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DESPITE CURRENT IMPASSE IN MIDDLE EAST TALKS, AIM MUST REMAIN TO REACH AGREEMENT ON CORE ISSUES 'WITHIN A YEAR', SECURITY COUNCIL IS TOLD

In All-day Debate, Many Delegates Call for Halt in Building New Settlements; Israel, Replying, Says Issue Awaits Final Status Outcome

Ahead of a debate on the Middle East that heard from some 40 speakers today, a top United Nations political official told the Security Council that, despite the impasse in direct peace talks, the international community must remain committed to the goal of an agreement on core issues within a year.

"We must overcome the current impasse and, more importantly, ensure that when talks resume they move intensively and definitively to seek resolutions of the key core issues, including borders," Oscar Fernandez-Taranco said as he delivered the monthly briefing on the situation and affirmed that the United Nations remained committed to an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and to the goal of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

He noted that the parties had not met since 15 September, following the 26 September expiration of Israel's partial settlement moratorium in the West Bank. He said that in the past weeks the Secretary-General had been stressing the illegality of settlement activity and was in direct and frequent contact with regional leaders, including Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, urging them to find a way forward.

The Quartet had also been intensively active in that vein, he said, led by the United States, encouraging the parties to find a way to resolve all final status issues and communicating with the Arab League Summit. He commented that such efforts were made more difficult by the Israeli approval last week of construction tenders for 238 units in East Jerusalem.

Despite the uncertainties, he said, the State-building agenda of the Palestinian Authority continued to advance. He welcomed Israeli measures to ease restriction on imports to Gaza while urging further steps. He noted that ground was broken for an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley funded by Japan, which could create 10,000 jobs but still required Israeli permits, and that the Authority continued to build its security sector, although Israeli incursions and settler/Palestinian violence continued.

Reporting as well on recent developments in Gaza and the region, he expressed particular concern over rising tensions in Lebanon related to potential indictments by the Special Tribunal and reiterated the Secretary-General's support for the work of that body.

Following the briefing, the Observer of Palestine appealed to the Council to uphold its Charter responsibility and ensure continuation of the path of peace to which the Palestinian leadership was committed, saying that breaches of law on the part of Israel, via acts of colonization, aggression, collective punishment and contempt for the will of the international community, must be confronted and firmly rejected. He said the end of settlement activity was not a Palestinian condition but a matter of international law to which Israel must be held accountable.

Israel's representative, on the other hand, said that settlements were one of many issues that needed to be resolved in final status negotiations. History had shown that they did not stand in the way of making peace, as had been shown by peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. When Israel dismantled all of its settlements in the Gaza Strip, it received terrorism and rocket fire in return. Any future agreement must be built on mutual security, as Israel continued to face diverse threats. In addition, Israel must be recognized as the nation-State of the Jewish people if a nation-State of the Palestinian people was so recognized.

Following those presentations, representatives of Council Members and other Member States took the floor, most appealing to both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to find a way to return to the negotiating table and to make the hard compromises necessary to reach a fair and lasting peace in the form of the two-State solution.

Most speakers called on Israel to renew its moratorium on settlement activity, with many seeking for an immediate freeze on all settlement activity in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and regretting in particular the recent approval of housing tenders. The representative of the United States said it was engaged in discussions with Israeli leadership on that issue.

That representative also welcomed Israel's easing of restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza and its support for economic growth in the West Bank. Many speakers supported, in turn, institution-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority and welcomed increased support from Israel and other Member States. The representative of Norway, however, warned that efforts to build accountable institutions and economic structures in the West Bank could not be sustained if most of the West Bank remained under full Israeli control.

Costa Rica's representative called for a "logic of peace, understanding and good faith" in finally resolving the Middle East conflict, calling on both sides to realize that they had to give up on some of their aspirations. It was time, he said, to encourage reasonable parties and to hush the voices of extremists.

On Lebanon, many speakers expressed strong support for the independence of the Special Tribunal on assassinations there, in accordance with the latest statement of the Secretary-General on the issue. Lebanon's representative affirmed the importance of all parties' fulfilling their obligations under Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

Also speaking today were the representatives of Gabon, France, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, Turkey, China, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nigeria, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Uganda, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Syria, Jordan, South Africa, Indonesia, Morocco, Tajikistan (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan, Tunisia, Iran, Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, Iceland, Venezuela, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Mauritania (on behalf of the Arab Group) and Ecuador.

The Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union also made a statement.

