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HOPE MOUNTS IN WAKE OF 'PROMISING OPENING' IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS,

BUT BOTH SIDES MUST TAKE TOUGH CHOICES, SECURITY COUNCIL TOLD

UN Special Coordinator Also Calls Attention to Escalating Sectarian Threats

Intense diplomatic activity to rekindle the peace process and achieve a two-State solution had reached a "decisive point" as Israelis and Palestinians had agreed, in principle, to return to the negotiating table, said the top United Nations Middle East official today during an open debate of the Security Council.

"Some very tough choices will be required from both sides in the period ahead," said Robert H. Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Yet, a resolution was critical for the fate of the region, which was witnessing a deepening crisis and humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and significant political developments in Egypt, he said.

It was against that backdrop, he added, that a "promising opening" had emerged from the intense diplomatic efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry and a number of partners. Those endeavours had led to the announcement that a basis had been established to resume direct final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, he said.

Leadership, courage and responsibility would be needed on the part of both sides to sustain that push towards achieving the two-State solution, he continued. It was also crucial to build on the opening offered by the Arab League ministerial committee's reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative and the active and concrete support pledged to the negotiations by European Union Foreign Ministers.

Stressing the need to make tangible progress ahead of the start of the General Assembly session in September, he added that "both parties must take every possible step to promote conditions conducive to the resumption of a political process and refrain from actions that undermine trust".

He characterized the situation on the ground since his last report to the Council as "relatively quiet, but tense and volatile". Demolitions of Palestinian property had again increased, and some settlement planning had resumed, both in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, he said.

Referring to the "grim situation" in Syria, he said that President Bashar al-Assad's regime continued to use its military might in civilian areas. Parties to the conflict were failing in their obligation to protect civilians, and the surge in sectarian threats and violence in Syria and across the region was "deeply worrisome".

An overwhelming number of the day's more than 40 speakers welcomed the efforts of Secretary of State Kerry and the agreement reached in principle to resume talks, as well as the announcement of the parties' preliminary meeting in Washington.

Taking the floor, the parties themselves stressed the importance of the opportunity presented by the agreement, with the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine noting that decisions made now would determine the future of the two-State solution. He hoped to seize the opportunity and was cooperating responsibly with efforts to restart the peace process, he said.

The representative of Israel, while underscoring the thousands of terror attacks by Palestinians against Israelis, nonetheless joined in reiterating his commitment to the peace process. He was looking forward to resuming direct talks with the Palestinian Authority, he said, adding that his vision was of two States.

A number of other delegations, however, emphasized that the resumption of peace talks was only the beginning of the process. Both sides must show bold and decisive leadership, said the United Kingdom's delegate, calling for an end to settlement announcements and the use of live fire by the Israeli Defence Forces during demonstrations, as well as rocket fire from Palestinians into Israel.

Several speakers expressed support for the European Union Commission's recent tough line on products from Israeli settlers and related organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory - a move which some said sent a strong message that the global community's patience with Israeli settlements had run out - and they called on other countries to follow suit.

Attention was also drawn to the humanitarian catastrophe and political crisis unfolding in Syria, which many delegates warned threatened to further destabilize an already volatile region. With a death toll that could reach 100,000 as early as next month and some 6 million people in need of assistance, they characterized the situation as "appalling" and "deplorable", and called for all sides to embrace dialogue and open access for humanitarian aid.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Togo, Azerbaijan, Argentina, Australia, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Pakistan, Luxembourg, Guatemala, Morocco, Russian Federation, France, China, United States, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Malaysia, Japan, Djibouti (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Indonesia, Bangladesh, Ecuador, South Africa, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Iceland, Cuba, Peru and India.

Also taking part was the Permanent Observer of the Holy See and Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Rights of the Palestinian People, also participated.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and ended at 3:45 p.m.

Background

The Security Council convened this morning to hold an open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

Briefing

ROBERT H. SERRY, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said that, as the region continued to undergo a deepening crisis with an ever deteriorating humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and significant political developments in Egypt, the "peace process remains critical for the fate of the region". It was against that backdrop that the Secretary-General had welcomed United States Secretary of State John Kerry's intense diplomatic efforts of recent months and his announcement that the basis had been established to resume direct final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

"Some very tough choices will be required from both sides in the period ahead", he said, adding that both Israeli and Palestinian leaders would have to win the support of their constituencies for renewed negotiations. The Secretary-General had called on both sides to show leadership, courage and responsibility to sustain that effort towards achieving the two-State solution.

While United States engagement was critical, he said, there was also a need for a broader regional and international role in support of any political initiative, as well as continued efforts to ensure that the Palestinian Authority remained a viable interlocutor and partner. In that regard, it was crucial to build on the opening offered by the Arab League ministerial committee's reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative. European Union Foreign Ministers had also recently pledged active and concrete support to the negotiations.

It was important that tangible progress be made ahead of the start of the General Assembly session in September, he went on, stressing that any negotiations must be accompanied by a renewed focus on visibly and tangibly improving the situation on the ground. "Both parties must take every possible step to promote conditions conducive to the resumption of a political process, and refrain from actions that undermine trust," he said. The situation in Gaza should not be forgotten. Improving the humanitarian and security situation in the wake of transformations in Egypt was another important enabler for peace and stability.

Turning to the situation on the ground, he characterized the reporting period as "relatively quiet, but tense and volatile". He was concerned about the prisoners' protests, including the hunger strikes already exceeding two months. Israeli security forces had conducted a total of 360 search and arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, including area A, resulting in one Palestinian shot and killed and 134 injured. Israeli security forces had announced a crackdown on Israelis suspected of carrying out so-called "price tag" attacks, with a number of reported arrests.

Demolitions of Palestinian property in Area C and East Jerusalem had again increased during the reporting period, and he regretted to report that, despite earlier reports of Israeli restraint on settlement activity, some settlement planning had resumed, both in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. "The position of the United Nations regarding settlements is unequivocal: they are contrary to international law and to Israel's commitments under the road map", he said.

