the United Nations and the Quartet to adopt a comprehensive strategic approach towards an immediate and complete cessation of all settlement projects in the occupied territories. Israel should immediately accept the Arab Peace Initiative, which was the only path to a lasting and comprehensive peace.

GHAZI JOMAA (Tunisia), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said the international community must make a firm commitment to end Israeli policies that impeded the peace process in order to avert serious consequences. Israeli settlement activities were illegal and had derailed the recently resumed talks, he said, recalling that the international community, including the Commission of the Arab Peace Initiative, had expended much effort in trying to restart the talks. It was therefore alarming that Israel persisted in its illegal practices, including the assassination of Palestinian civilians, the blockade of Gaza, an increase in expulsions, house demolitions, military incursions and many others that contravened the Geneva Conventions.

Those practices must all come to an immediate end, he emphasized, calling on the Council to take up its responsibilities in that regard, and on the Quartet also to take effective action. The Arab Group called for the lifting of all impediments to the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza, so the inhabitants could enjoy their basic rights. In addition, the Group opposed any actions aimed at changing the character of Jerusalem, Israeli air violations in Lebanon as well as Israel's continuing occupation of the Syrian Golan and other Arab lands. Any administrative changes made were null and void, he stressed, adding that there was no alternative to ending occupation. Firm measures must be taken to deal with the underlying tensions and ensure civilian rights.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria), lamenting the Council's inability to honour its commitment to protect global peace and security in line with the Charter, said the situation in the Middle East showed there was a methodical attempt to violate rights in the region, contrary to the basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Israel's aggressive behaviour and unbridled settlement campaigns in occupied Arab territories had been condemned by the international community as violations of international law, he said, pointing to Israel's eviction of Arabs from their own lands, the creation of foreign settlements, the construction of a separation wall, the Judaization of Jerusalem and racist practices, all of which were carried out amid a deafening international silence, connoting complicity.

He said the perpetrators of crimes in Gaza remained unpunished, adding that such impunity only encouraged Israel to continue its inhumane blockade. Its response to international appeals for justice had been to attack the "Freedom Flotilla" in 2010, he said. Israel persisted in its refusal to return the occupied Syrian Golan and refused to implement Council resolutions that considered its annexation of the region null and void. The Israeli Knesset had authorized a law calling for the holding of a referendum before it could withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and East Jerusalem, he said, describing that action as a clear rejection of international law and the Council. The Syrian Golan could not be subjected to negotiations, he emphasized, reiterating his country's demand for peace and the return of its usurped land. Until when would Israel remain above the law? he asked. Would the Council fail to force it to comply with its obligations under international law?

MOURAD BENMEHIDI (Algeria) said Israel's recent allocation of resources to expand settlements through 2012 demonstrated that it was clearly not on the path to peace, but was intent on undermining any future prospects for a peace settlement. It was equally clear that such measures were intended to remove all traces of Palestinian heritage and fortify the Israeli presence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In Gaza, the situation remained disturbing in terms of human rights and international law, he said, reiterating Algeria's demand for the immediate lifting of the illegal blockade. He also expressed serious concern over the imprisonment of 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails, where they were subjected to torture, the focus of a recent international seminar held in Algiers. He stressed the responsibility of the Security Council to halt the brutal practices of the Israeli Government by ensuring compliance with international law.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON (Pakistan), endorsing the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said he shared the assessment that the impasse in the peace process was due to an expansionist Israeli policy which manifested itself in the form of ongoing settlement activities, a clear violation of international law and a major provocation. Israel must stop building new settlements and using settlement activity as a political tool, he stressed. Meanwhile, the Palestinian people had taken important strides towards building State institutions in two years, establishing a solid edifice for statehood and removing the pretexts for the occupation. The goal of a Palestine State by August 2011 was well within grasp, he said, adding that letting it fall by the wayside would have the same serious consequences of other missed deadlines. The Security Council should therefore fulfil its Charter responsibility to ensure that the opportunity was not lost by calling upon Israel unconditionally to cease all settlement activity and resume direct negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on all outstanding issues.

GARY QUINLAN (Australia) said all Member States should welcome the prospect of an Israeli and a Palestinian State being represented at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly later this year. Israeli and Palestinian leaders needed to return to direct talks as a matter of urgency, he said, adding that both sides must refrain from actions that undermined confidence, including the construction of settlements. Australia unambiguously opposed new Israeli settlements, he said, describing them as illegal. They actually undermined the prospects for peace, he added, noting that the now-expired moratorium on settlements had had a positive impact.

Turning to Gaza, he said the situation in the enclave remained extremely serious. While welcoming the relaxation of some Israeli restrictions on access and recognizing its legitimate security concerns, Australia urged Israel to implement immediately the announced relaxation of restrictions and to ease them further. As for the situation in Lebanon, he said all parties must play a constructive role and refrain from any actions that might create instability. He called on all parties to cooperate with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and to allow it to complete its important work.

DAFFA-ALLA ELHAG ALI OSMAN ([Sudan](#)) said the United Nations had adopted many resolutions calling on Israel to end its illegal practices, and the international community had almost universally agreed that Israeli settlement activity must end, as it was a serious obstacle to the attainment of a lasting peace. Settlement activity was currently hampering prospects for resumption of direct talks. The Security Council should shoulder its responsibilities by getting Israel to end its settlement activities in order to pave the way for negotiations leading to the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State. All those who desired such an outcome should vote for the resolution under discussion.

NOJIBUR RAHMAN ([Bangladesh](#)) lamented that the Palestinian people continued to be denied their fundamental right to self-determination and to live freely on their own land. That appeared to be a collective failure on the part of the international community, and more so, on Israel. To achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it was very important to address the key issue of Israel's prolonged and illegal occupation of Arab territories. He was disheartened to see that although the Israeli Prime Minister and Palestinian Authority President had pledged in September 2010 to seek a framework agreement on permanent status within one year, the process had suffered a serious setback — because Israel had not renewed its 10-month settlement moratorium that had expired at the end of September and because the Palestinian President refused to resume peace talks with Israel until it ended all settlement activity.

He said direct negotiations would only succeed if there was sustained regional and international support for the talks, the parallel process of Palestinian state-building and the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive regional peace, as envisaged in the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant Assembly and Council resolutions, the land-for-peace principle and the Madrid Conference terms of reference, which guaranteed Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories to pre-1967 borders, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. He reiterated Bangladesh's long-held position that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine was the root cause of regional violence, unrest and destabilization.

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