The meeting opened at 10:40 a.m., adjourned at 1:20 p.m., reconvened at 3:10 p.m. and closed at 6:00 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met today in open debate to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Briefing

Briefing Council members, OSCAR FERNANDEZ-TARANCO, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said that six weeks after direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations began in Washington they were at an impasse, with the parties not having met since 15 September, following the 26 September expiration of Israel's partial settlement moratorium in the West Bank.

He said that Secretary-General had been reiterating the illegality of settlement activity and was in direct and frequent contact with regional leaders, including Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, urging them to find a way forward. The Quartet — the United Nations, United States, Russian Federation and European Union — had been intensively active in that vein, led by the United States, encouraging the parties to find a way to resolve all final status issues within one year and communicating that message to the Arab League Summit and the principals.

"We have a brief and crucial window to overcome the current impasse," Mr. Fernandez-Taranco said, adding that efforts were made more difficult by the Israeli approval last week of construction tenders for 238 units in East Jerusalem. He reiterated that there was no alternative to a negotiated settlement resulting in two States living side by side in peace.

Despite the uncertainties, he said, the State-building agenda of the Palestinian Authority continued to advance, with the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in New York, supporting Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's determination to implement the "Homestretch to Freedom" agenda by August 2011 and welcoming Israeli measures to ease restriction on imports to Gaza while urging further steps.

On 11 October, he said, ground was broken for an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley funded by Japan, which could create 10,000 jobs but still required Israeli permits. However, despite Palestinian Authority reforms and what he called "continuing generosity" from donors, the Authority faced critical shortfalls and increased difficulty in borrowing to cover them.

He added that despite Palestinian efforts to increase security, Israeli forces conducted 353 operations in the West Bank during the reporting period, in which 6 Palestinians were killed, including leaders of a Hamas branch allegedly involved in killing four Israelis on 31 August. In addition, 157 Palestinians were injured and 330 arrested.

A total of 44 violent incidents were reported between Palestinians and settlers and, in what he called a "deplorable act of desecration", there was an arson attack on a mosque near Bethlehem, after which rabbis visited, donating new Qurans in an attempt to promote tolerance. In addition, hundreds of olive trees were reported damaged by settlers. He commented that much more needed to be done by Israel to prevent violence by extremists against Palestinians.

He welcomed the Israeli demolition, on 13 October, of ten outposts in the West Bank, hoping for further activity in that regard. He said that the separation wall and 508 obstacles to movement in the area continued to pose challenges, noting that an organizer of the anti-wall campaign, who he said espoused non-violence, was imprisoned.

Confrontations in East Jerusalem continued as well, he said, with clashes ensuing after a Palestinian was shot by a security guard following an alleged stone-throwing incident. More families were evicted. He said that a sensible resolution was still needed on the status of four Palestinian lawmakers from a Hamas-affiliated party.

He called for more easing of restrictions and calm in Gaza. He said that seven rockets and six mortar rounds were fired into Israel, while Israeli forces conducted five air strikes and six incursions, with three Palestinian militants and one civilian being killed. He added that an average of 857 truckloads per week entered Gaza as compared to 566 before the new policy. However, this was still only a third of what was going in before to the blockade. He urged further measures to ease restrictions.

He welcomed the completion of 151 housing units in Khan Younis and further approvals for United Nations projects, saying that the Organization would present additional programmes of work, and it would work with Israel on streamlining implementation.

He said the de facto Hamas authorities closed down several civil associations during the reporting period, with others closing down due to pressure. In addition, a recreation park in Gaza was set ablaze and he expressed concern over the death sentence given by a military tribunal to a Palestinian man for collaboration with

the enemy.

He also reiterated the call for release and immediate access to Gilad Shalit, and reiterated continued support for Palestinian reconciliation. In addition, he reported that the proceedings of the Israeli Commission to examine the flotilla incident of 31 May were now at an advanced stage, and he looked forward to continued cooperation of the parties.

It remained urgent, he said, to restore the regional tracks of the peace process, in particular between Israel and Syria, through a comprehensive approach. The situation in the occupied Golan remained stable but settlement activities continued. In Lebanon, tensions, including belligerent rhetoric, escalated as a result of potential indictments by the Special Tribunal. He reiterated the Secretary-General's support for the work of that body. He added that the visit to Lebanon of the President of Iran sparked serious concerns in many quarters.

Repeating his appeal to donors, he said that living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were of serious concern, with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facing shortfalls. He reported that the overall situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally quiet, although Israeli air violations took place on an almost daily basis.