The situation in Gaza had largely remained calm, with a total of three rockets fired from the enclave into Israel. The situation there had been affected by the political developments in Egypt, and for security reasons, the Rafah crossing had been closed for nearly a week. The Egyptian authorities had also taken robust measures against the tunnels into Gaza. He encouraged all parties not to forget the precarious situation in Gaza and to take advantage of the improved context between the parties to lift the remaining closures.

Referring to last week's briefing by Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos and others, who had described the "grim situation" in Syria, he said that all combatants there should be reminded that those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law would be held accountable. The Government continued to use its military might in civilian areas, while increasingly attracting foreign fighters and using paramilitary forces. Parties to the conflict continued to fail in their obligation to protect civilians, and the surge in sectarian threats and violence in Syria and across the region was "deeply worrisome".

"Syria is increasingly turning into a regional, if not a global, battleground", he said. Unfortunately, the warring parties had not responded to appeals for cessation of violence during Ramadan. The international community continued to do its best to ensure that the Geneva conference took place as soon as possible, but while progress had been made and convergence found, a number of parameters for the conference were still being discussed.

The Secretary-General remained gravely concerned at reports of alleged chemical weapons use in Syria, he went on. In addition, the Russian Federation, on 9 July, had presented to the Secretary-General its analysis of one incident of alleged use. That and other information was currently being studied by the United Nations investigative mission, he said, adding that the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Angela Kane, and Professor Åke Sellström would visit Damascus this week to complete consultations on the modalities of cooperation required for the proper, safe and efficient conduct of the investigative mission.

He recalled that the Council, in its presidential statement of 10 July, had unambiguously stressed the need to redouble efforts to preserve Lebanon from the spillover of the Syrian conflict. However, there was a real danger of further escalation of violence, extending from the conflict in Syria. On 9 July, a bomb in Beirut's Shi'ite southern suburbs had injured 53 people and caused extensive material damage. On 7 July, three people had been injured, including two soldiers, when a bomb exploded near Hermel. Meanwhile, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) along the Blue Line remained broadly quiet.

A promising opening emerged last week in the ongoing efforts to develop a meaningful political initiative, he said, adding, "we have now reached a decisive point" and now was the moment to translate the collective call for action into a shared sense of urgency in supporting leaders on both sides. The risk of foregoing the

present opportunity should be clear for both sides, he concluded.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, said the meeting took place at “a critical juncture in the long history of the international community’s attempts to peacefully and justly resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”. Thanks to the efforts of the United States and the Arab partners of the Ministerial Committee of the Arab Peace Initiative, there was an opportunity to make peace a reality. Decisions made now would determine whether a two-State solution would be realized. Failure to achieve it now would lead to alternative political, legal and popular efforts to fulfil the inalienable human rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

He hoped to seize the opportunity and was cooperating responsibly with efforts to restart the peace process. Despite enormous challenges, Palestine consistently showed good faith, remaining respectful of the rule of law. Such respect was the key to all final status issues and achieving peace, in the context of a process with clear parameters and a set timeframe. The State of Palestine had formally accepted the two-State solution 25 years ago in a compromise that reflected commitment to peace and pragmatism. Despite setbacks caused by unlawful Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the international community’s failure to hold Israel accountable, that commitment prevailed.

The reality on the ground needed to be redressed to prevent a rise in tensions, mistrust and instability, as without it, he said, belief in peace would disappear as would the “final opportunity to realize the two-State solution”. He outlined continued violations of law, reflecting Israel’s deepening occupation, and he noted continued “criminal rampages” by Israeli settlers, who had the support of some Government officials. He was very concerned that members of the Israeli Government held such extremist views. Settlements were incompatible with a two-State solution, while the seizure of another people’s land, forced displacements and colonization were war crimes.

Calling on the international community to demand an end to such activities, he commended the European Union for adopting guidelines in accordance with international law. Israel needed to show real commitment to peace through deeds and the international community needed to hold Israel accountable through the Security Council. He also raised grave concerns about the situation facing Palestinian refugees in Syria, stressing that developments reconfirmed the need for a just solution for the plight of Palestinian refugees. He appealed for a redoubling of international efforts to ensure the protection of all civilians in accordance with international law and to find a political solution to that tragic conflict.

RON PROSOR (Israel) was pleased at the renewal of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) mandate and noted the daunting challenges facing its troops. Stories emerging from Syria sent shockwaves throughout the region. Israel had lived for two years with a war threatening to spill into its backyard, but had shown maximum restraint. The situation on Israel’s northern border was precarious, however, and Israel would respond to continued provocation. Syria had chemical weapons, and President Bashar al-Assad had proven willing to do anything to cling to power. The situation was complicated by his receipt of advanced weaponry, which Israel could not allow to fall into Hizbullah’s hands.

He criticized the international community for labelling Hizbullah as a political party and accepting it as a stabilizing force in Lebanon. He queried whether Hizbullah’s intervention in Syria could be seen in the same light, adding that Hassan Nasrallah was a terrorist willing to drag the region into war. Some States continued to differentiate between Hizbullah’s political and military wings. He welcomed the European Union’s recognition of the military wing as a terrorist organization, although he noted the decision came only after the group was found guilty of murdering Europeans. Hizbullah was a “terrorist industry”, which was as sophisticated as it was interconnected, and to distinguish between the military and political wings was entirely impractical.

Naysayers had argued that sanctions against Iran would be ineffective, he went on, noting that after years of crippling sanctions, the people of Iran had recently voted for change. However, presidential candidates had been pre-screened, with anyone “too anti-establishment, too free-thinking or too female” removed from the list. President Hassan Rouhani should be judged, not by his words, but by his actions, and he planned to put thousands of boots on the ground in Syria. If Iran’s policy on Syria had not changed, he asked, why would his policy on Iran’s nuclear program? Iran’s weapons programme was “the single greatest threat, not just to the Middle East, but to the entire world,” and was rapidly advancing, while the international community’s response was slow.