He said the international community must remain committed to the conclusion of a peace agreement within one year. "We must overcome the current impasse," he said, "and — more importantly — ensure that when talks resume, they move intensively and definitively to seek resolutions of the key core issues — including borders". It must be affirmed that the United Nations remained committed to an end to the occupation that began in 1967, and to the goal of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said: "Today, we find ourselves at yet another critical juncture in our long, tormented search for a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the realization of peace and security in the Middle East." There were two paths from which to choose: The first choice was to seize the opportunity to resume and accelerate the peace process, on the basis of its agreed terms of reference for realization of the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. That was the preferred path of and supported by the overwhelming majority of the international community. Pursuing that path was absolutely vital for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

He said the second choice was also clear: "To allow the intransigence, violations and impunity of one State, Israel, the occupying Power — to not only undermine but to completely sabotage the prospects that remain for realizing the two-State solution for peace." The status quo in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was untenable, unsustainable and volatile as a result of Israel's ongoing illegal actions and provocations. He once again appealed to the Council to uphold its Charter responsibility and to give due attention to ensure that the first path — the path of peace — was resolutely pursued. Breaches of the law via acts of colonization, aggression and collective punishment and contempt for the will of the international community must be confronted and firmly rejected. Israel must choose to either pursue the path of peace or to bear responsibility for its obstruction.

Proximity talks had been supported by the Palestinian leadership, the Arab countries and the international community as a means to bridge the gaps between the two sides of the issues of settlements, borders and security. Those talks, however, had not made tangible progress due to Israel's intransigence and refusal to comply with its legal obligations under the Road Map to cease all settlement activities, including "natural growth". He went on, "The cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is essential for the resumption of a credible process aimed at achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders." That was not a Palestinian condition, but a legal obligation. Israeli conditions now being imposed on the Palestinian side were arbitrary, and they distorted the reality on the ground.

The Palestinian leadership, with the support of the Arab Ministerial Committee, had nevertheless heeded the international calls for resumption of direct negotiations, he said. Despite Palestinian reservations about the "moratorium", that gesture had given some semblance of credence to Israel's stated commitment to the two-State solution. Despite the prevailing adverse circumstances, the resumption of direct negotiations in September had once again raised hopes that the political impasse was about to be overcome.

Yet, regrettably, that was not enough to compel Israel to extend its "moratorium", he said. The Israeli Government had chosen to blatantly disregard the global calls to cease its unlawful colonization of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Settlement construction and expansion continued, with new projects being provocatively undertaken daily by settlers and officials. The Israeli settler population had increased by 8,000; fanatical and extremist settlers continued to terrorize, harass and intimidate Palestinian civilians, including children, and to destroy and vandalize Palestinian properties, including an arson attack on a mosque. The situation in occupied East Jerusalem remained most volatile as Israeli settlers continued acts of aggressions against the Palestinian residents and to seize Palestinian properties.

At the same time, he said, the situation in the Gaza Strip remained critical in spite of Israel's declared intentions to "ease" its illegal, inhumane blockade. Barely 25 per cent of needed goods and supplies had been allowed to enter. The reconstruction process, including efforts by UNRWA, continued to be severely hampered. Israel continued its defiance and the humanitarian crisis and military aggression persisted unabated. The most effective remedy was adherence to the law and pursuit of a peace settlement through an active, accelerated, good faith political process on the basis of the agreed terms of reference.

Israel stood alone, he said, in rejecting the global call to honour its legal and moral obligations. Its actions focused on altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, attempting to impose a fait accompli and thereby seriously, and perhaps permanently, threatening the viability of the two-State solution. "It is thus Israel that is responsible for the critical situation on the ground and for undermining peace negotiations, and it must be held accountable," he said. Israel should be held to the same legal standards as all countries in the world; it must stop being given the preferential treatment that had fuelled its contempt and impunity over the decades. The Palestinian leadership stood firm in its rejection of Israeli settlement activities.

Now was the time for Israel to decide whether it wanted peace and security for its people and with all of its neighbours, or whether it wanted to remain an "occupier, oppressor, human rights violator, and aggressor State". The international community, including the Council, must follow through with the long-overdue implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy, and cease the "exception" treatment granted to Israel for decades, which had permitted it to act as a State above the law. The Palestinian leadership remained committed to peace and to engaging in a credible peace process on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

MERON REUBEN (Israel) expressed Israel's "profound and enduring wish to establish peace with the Palestinians. A peace based on security and mutual recognition. A peace that will ensure prosperity for our two peoples." Peace could only be achieved through direct negotiations and compromise from both sides. "Israel has continued to show that it is willing to take bold measures and make difficult decisions in pursuit of peace."