He said Middle East debates in the Security Council included monthly reports about Israel’s alleged infractions, but those failed to address the thousands of terror attacks by Palestinians against Israelis. Those aggressions had doubled between 2011 and 2012, with 34 attempted abductions foiled by Israeli security services. There had been 2,736 terror attacks in 2012, he said, adding, “One would think that an open debate on the Middle East would include sources that are open to the public.” Nonetheless, he was committed to the peace process and looked forward to resuming direct talks with the Palestinian Authority. His vision was of two States. Israel had concluded peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt, showing that, with honest and committed leadership, peace was possible.

KOKOU NAYO MBEU (Togo) commended the efforts by Secretary of State Kerry on the agreement reached in principle by both parties to the conflict to resume talks, and the announcement of their preliminary meeting in Washington. The two-State solution must be achieved. Concerned over the continued violence in the region, he called on Hamas to take urgent steps to control extremist groups and on Israel to abandon its settlement building and lift the Gaza blockade. He welcomed Israel’s announcement to release additional Palestinian prisoners, but said it must do more for those still in detention. Israeli and Palestinian leaders must show firm resolve to find a solution to the world’s oldest conflict, and the Quartet must be involved. Turning to Syria, he said the 23 June killing of a Catholic priest by Jihadist groups gave a glimpse of the Syria of tomorrow if peace efforts failed. He supported the Russian Federation/United States initiative for a second peace summit based on the 30 June 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

AGSHIN MEHDIYEV (Azerbaijan) underscored the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. Given the current insecurity in the region, the parties must show effort to sustain global efforts towards a two-State solution and they must uphold their commitments under the 21 November ceasefire. Azerbaijan had consistently condemned illegal settlement building, and called for its immediate cessation. On 11 June, Azerbaijan had hosted a conference within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the establishment of a financial safety net for Palestine. He supported ongoing efforts to achieve Palestinian unity. At the same time, he was deeply concerned by continuous destabilization and violence in Syria, and its regional implications. Urgent action by the international community was needed to achieve a negotiated political settlement, which was the only way out of the conflict, and he hoped the Geneva conference would take place soon.

MARÍA CRISTINA PERCEVAL (Argentina) said that violence in Syria had spread throughout the region and that there was an increase in the use of sectarian rhetoric, with the potential to increase tensions and lead to wider-scale atrocities. Deliberate obstacles to humanitarian access must end, and war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as serious human rights violations, must be addressed. The Council should consider referring the situation to the International Criminal Court. Supplying weapons to the parties must stop, and the international community must support States hosting Syrian refugees. The Council had failed to comply with its mandate. Now, it must work to convene the Geneva conference on Syria as soon as possible. “We are what we do, and we are also what we do not do.”

As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she welcomed the announcement that a basis had been established for the resumption of talks, and stressed that the parties must respond constructively and “in good faith”.

GARY QUINLAN (Australia) welcomed the agreement between Israelis and Palestinians to resume direct final status negotiations. The resumption was the first step on a challenging path towards a two-State solution. Both sides should seize the historical opportunity and negotiate in good faith, with the aim of achieving lasting peace. He encouraged Palestinians to focus on negotiations rather than on United Nations resolutions or pursuing membership of international organizations, and rocket attacks on Israel needed to stop. Israel should cease illegal settlement activity, as it undermined confidence in the peace process. A durable, democratic Israel depended on the creation of a viable Palestinian State. The international community must support negotiations and the Palestinian

economy.

He said the Syrian conflict was brutal and widening with 7 million Syrians in need of help. One third of all housing and schools had been destroyed, and thousands of Syrians were trapped in Aleppo and Homs. Sixty per cent of hospitals were not operating and medical supplies were being targeted. Syria's neighbours, especially Lebanon and Jordan, were at a breaking point, and the United Nations humanitarian system was stretched beyond capacity. Hizbullah's involvement threatened Lebanon's stability and dissociation policy, requiring the Lebanese Government to confront the challenges. Both Lebanon and Jordan needed strong international political and humanitarian support, as refugees put enormous strain on their essential services. Noting growing evidence of chemical weapons use, he was concerned at the delay in admitting United Nations inspectors. He also supported the convening of a second Geneva conference on political transition.

KIMSOOK (Republic of Korea) said although it was a good sign that clashes in the West Bank were diminishing and the restrictions on access into East Jerusalem were easing, it was important to be mindful of the potential explosiveness of underlying tensions. He called on the leadership along with the people of Israel and Palestine to prove that those who bet on the failure of a lasting peace could never win. The Syrian crisis in itself had already had wide-ranging negative effects on the region, and full-scale clashes would spark a surge in the violence. The continued systematic violations against women and children in Syria must come to an end, he said, reiterating his call to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. Also deeply troubling was the hate speech accompanying the crisis, which aroused sectarian tensions and violence throughout the region. All leaders must exert more effort to prevent that.

EUGÈNE-RICHARD GASANA (Rwanda) commended the United States Government's efforts to resume Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. He called on both parties to the conflict to seize "this unique opportunity", and on countries with influence to encourage them to approach talks with flexibility and open-mindedness. Urging both sides to refrain from undermining the two-State solution, he condemned the recent rocket attacks into Israel. He hailed the Israeli Government for expanding the distance for Palestinian fisherman from three to six nautical miles off Gaza's coast, and encouraged it to further expand that distance. He meanwhile stressed the need for Syria's neighbours to keep their borders open for refugees fleeing the violence, for which perpetrators in Syria must be held to account. He supported the work of Special Representative Brahimi and for the holding of a second Geneva conference as soon as possible. He was deeply concerned over the increased involvement of Hizbullah and other Lebanese parties in Syria and called on them to respect Lebanon's dissociation policy and the Baabda Declaration.

MASOOD KHAN (Pakistan) lauded the direct peace talks to start soon between the Palestinians and Israelis. The narrow window for a two-State solution must be seized. Resumption of the peace process was a vital strategic interest. He welcomed Israel's announcement on the release of Palestinian prisoners and said that an end to settlement construction and recognition of the pre-1967 borders as a baseline for negotiations were also crucial. Easing the Gaza blockade would build confidence, he said, calling on the Council, Quartet and regional organizations to support the peace process. Israel must vacate Lebanese lands and the Syrian Golan, and the Council should take steps to stop arms supplies to the sides in the Syrian conflict. Obstacles to another Geneva conference must be removed expeditiously. He called on all sides to give full access to the United Nations fact-finding team on the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria.

SYLVE LUCAS (Luxembourg), aligning herself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union, said that the announcement of an agreement in principle for the resumption of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians was an important step. The present initiative was "perhaps the last chance", and the international community could not let it pass by. The time had come to take the difficult and historic decisions necessary in the long-term interest of both peoples. Turning to Syria, she said that the death toll over the last two years "makes us shudder" and that grave violations of human rights continued unabated. She could not stress enough the need for the Council to refer that situation to the International Criminal Court. In addition, the Council must amplify the requests made by humanitarian actors with regard to opening access and mitigating other challenges. She hoped that, if only on humanitarian issues, the Council would soon end its silence and assume its responsibilities.

GERT ROSENTHAL (Guatemala) said that the original enchantment of the Arab Spring was now seasoned with a dose of scepticism. Recent events in Egypt were but one testimony of that fact. Regarding the peace process in the Middle East, it was imperative that the directly affected parties - Israel and Palestine - be the ones to define the path that would lead to the two-State solution. On Syria, the Security Council clearly had failed to meet its basic purpose to avoid, first, and then put to an end to, the spiral of violence. He was deeply concerned that the crisis was spreading to neighbouring countries while the humanitarian cost reached unimaginable levels. He urged all parties involved, mainly the United States, Russian Federation, and the Secretariat, to organize a conference that would trigger negotiation between the parties. It was also extremely important for the international community to completely stem the flow of arms to Syria and send a clear message that those responsible for crimes would be punished.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) said that he hoped to hear an optimistic statement by the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Arab and Palestinian side had shown strong political will to achieve peace, including through the Arab Peace Initiative. He hoped that Israel would join that dynamism and alter its trend of occupation. "The American initiative opens a window of change that may be the last," he said, calling on the parties to embrace that opportunity and demonstrate strong, determined political will in preparing for negotiations. Continued occupation and its daily fallout generated violence and radicalism, and fuelled hatred, torpedoing any hope for peace. Preparations for talks must be coupled by good-faith steps, in particular, the lifting of the Gaza blockade. Achieving a two-State solution required a vision free from narrow interests; one that took into account the interests of both peoples. The Council could not remain silent in the face of the Syrian crisis, he added, noting that convening a second Geneva Conference was both a moral and political duty for the international community.

VITALY I. CHURKIN (Russian Federation) stressed that only the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could agree on the parameters of a solution. At present, both sides should refrain from unilateral actions and engage in confidence-building. The Quartet, as the internationally recognized mechanism for finding a fair and lasting solution, must play its role. Progress would have a healthy impact on the situation in the entire region, where countries continued to undergo major transformations. On the situation in Syria, he said that any solution to the conflict must be political and must be found through dialogue in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. Swiftly ending all violence and restoring the country must be the top priority; the opportunity for such a solution could be opened by the Russian-United States initiative of 7 May. In addition, all terrorists and extremists must be removed from Syria, and all opposition groups must take part in talks with the Government.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France) said the Middle East was being rocked by two crises that required a resolute global response. The two-State solution was the only way out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and he welcomed Mr. Kerry's initiative. This year would be one that would lead to meaningful negotiations or would mark the slipping away of a unique opportunity. The process called for a viable political environment, and in that regard, he was concerned that new settlement building would complicate the resumption of talks. Lifting the blockade was imperative. He firmly condemned rocket fire into Israel and stressed Israel's need for security, he said, adding that France was ready to contribute to a final settlement, along with its European partners.

Turning to Syria, he said the human toll was reaching 100,000 victims, plus tens of thousands displaced people. The Syrian regime knew no limits in the use of weapons, and several sources had shown that the regime had and continued to use sarin gas, which was a war crime. He called on the Syrian Government to facilitate the access of the United Nations fact-finding mission to Syria this week, as well as unfettered access for humanitarian aid. A political transition was needed to make a break with the past and meet the legitimate democratic aspirations of the Syrian people. The broadening of the National Syrian Coalition and the election in Istanbul of its new President were important. He welcomed the Council's unanimous support on 10 July on Lebanon. It was also crucial to reiterate collective support for the Lebanese State and keep it from being drawn into the Syrian conflict, which required that everything be done to resolve it.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) welcomed Mr. Kerry's 19 July announcement and pledged that the United Kingdom would do all it could in the coming months to support the parties. However, that was only a beginning, and not an end. Both sides must show bold and decisive leadership. Further settlement announcements and the use of live fire by Israeli Defence Forces during demonstrations, as well as rocket fire from Palestinians into Israel, must end. Gaza must benefit fully from any economic package that resulted from the peace talks, including the easing of restrictions on the movement of goods and people. He was dismayed by Valerie Amos' briefing on Syria last week. Particularly shocking was to learn that 6 million Syrians required assistance and that 4 million did not

have enough to eat. Since last July an average of 200 people had been killed daily in Syria. He urged all neighbouring countries to keep their borders open those fleeing the fighting.

He said his country had doubled aid to more than \$500 million for Syrian refugees, including in Jordan and Lebanon. Member States must do more to support them, including in the long-term. He called for full accountability for human rights violations, and said the Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court without delay. He called on Syria to give the United Nations unfettered access to investigate chemical weapons' use. In closing, he said that millions of Syrians wanted a peaceful, democratic future, for which legitimate forces were fighting. "We should be on their side," he said, calling on all stakeholders to support a viable political settlement.