He said Israel had helped to encourage impressive growth in the Palestinian economy and had removed hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank, despite legitimate security concerns and continued terrorism. "With a heavy heart, Israel put in place a self-imposed and unprecedented ten-month moratorium on settlement construction." After refusing to engage in direct negotiations for nine months during the moratorium, the Palestinians — who at first had belittled the gesture — now demanded its extension as a precondition for continuing talks.

Settlements were one of many issues that needed to be resolved in final status negotiations, he said. History had shown that they did not stand in the way of making peace, as demonstrated by peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. Furthermore, when Israel dismantled all of its settlements in the Gaza Strip, it

received terrorism and rocket fire in return. Any future agreement must be built on the principles of mutual recognition and security. "A request that Israel recognize a Palestinian State as a nation-State of the Palestinian people must be met with an acknowledgement that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people," he said, adding that any peace agreement must also clearly address Israel's security concerns with strong arrangements in the field, as the diverse and dangerous threats facing Israel remained significant.

Noting that, with support from the Iranian and Syrian regimes, extremist terrorist organizations continued to re-arm and stage attacks on Israeli civilians, he said the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip remained an "epicentre for terror". In Lebanon, the Hizbullah terrorist organization served as a constant obstacle to peace and security for all in the region. "Establishing peace will require more than declarations or signatures on a piece of paper, it will necessitate concrete actions on the ground." The wider Arab world must also show Israelis and people around the globe that its declarations of peace would extend beyond words — and translate into deeds.

He said that the Hizbullah terrorist organization continued to build up its military capabilities and armaments, acquiring sophisticated weaponry and missiles from its Iranian and Syrian patrons. Hizbullah's deadly rearmament endangered Lebanon itself as well as the wider Middle East. The terrorist organization continued to build its military infrastructure throughout villages in southern Lebanon, adjacent to schools, hospitals, houses of worship and residential buildings, as evidenced by a series of explosions of Hizbullah weapons caches. "Hizbullah's provocations and continued rearmament must not go unanswered by this Council," which, he said, had repeatedly and clearly stipulated that the terrorist organization must disarm and disband as a key issue addressed in resolution 1701 (2006).

He called on the Syrian Government to refrain from engaging in actions that destabilized the region. "While Syria claims to seek peace, it continued to support terror," he said. There were numerous indications that the Syrian regime was hosting Hizbullah training camps where training on missiles and other weapons was received. "This reflects just the tip of the iceberg in terms of Syria's extensive support for terrorism in the region," he added.

The greatest danger facing the Middle East and the world was Iran, he said. A leader who denied the holocaust, promoted conspiracy theories about the 11 September terrorist attacks and called for Israel to be wiped off the map, Iran's President only advanced the causes of destruction and instability. His regime's support provided a lifeline to the terrorist organizations of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah, and Iran sought to foil any movement towards rapprochement between Israel and the Palestinians. There were other voices in the region, however, including an open letter to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the Lebanese media, saying: "You are attempting to interfere, just like others that came before you, in our affairs, where foreign interference was just to use Lebanon internally."

Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities was even more alarming, he said, continuing: "It endangers us all — and must continue to be met by strong and effective action." He also expressed ongoing deep concern that for more than four years, the kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, had remained deprived of his most basic human rights, including any visit from the Red Cross. Israel expected the international community to do all in its power, and more than had been done thus far, to bring about his swift release.

BROOKE D. ANDERSON ([United States](#)) said the core issues of the long, tragic Middle East conflict would not easily be resolved, but a negotiated solution was the only one possible. She affirmed that her country was working intensively with both sides to allow negotiations to continue, towards the result of a just and lasting peace. In that diplomatic activity, restraint on settlement was being urged, as well as continued progress in security and other important results on the ground. She stated that the forces of violence and despair must not be allowed to bring about an endless continuation of the conflict. She called on others in the region to support the parties' peace efforts as well, and welcomed progress in easing restrictions in Gaza.

She also reiterated calls for the release of Gilad Shalit and welcomed the ongoing investigation into the flotilla incident, as well as the work of the investigative commission, saying she continued to regard it as the most appropriate way to deal with the aftermath of the occurrence. On Lebanon, she stressed the importance of the full implementation of resolutions 1550 (2004) and 1701 (2006) without external interference, and urged attention to the continuing flow of arms across the borders and other developments that undermined peace. In regard to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, she said she completely endorsed the Secretary-General's statement that its work go forward and that those who interfered with it did not have the interest of justice, or Lebanon, at heart.

ALFRED MOUNGARA ([Gabon](#)) welcomed the September resumption of dialogue between the parties and regretted the current impasse. He urged both parties to resume the talks and invited them to arrive at compromises on stumbling blocks as soon as possible. As comprehensive regional peace was necessary, he maintained that the involvement of other regional nations in the talks was needed. He also called for an end to persistent violations of Lebanon's air space and for freedom of movement for UNIFIL.