WANG MIN (China) said that the situation in the Middle East remained complex and fragile, and that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lay at its core. However, there was now a significant opportunity for direct talks between the two parties, which would hopefully achieve substantive progress soon. It was China's position that a sovereign State of Palestine should be established in line with pre-1967 borders, living side-by-side in peace with Israel. In the short term, action was needed to freeze all housing settlements and to lift the Gaza blockade, among other things. Additionally, the international community should help the Palestinians with development and job creation. China supported a greater role for the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to establish consensus support for the peace process, and last May, had invited leaders on both sides to visit China, where it had put forth a four-point proposal focusing on the need for direct negotiations. As for Syria, "a political solution is the only way out", and he called on the parties to implement a ceasefire, to actively respond to the call for a Geneva Conference and to engage in dialogue as soon as possible.

ROSEMARY DICARLO (United States) said that, last week, after his sixth trip to the region as Secretary of State, Mr. Kerry had been able to announce that the parties had reached an agreement on the basis for resumed negotiations. As he had noted, "everyone is aware that this process will not be easy," and everyone understood that the conflict could not simply be wiped away. However, the leaders on both sides had courageously recognized that they must begin by sitting at the table together in direct talks. It was now necessary for them to avoid unilateral actions and to engage in trust-building. In that vein, the United States reiterated its position that General Assembly resolution 67/19 did not establish Palestine as a State. Her delegation was committed to bringing that about, in direct negotiations with the Israelis, which was the only path to statehood.

Turning to Syria, she said that the only sustainable outcome was a solution based on the Geneva Action Group's communiqué. Despite its professed support for negotiations, the Assad regime was in fact working to thwart any peaceful solution. The United States asserted that the regime had used chemical weapons against civilians on a small scale several times in the past year, she said, calling on the United Nations to investigate all such allegations. Her delegation also remained deeply concerned about the regime's continued campaign on the city of Homs, she said, adding that there was no justification for the denial of humanitarian access there. She also was gravely concerned by the violent clashes and bombings in Lebanon, and supported that country's policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis, with which all parties must abide.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) thanked the Council for its 10 July presidential statement and its respect for Lebanese sovereignty, which was challenged daily by Israeli jet fighters. From 3 to 5 May alone, the United Nations had encountered more than 40 Israeli fighters in Lebanese air space. It was also high time for Israel to withdraw from remaining Lebanese territories. Turning to Syria, he thanked the Council for its reference in the 10 July statement to the marked increase of cross-border fighting into Lebanon. The country's dissociation policy did not mean it was ignoring its obligations to its Syrian brothers under international law. "Lebanon will not close its borders. It will not turn its back on the refugees," he declared. At the same time, it would not be able to cope alone with the increased influx of Syrian refugees, and he appealed to the international community to intensify direct support to Lebanon to assist the refugees.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said that unprecedented and unabated settlement construction was the major obstacle to peace. Israel had the main responsibility for furthering talks, and the Council should send a message that continued occupation would no longer enjoy impunity. The European Union should re-examine its blacklisting of Hizbullah's military wing as a terrorist group.

ABDULMOHSEN F. A. ALYAS (Saudi Arabia) said Israel continued to violate international law and the rights of the Palestinian people. The latest evidence of its arrogance and defiance of the international community's will was its announcement last week to approve the construction of 1,000 new housing units in several areas. Israel continued to ignore global efforts to revive the peace process and, thus, more pressure on it was vital to make it understand that peace was the only choice. He commended the European Union's latest decision that stressed the illegitimacy of settlement building and its non-cooperation with Israeli Government agencies, and he called on all countries to follow suit.

Turning to Syria, he stressed the need for global action, in line with relevant General Assembly resolutions, to support the Syrian people, stop the massacres and genocide committed by the Syrian regime and prevent the spread of the crisis to neighbouring countries. Any delay would mean more suffering for Syria's helpless people. History would hold the world accountable for that delay.

LUIS ALBERTO FIGUEIREDO MACHADO (Brazil) questioned the current situation, whereby the Council was sidelined and sterile efforts to promote peace remained in the hands of small groups such as the Quartet. As Israel and Palestine prepared to re-engage in direct negotiations, it was important to help meet the humanitarian needs of Palestinians. He expressed deep concern at the Syrian situation, where a human tragedy was unfolding with spill-over effects in the entire region. Strongly supporting the initiative to convene a new Geneva Conference as soon as possible, he emphasized that a diplomatic surge - not an arms surge - was the path to a political settlement, and that must be promoted by the Council. On Egypt, he urged all actors to seek solutions and reconciliation in support of freedom, democracy and prosperity. Also worrying was the increasingly sectarian nature of the violence in Lebanon, which created additional challenges in that diverse country.

FRANCIS ASSISI CHULLIKATT, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, said that the whole world was shocked by the ever increasing statistics describing the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. Perhaps the saddest of those figures was the growing death toll, which would reach over 100,000 deaths by August. That destructive conflict was exacerbated by outside influences and extremist groups, which saw it as an opportunity for political or ideological gains rather than as an appalling disaster. Pointing to the devastating impact on Syria's Christian population, in particular, he said that the persistent refusal of either side to engage in meaningful political dialogue augured only more deaths, fear, hatred and destruction. "War can never more be considered a means of resolving conflicts," he said, voicing hope that the international community could find a path to the much-awaited second Geneva conference.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of the Delegation of the European Union, reaffirmed that it would give its active and concrete support to help ensure successful negotiations between the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That included support to any international agreements aimed at underpinning a peace agreement. On Syria, the delegation was appalled by the continuing military crackdown of the regime and the disastrous humanitarian situation. It especially deplored the relentless shelling of Homs, as well as the denial of humanitarian access for United Nations and other humanitarian actors. Reports of increasing brutality by certain armed opposition groups were equally alarming. The Syrian authorities must lift all obstacles to aid distribution.

He said that the endorsement in June of the joint initiative by the Russian Federation and the United States by the Group of Eight (G8) had created an important momentum "that we cannot afford to lose". The delegation was deeply concerned with the involvement of extremist and foreign non-State actors in the fighting in Syria on all warring sides, and with the rising sectarian tensions in Lebanon and Iraq. He reiterated the importance of the role of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, and noted his grave concern about recent assessments on the use of chemical weapons and agents within Syria and thus urged the Syrian authorities to grant, without delay, the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission full and unfettered access to all sites of alleged use of such weapons.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Rights of the Palestinian People, said the volatile regional environment should not deflect attention from the Israeli-Palestinian track. He welcomed the announcement in Amman that the basis had been established to resume talks and

appreciated the active diplomacy of the United States Secretary of State towards that goal. The international community must stay fully engaged to ensure the parties lived up to their commitments.

Last month, he recalled, his Committee held an international meeting in Beijing on Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding. The significant turnout and extensive media coverage it received was proof of the high priority the global community gave to the issue. During the meeting, speakers had stressed the need to reach a negotiated two-State solution and strongly supported the renewed engagement of the United States towards that end. They warned, however, that other key stakeholders, such as the Council and the Quartet, remained on the sidelines and they were deeply troubled by Israel's refusal to stop all settlement activity, which had risen alarmingly during the first quarter of 2013. He welcomed the European Commission's directive to ban European Union funding for Israeli settlement projects as a strong message that the global community's patience with Israeli settlements had run out. The Israeli leadership should pay attention and act wisely in order to avoid irreparable damage to negotiations.

MOOTAZ AHMADEIN KHALIL (Egypt) expressed support for recent efforts by the United States to restart peace negotiations. He hoped for real progress soon and said Israel needed to "show the necessary political will for the success of the negotiations. They must choose peace rather than settlements." Palestine's demands regarding negotiations were not preconditions. He condemned Israeli violence against Palestinians, as well as the settlement activity, and commended the European Union for excluding the settlements from future agreements with Israel. That meant non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Arab territories occupied since 1967. He rejected Israel's blockade on Gaza and stressed that the situation in the Middle East region overall should not distract from the need to stop Israeli settlement activity and establish the independent State of Palestine. Regarding the Syrian crisis, he called for an immediate end to violence and urgent assistance to the refugees and the countries hosting them.

LEVENT ELER (Turkey) said it was increasingly crucial to resolve the Palestinian question, which remained at the heart of the challenges in the Middle East. He encouraged parties to commit to preparing a solid ground for talks, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps. Parties needed to build confidence, through freezing settlements, releasing prisoners and making security arrangements for both sides. Provocative steps against holy sites, particularly Masjid Al-Aqsa, should be avoided. He fully supported Palestinian reconciliation and the establishment of a unity Government that embraced all Palestinian people, as that was vital to saving Palestine from the yoke of occupation.

He described the situation in Syria as the biggest humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century, threatening regional peace and security and putting a grave burden on the country's neighbours. There was an immediate need for a political solution paving the way for a democratic transition. However, settlement remained elusive while the regime continued with the "totally unacceptable" use of ballistic missiles and chemical weapons. The Security Council must act urgently, resolutely and collectively.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) reiterated his delegation's strong rejection of all attempts to divert the Council's attention from the primary purpose of the present debate by forcibly introducing topics from outside that mandate such as the situation in Syria, Egypt and Lebanon. United Nations officials had failed to highlight the cooperation between Israel and the armed terrorist groups active in the occupied Syrian Golan, and he would not respond to the claims of some delegations against his country, as he wished to stick to the topic of the debate and to discuss only the longstanding occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Indeed, the Israeli occupation of Arab territories had reached a dangerous level and the international community seemed unable to compel Israel to end its gross violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention, among its other commitments. It was strange that certain countries, who had exhibited "fake enthusiasm" for human rights, had lost that enthusiasm when discussing Israel's violations. In that regard, he pointed to the dangers of Israeli laws and policies which sought to destroy Arab villages and displace Palestinians. There had been no serious international attempts to end the campaigns of ethnic cleansing and Judaization.

Similarly, in the nearly 46 years since Israel had first occupied the Syrian Golan, no one had called seriously for the protection of the Golan's population, he went on. In light of the international silence vis-à-vis Israel's aggressions, the continued commission of such acts had escalated regional tensions to unprecedented levels, which now threatened international peace and security, and the persistence of some Security Council members to cover up Israeli actions made them complicit in those violations. Finally, Israeli assistance to terrorists in the Middle East was not just a violation of the UNDOF agreement and of international law, but it also risked the lives of United Nations forces and undermined their work.

HUSSEIN HANIFF (Malaysia) said that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to deteriorate and, as Israel continued to illegally build settlements, the window for peace was slowly closing. Israel's imposition of nautical limits on fishermen from Gaza - recently eased - had led to a reduction of 60 per cent in the total fish caught that year, which in turn, had contributed to the 80 per cent poverty rate among Palestinian fishermen. He condemned the illegal blockade on Gaza, now in its eighth year, and called for an end to such cynical Israeli policies. He was also deeply concerned by the illegal detention of 5,000 Palestinian prisoners, especially the 200 Palestinian children, who were denied the request to be accompanied by their parents, access to a lawyer or bail. Israel also continued to pillage and profit from the illegal exploitation of the occupied Syrian Golan, where recently it granted exclusive rights to a United States-Israeli company to drill for oil. He commended the efforts of Secretary Kerry and also the European Union Commission's announcement to label settlement productions. Regarding the Syrian situation, he welcomed plans for another Geneva conference, but said that only the Syrian people should determine their destiny.