He invited the parties to refrain from incitement through action and speech, and underscored the need for broader access to Gaza through crossings. He stated, in addition, that it was essential that Israeli security concerns be taken into account in the peace talks. He finally reiterated his country's strong support for a viable Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

GÉRARD ARAUD ([France](#)) said the relaunch of the negotiations had been a bold and brave decision by the Palestinian and Israeli leaders, as the status quo would only lead to further instability and violence. The settlements were illegal and an obstacle to peace. The settlement activities carried out in East Jerusalem, with support of Israeli authorities, were of concern as they also encouraged further violence in the Holy city. The international community continued to advocate the extension of a moratorium. The primary objective of negotiations was a substantial discussion on final status issues. The international community must commit itself to assist negotiations and the States in the region had a decisive key role to play. He deplored the decision of the Israeli Government to tender permissions for construction of housing in East Jerusalem, because Jerusalem must become the capital of two States.

He said the Palestinian side must strengthen security sector reform, promote the rule of law and continue its fight against terrorism. As for Gaza, he urged the immediate opening of access points to support freedom of movement of goods and individuals. He continued to call for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Shalit and the cessation of violence against Israel. The Palestinian efforts to bolster its institutions must be continued with support from Israel. France was ready to convene a second Paris pledging conference to support those efforts. He called on all parties in Lebanon to implement resolution 1701 (2006) and respect the Blue Line. He expressed concern at the statement by the President of Iran regarding the right to exist of a Member State of the United Nations. The Special Tribunal must be able to continue independently, he added. No one should prejudge the outcome of its work or attempt to assert influence.

MARK LYALL GRANT ([United Kingdom](#)) said the direct negotiations had been welcomed as a way to achieve a secure recognized Israel living alongside an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as capital of both states, as well as a settlement of the refugee issue. The negotiations, however, were now on hold. He was disappointed that Israel did not extend the moratorium and that settlement activity had resumed. The approval for housing units in East Jerusalem was disturbing. Settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, was illegal and was damaging to the peace process. Reinstating the moratorium, which already fell short of Israeli legal obligations, was not unreasonable.

The Palestinians must also play their parts, he said. He welcomed progress made by the Palestinians in the area of security, but intra-Palestinian reconciliation was crucial for creating a Palestinian State. It was imperative that progress on Gaza be made. Israel's decision to change from a list of permitted goods to forbidden goods was a step in the right direction but more must be done. Because Israel had legitimate security concerns, he called on Hamas to renounce all violence. He also called for Shalit's immediate and unconditional release and for access to him by the Red Cross. Stressing that any solution must involve the entire region he expressed concern at increasing rhetoric aimed at undermining the Special Tribunal in Lebanon, which must be allowed to continue unimpeded. A negotiated peace in the Middle East was achievable, he said, and it was up to the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to make the compromises to deliver it.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said the relaunch of negotiations was crucial for peace in the Middle East. He noted recent diplomatic activity in which his country had played a part. In that light, he regretted the impasse and the end of the settlement moratorium. He urged both parties to work for compromise solutions on core issues and called on them to avoid steps that would prejudice negotiations. Final status issues must be a priority when talks resumed, he maintained, even though settling such issues would inevitably prove difficult. United States support for the talks was important, but collective support of the Quartet, regional States and the international community was also necessary.

In Gaza, he said, it was important to end violence and he backed Egyptian negotiations towards Palestinian unity. He supported the continuation of a detailed, unbiased investigation of the flotilla incident. In regard to Lebanon, he stressed that stability needed to be bolstered and it was important for the Lebanese to continue to build State institutions without interference. He expressed concern over tensions over the Special Tribunal and called for a continuation of fair and unbiased operations. He supported the work of UNIFIL as well.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said the most striking feature of the current situation in the Middle East was Israel's continued harmful practices, ignoring United States President Barack Obama and the international consensus and threatening the success of any negotiations. On the West Bank, he stated, economic security could not be realized in isolation from the political situation. He could not imagine peace progressing while Israel continued its repressive activities in the West Bank, its creation of facts on the ground that prejudged a negotiated settlement and its blockade of Gaza.