KAZUYOSHI UMEMOTO (Japan), supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, endorsed a two-State solution and welcomed the efforts of Secretary Kerry. He called on the international community to mobilize political and economic resources to help Israel and Palestine overcome their differences. With respect to Syria, he expressed deep concern about the risk of the spread of conflict, particularly into Lebanon. Stressing the need to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria, he noted Japan's support to international and non-governmental organizations, which had amounted to \$90 million. It was regrettable that recent military offensives by the Syrian army had made it difficult to convene the so-called "Geneva 2" conference. He hoped Egypt would return to a democratically elected civilian Government as soon as possible through an inclusive process respectful of human rights and the rule of law.

KADRA AHMED HASSAN (Djibouti), speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, warned against missing the opportunity to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Resumed negotiations held promise, but Israel continued to illegally fortify its occupation in the Palestinian Territory. Settlement activities had manifestly escalated, while Israel's willingness to resume negotiations depended on its genuine readiness to stop those illegal activities. She endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative, and called on Israel to accept the 1967 borders and to take confidence-building measures, such as releasing Palestinian detainees, removing travel restrictions on Palestinians and preventing settler violence. She welcomed the European Union's cooperation ban with Israeli individuals or institutions based in settlements.

On Syria, she stressed the need to preserve that country's unity, sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, and called for an immediate cessation of violence and destruction, as well as respect for Islamic values and human rights. Syria must be saved from the danger of an all-out civil war. She urged the regime to show wisdom and to engage in serious dialogue with the opposition to pave the way for a transition leading to fulfilment of Syrians' legitimate aspirations for democratic reforms and changes. The Security Council should assume its responsibilities and act promptly to stop the killing.

GHOLAMHOSSEIN DEGHANI (Iran), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said settlement-building was at a seven-year high in the first quarter of 2013, in violation of international law, while arrests, detentions and forcible displacements of Palestinian civilians continued. The ongoing settlement activity starkly highlighted Israel's unwillingness to respect international law and to act in good faith for the sake of peace and stability in the region and the world. Illegal practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory must stop and the international community must act urgently to redress the unjust situation. Israel's Air Force violated Lebanese sovereignty and the military continued to build fortifications in the Syrian Golan, violating the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. Israel should withdraw from the Syrian Golan, and the Council should condemn its 13 May military aggression against Syria.

Speaking in his national capacity, he noted his country's democratic election with 70 per cent turnout, in which President-elect Rouhani had won a landslide victory. Israel could not accept that boost to Iran's international stature. Iran's nuclear programme was peaceful and conformed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and all other treaties banning weapons of mass destruction. Iran also supported a Middle East free from nuclear weapons. While Israel killed innocent people in Lebanon and Gaza, it assassinated Iran's nuclear scientists. The European Union's addition of Hizbullah's military wing to its list of terrorist organizations showed its double standards and bias towards Israel. Hizbullah was respected and accepted in Lebanon and was a legitimate resistance movement. He advised Israel not to level baseless allegations against others, but rather to abide by international law and the United Nations Charter.

DESRAPERCAYA (Indonesia) said that his delegation was deeply appalled at Israeli policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and at its lack of regard for the need to create conditions conducive to peace. Nothing was as obvious an obstacle as the construction of illegal settlements, which were a strong symbol of Israel's lack of commitment to meeting the Palestinians on a productive playing field. Practices such as the construction of the separation wall, home demolitions, residency revocations and others were also of concern. As a longstanding supporter of the two-State solution, Indonesia welcomed efforts by the United States and plans for the resumption of direct talks soon. "If true progress is ever to be made on the Middle East file, it is essential that Israel act as a responsible partner and member of the international community," he said, adding that no nation - including Israel - should be immune from the consequences of violating international law.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN (Bangladesh) said that the saga of the Palestinian misfortune had unfolded before the eyes of the international community and in the absence of any resolute action. There could be no military solution to that longstanding conflict; only through negotiations could a viable solution be realized. The Security Council could not evade its role, particularly since its own resolutions on the matter adopted over time remained unimplemented. "The stalled peace process must restart," he stressed, adding that "we see a flicker of hope in the Secretary of State John Kerry's efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table". Bangladesh fully endorsed that initiative, adding that the root cause of the conflict was the occupation, which must end as soon as possible.

XAMER LASSO MENDOZA (Ecuador) said that the intransigence of Israel and its illegal colonization policy had been closing every door to a bilateral solution. Recognizing the borders of 1967, he said that Palestine was committed to establishing peace on that basis, while Israel, the occupying Power, rejected the peaceful solution with its policy of settlements, construction of the wall, land confiscations, house demolitions, displacements and unlawful detentions. He condemned the "settler terrorism" against the Palestinians on their land, and called on the Security Council to meet its obligations in that regard. The High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should also be called on to fulfil their responsibilities in the face of those serious violations.

MALIBONGWE PATRICK MCAKUVANA (South Africa) commended United States efforts to facilitate peace talks. He called on Israel to reconsider its position on settlements and refrain from any such acts that would affect the spirit of negotiations. He urged Palestinians to strive for unity as a weapon against those bent on dividing them for their own gain. He welcomed, as a confidence-building measure, Israel's decision to free some Palestinian prisoners, but remained concerned about the plight of Palestinians languishing in Israeli jails in appalling conditions. Israel's continued home demolitions, illegal excavations of religious sites, attacks on Palestinian civilians, and cutting down of olive trees should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. The continued blockade of Gaza violated international humanitarian law. It was the global community's responsibility to assist the parties to ensure the talks yielded positive results.

He welcomed the European Union's decision to pressure Israeli by publishing new guidelines banning funding to entities linked to settlements or occupation. It should be a clear sign to Israel that settlements were not just illegal, but they could attract retributive action from law-abiding nations and organizations. He hoped other countries would follow suit. He also expressed concern for the plight of Palestinian refugees in Syria.