Lebanon, he said, sought a fair and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, based on Council resolutions and previous agreements. Such a peace must include the return of land still occupied in Syria and Lebanon. In that context, he expressed support to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) said that despite appeals from all quarters of the international community, Israel, by letting the moratorium expire, had effectively returned the whole process of direct negotiations back to square one. He welcomed the decision by the Palestinian side to not withdraw completely from the process. He called on Israel to desist from taking unilateral steps and employing politically expedient rhetoric that undermined the notion of a negotiated two-State solution. That meant, first and foremost, an immediate freeze of all settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem. The conditions of occupation had to be eased and a positive environment created on the ground that allowed for the State-building exercise in Palestine to make progress. Obstacles to private sector development and sustainable growth had to be lifted. Progress in State-building made by the Palestinian Authority must continue to be supported by the international community.

He said that by virtue of its "illegal and inhuman blockade", Israel was directly responsible for the ongoing human tragedy in Gaza. He called for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the full and immediate lifting of the blockade. Welcoming recent progress in talks between Palestinian factions, he said the Palestinian people needed and deserved a single leadership that incorporated all factions. It was also crucial that in Lebanon all actors remained calm, maintained dialogue and were sensitive to all legitimate concerns. The Special Tribunal should not become politicized.

Regarding the "attack by Israeli forces on an international humanitarian aid convoy in the high seas", he said he welcomed that the work of the Panel of Inquiry was under way. The Panel had produced its progress report after receiving an interim report on the Turkish national investigation. The Fact Finding Mission of the Human Rights Council had submitted its report and had concluded that a series of violations of international law had been committed by the Israeli forces. All parties must refrain from taking steps that were counterproductive. The announcement of major new settlement activity in East Jerusalem was yet another step in the wrong direction. Israel must put an end to actions designed to change the demographics and the social and religious fabric of Jerusalem.

LI BAODONG (China) said the international community should continue to work to create conditions for resolving tensions in the Middle East. Differences must be settled through negotiations between the parties in order to achieve a lasting peace. He supported the early creation of an independent Palestinian State living in peace with Israel. The direct negotiations had been brought to a standstill by the question of settlements. He hoped that Israel would be able to see the big picture and extend its freeze on settlement construction.

The situation in Gaza remained grave, he said. While welcoming the ease of restrictions on goods allowed into the Strip, he said it was not enough to alleviate the grave humanitarian situation there. He called on Israel to lift the blockade immediately. He called upon the international community to provide greater support to the people of Gaza. He hoped that all factions within Palestine would settle their differences through dialogue at an early stage. Taking note of Quartet efforts, he underlined that the Quartet could not replace the role of the Council in the maintenance of international peace and security.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING (Austria), aligning himself with the statement to be made by the European Union delegation, said both parties in the Middle East must take courage and move ahead with direct talks. He called on Israel to bring all settlement activity to a halt, including in East Jerusalem, and said both sides should continue to work for a negotiated solution. He urged leaders to look beyond expediency. The parties must take visible and tangible steps to renew peace efforts. Easing conditions in the West Bank and Gaza was particularly important, to build on recent improvements in security and economic growth in the West Bank. He welcomed the development of Palestinian institutional capacity and called for Palestinian reconciliation.

He said he supported the ongoing efforts of the Panel of Inquiry to investigate the flotilla incident. In regard to Lebanon, he called on all parties to abide by their commitments in resolution 1701 (2006), and for the clearance of the area south of the Litani River of illegitimate armed activity in that regard. He fully supported the independence of the Special Tribunal as per the Secretary-General's recent statement on the matter. He pledged Austria's continued work with its European partners to help bring about the resumption of negotiations and called on regional States to work cooperatively in that effort as well.

IVAN BARBALIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said tremendous efforts were required on both sides to get the negotiations moving. He expressed grave concern about actions that once again threatened the continuation of direct talks, in particular the expiry of Israel's ten-month partial settlement moratorium. He called for Israel to respond positively to appeals by the international community, and to end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem. The resumption of negotiations was a crucially important opportunity that must not be missed. The Middle East could not afford a failed peace process. Both parties must make the difficult and necessary decisions to achieve a just political settlement leading to a two-State solution. Both sides must also avoid provocative actions that could undermine the process, and must respect international humanitarian law.

He said a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East could be achieved only on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid Principles, the Road Map, and agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. Bosnia and Herzegovina remained committed to a two-State solution, with the two sides living in peace and security. However, the continuation and worsening of the situation in Gaza was a continued preoccupation. While Israel had taken positive steps towards easing the entry of some goods, his delegation called for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and 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 from the West Bank.

For a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, he added, Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese negotiations were also important, as were the provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) for all parties to respect the Blue Line and cooperate fully with the United Nations and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria) said the resumption of direct talks had been a positive development, although no one had been under the illusion that it would be an easy process. There was a need for compromise and flexibility. It was disheartening to note that despite appeals by the international community that Israel continue its settlement freeze, Israel had announced renewed settlement activity in East Jerusalem, something which could be interpreted as a move to kill direct talks. The Council, the Quartet, the Arab League and others should sustain their pressure on the parties to remain engaged through dialogue. Both parties must

create conditions conducive to a lasting peace and refrain from provocative actions. She urged Israel to repeal its decision to construct new homes in East Jerusalem.

She said statements that some Hamas people had carried out attacks on southern Israel to scuttle peace talks were troubling. Welcoming the finding by an Israeli court that two Israeli soldiers had been found guilty of inappropriate action, she expressed hope that Israel's announcement on indirect talks with Hamas on a prisoner swap would help ease tensions. She also reiterated the need for complete removal of the Israeli blockade on Gaza, saying that such action would facilitate the Palestinian State-building process and reduce threats to Israeli security. Mutual trust and confidence were necessary for negotiations to be successful. The parties must therefore abide by, and recommit themselves to, their respective Road Map obligations.

TSUNEO NISHIDA ([Japan](#)) strongly encouraged both parties to resume direct negotiations, and said he supported United States efforts in that regard. He expressed disappointment on the lapsing of the Israeli moratorium on settlement activity and urged Israel to renew that moratorium and to refrain from implementing new construction plans. Calling upon both parties to carry out their Road Map commitments, he reiterated calls to Israel to freeze all settlement activity in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and also calls to the Palestinian Authority to continue to improve security, end violence and to work against incitement.

He said the negotiations should result in a two-State solution. Towards that goal, he supported the Authority's plan to build a Palestinian State within 24 months, pledging Japan's continued assistance and help in building capacity. On Gaza, he called for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), as well as Palestinian reconciliation, supporting Egypt's efforts. Expressing alarm over recent statements made in Lebanon, he called on all parties to act responsibly and abide by resolution 1701 (2006). In that regard, he said he strongly supported the work of UNIFIL and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which must continue without interference with its work toward ending impunity. He pledged that his country would continue to make every effort to help achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VOTTI ([Brazil](#)) said the end of the construction freeze, continued construction of Israeli homes in East Jerusalem, attacks on and by Israeli settlers and the increased exchange of fire between Gaza and Israel were all ominous developments that challenged direct negotiations. That had been compounded by Israel's decision related to the acquisition of citizenship and future swap of territory. Reversing those disturbing development required political courage and statesmanship, including, at least, a continued construction moratorium. "Freezing construction is not only a legal obligation," she said, "but actually the single most critical contribution to peace in the region at this juncture."

She said saving direct negotiations would also require the active engagement of the international community. Commending the efforts of the United States administration and applauding the decision of the League of Arab States to support the Palestinian Authority in giving more time for conditions to be created for the resumption of negotiations, she said negotiations were the only way to sustainable peace. Stopping and preventing violence was also key. She condemned attacks against Israeli settlers and rocket-firing into southern Israel, as well as provocation and violence from the settlers, and attacks on mosques and on Palestinian civilians and property. The success of the peace process would also depend on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Addressing the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, she said that — while welcoming the easing of the Israeli blockade — what was required was a complete lifting, without prejudice to Israel's legitimate security concerns.

CLAUDE HELLER ([Mexico](#)) said that in September direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority had been resumed with the objective to resolve all issues within a year, but those negotiations now "hung from a thread". That situation was unacceptable. Dialogue and negotiation must continue and must produce results for both Palestinians and Israelis. The status quo was not acceptable. It would be decisive in that regard if both parties abstained from carrying out provocative acts. Resumption of settlement construction in the West Bank and the recent announcement of new construction in East Jerusalem were steps back. Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were illegal and were a serious obstacle to the peace process. Settlements did not provide for greater security but created tension, resentment and violence. He urged Israel to cease that practice, including natural growth, once and for all.

He said the Palestinian Authority must also meet its obligations under the Road Map, noting that the capacity of Palestinian security forces had improved. The blockade imposed on Gaza was unsustainable and counterproductive. The partial lifting of restrictions was not sufficient and the blockade must be lifted completely. Addressing legitimate Israeli security concerns was only possible through an international monitoring system at the border crossings. Such a system would lead to reduction in tension and prevent such incidents as the attacks on the relief flotilla. A prompt, impartial and transparent investigation into that incident must be carried out.

Noting increasing tensions among factions in Lebanon as well as ongoing violations of Council resolution 1701 (2006), he appealed to Israel, Lebanon and other stakeholders to comply with the resolution's provisions and to avoid belligerent rhetoric. The Special Tribunal, whose work had generated violence and controversy, was an independent body with a clear Council mandate to put an end to impunity. Its conclusions should not be challenged and there should be no interference with its work.