SHEIKH MESHAL HAMAD M.J. AL-THANI (Qatar) stressed the need for a just, comprehensive, durable solution leading to an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. He welcomed the efforts of the United States Secretary of State and the reaffirmation by the Arab summit in Doha in March of the Arab Peace Initiative. Qatar would exert every effort to uphold those initiatives. He welcomed the European Union's decision to withhold financial aid from Israeli organizations active in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. That move showed the international community's rejection of illegal settlements, and he hoped other States would follow suit. The situation in Syria was a threat to that country's territorial integrity, as well as to regional and global security. The Syrian regime was holding its citizens hostage and relying on the existing divisions in the Council to continue its murderous acts. The Council must act swiftly and effectively, Syrians and the world at large were looking to it for a just resolution and end to the violations.

THALAPITA RALALAGE WARUNA SRI DHANAPALA (Sri Lanka) said immediate steps were needed to assuage the human suffering in the Palestinian Territory. Continued Israeli settlement building had disrupted the peace process and caused recurring violence in the region. Trade restrictions in Gaza must be lifted to bolster the Gazan economy and the well-being of its people. An end to the blockade would pave the way for sustainable development. Both parties to the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population. Settlement freezes should not be a precondition to negotiations because they were accepted in previous agreements. At the same time, Israel's need for security must be respected. The international community must stay engaged in support of a just and durable solution. He was heartened by the recent efforts of the United States to revive the peace process, and called on both parties to demonstrate good will and engage in confidence-building steps towards that goal. He supported Palestine's application for full membership to the United Nations and hoped the Council would play a more effective role in making that a reality.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) condemned Israel's military occupation and the consequent denial of the Palestinian people's rights. The worst violations included construction of settlements and the separation barrier, lethal force against civilians, detentions and ill-treatment of political prisoners, the blockade against Gaza and the hundreds of checkpoints in the West Bank, as well as the withholding of Palestinian revenues. Israel had "systematically disregarded" United Nations resolutions advocating a two-State solution. He supported the desire of Palestinians to become a full Member State of the United Nations. Turning to Syria, he said political dialogue was needed between the sides, and he rejected any foreign intervention in Syria and regretted the supply of arms to groups involved in terrorist activities.

SAUL WEISLEDER (Costa Rica) said there was a glimmer of hope that a negotiated solution could be found between Israelis and Palestinians. Talks were at a preliminary stage, but it was worth underscoring the dedication shown by Secretary Kerry towards establishing direct negotiations. They were a first step, and he was under no illusions. However, he believed in the creative power of good judgement, realism and creative perseverance. The "logic of peace" should be brought to bear to enable Israeli and Palestinian leaders to find the courage they needed. Each must recognize that they could not achieve everything they wanted, but that concessions were not defeats and it was possible to reach at least the minimum to which they aspired. On both sides, extremists should be isolated and moderates should be boosted.

GRÉTA GUNNARSDÓTTIR (Iceland) urged the Syrian Government to abide by international humanitarian and human rights law. The Council, she said, should take the lead in fostering a peaceful political solution, because the parties in the conflict would not lay down arms without external interference and there was a potential that the tragic conflict would escalate further. With the Council's failure to show leadership, however, she looked forward to the briefing to the General Assembly next week by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the situation of human rights in Syria, because it offered the wider membership a chance to engage on Syria. Turning to the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, she said a two-State solution was the only route to peace, and until such an agreement was reached, the international community must prevent and address ongoing humanitarian and human rights law violations.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba) said Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands and its aggression against the Palestinian people was the main obstacle to a just, lasting, comprehensive solution. The Council must adopt specific practical steps that would make Israel end its abuses, lest there be no peace in the Middle East. Cuba supported the Assembly's decision to grant Palestine observer State status, as well as Palestine's application for full membership. The Palestinian people increasingly suffered due to the rising number of illegal Israeli settlements. Only the end of the colonization, the release of political prisoners and the lifting of the blockade on Gaza would bring about a just solution.

On Syria, he said he was alarmed by calls for a regime change and support for the use of force and violence, and specifically opposed maneuvering by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to seek the Council's approval to attack Syria. Civil war in Syria or the intervention of foreign forces would have dire consequences for international peace and security. He shared the concern over the loss of innocent lives, but rejected the use of "alleged protection" of civilians, which was a pretext for foreign intervention and use of mercenaries. He reaffirmed the Syrian people's right to self-determination and sovereignty.

AUGUSTO THORNBERRY (Peru) said his country had consistently maintained a clear position on Palestine in line with international law and recognized the need to implement General Assembly resolution 181, which called for the creation of two States. Peru had recognized Palestine as a State and supported United Nations resolutions toward that goal. It had also voted in favour of Palestine's request to join the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Peru recognized Israel's right to develop in peace and harmony with its neighbours within secure borders, and condemned any act of aggression against it. Acquisition of any territory by force was inadmissible, and he called on Israel to immediately cease evictions of Palestinians from their homes. He welcomed the United States initiative to re-launch the peace process. Deeply concerned at the escalating Syrian conflict, he called on the international community to encourage parties to engage in inclusive dialogue, based on the Geneva Communiqué.

ASOKE KUMAR MUKERJI (India) welcomed United States efforts to re-engage Israel and Palestine in direct talks. Also necessary was to address the issue of Israeli settlement activities, which remained a serious obstacle to peace. The Gaza blockade was also adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. The Palestinian Authority was facing one of the worst financial crises, which threatened to erode progress in building State institutions. India continued to partner with the Palestinian Authority in its socioeconomic development, including through the provision of direct budgetary grants and training programmes. He supported the State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Lastly, he looked forward to the holding of a second Geneva conference on Syria, leading to a nationally led and inclusive political dialogue that resolved the Syrian crisis.

Taking the floor at the end of the debate, Mr. SERRY said he was pleased to have heard the support expressed by most States for a return to negotiations. He stressed the urgency of efforts to provide a credible political horizon and underlined that an important period loomed. He and the Secretary-General supported the peace process and would continue to provide fair, balanced and factual briefings on what remained a highly complex situation.

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