RUHAKANA RUGUNDA ([Uganda](#)) said that it was essential that the two parties in the Middle East upheld their commitment to work for permanent peace, which would require hard concessions to achieve the necessary two-State solution. He commended international partners for their efforts to try to bring that about, and saluted Palestinian Authority leaders for their efforts in building institutions. He called on Israel to freeze all settlement activity.

Turning to Gaza, he called on both sides to exercise maximum restraint, and called for a total lifting of the blockade. On Lebanon, he called on all parties to fully implement their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006).

When the Security Council resumed this afternoon, MAGED ABDELAZIZ ([Egypt](#)), speaking for the Non-Aligned Movement, said that despite all serious and credible efforts exerted by the various parties to ensure the resumption and continuity of direct negotiations, a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine remained regrettably far from being achieved. This was because Israel, the occupying power, continued to pursue its illegal policies and practices that were not only endangering the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, but rendering such a solution practically impossible. Israel must cease its unlawful colonization in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and place a complete and indefinite freeze on all settlement activities, including so-called "natural growth".

The Non-Aligned Movement stressed that serious and genuine negotiations could not be conducted while Israel carried out such "illegal actions and provocations", and that the continued expansion of settlement building destroyed mutual trust and confidence. It also demonstrated that Israel had yet to abandon its expansionist goals, and he demanded that Israel refrain from all such actions. There was a unanimous global conviction that Israel must respect its obligations as an occupying power, as an imperative condition for achieving the two-State solution. The Palestinian Authority, he said, was continuing to exert positive and constructive efforts to lay the foundation and build national institutions in preparation for the independence of the Palestinian State. However, there were continued acts of violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, including children, as well as the burning of Islamic places of worship, orchards, and agricultural fields.

He said that the situation in Gaza remained among the top priorities of the Non-Aligned Movement, as that "unacceptable and unsustainable" situation must be brought to an end through the lifting, by Israel, of its illegal blockade. There was also an urgent need for the reconstruction of Gaza, and he called on Israel to allow for the import of essential construction materials, including those necessary for the long overdue reconstruction of the United Nations facilities and UNRWA schools. The Movement was also deeply concerned over Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty, and called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2009). Additionally, the Movement reaffirmed that all actions taken by Israel to alter the legal, physical or demographic status of the Occupied Syrian Golan would be null, void, and have no legal effect.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said circumstances did not augur well for the Middle East because of the fact that Israel had obliterated the last hope for a just and lasting peace in the region. It continued to pursue settlement activity and impose an embargo in Gaza, and "threatened the expulsion of millions" under the pretext of the Jewish character of the State of Israel. Israel rejected peace by even refusing the modest request to extend the settlement freeze. Peace was only possible through the Arab Peace Initiative, including establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, and resolution of the question of refugees. The Israeli answer to that initiative was seen in continued settlement policy and appropriation of land and natural resources.

He said Israel's racist decisions relating to the pledge of allegiance to a Jewish State was an "expression of Israeli fascism" and ran counter to Israeli claims that it was an oasis of democracy in the Middle East region. The Council was called upon to undertake practical measures commensurate with Israeli acts. The siege on the people in Gaza should be lifted and checkpoints and crossing should be opened.

Israel continued to refused to return the Golan to Syria and to comply with decisions of international legality. It detained Syrian citizens of the Golan and confiscated land, stole and polluted water and killed hundreds with its land mines. Syria had a sovereign right to the occupied Syrian Golan, which was not a subject to negotiation. Israel must prove in acts they were ready for a just and comprehensive peace. Israeli state terror had been documented by international and Israeli institutions. Recently it had forged passports of some of its allies to assassinate a Palestinian citizen in Dubai. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference had named Israel as an obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

KHALID ABDULLAH KRAYYEM SHAWABKAH (Jordan) called upon Israel to respond to international calls for changing its policies so that negotiations might resume on all final status items. He said Israel must halt all unilateral measures in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, including settlement activity, demolitions and evictions and cessation of archaeological diggings around whole Christian and Muslim sites. All those activities violated the rules of international humanitarian law, and constituted negation of Israel's obligations as an occupying Power.

He said the crux of the Arab/Israeli conflict was the question of Palestine. That question must be settled through the two-State solution. The Arab Peace Initiative, vital to the region and the world, was the collective Arab commitment to a permanent peace. That initiative, however, had not received a commensurate response by successive Israeli Governments. Achieving the two-State solution and a comprehensive peace was the only way to resolve other issues in the region, including manifestations of radicalism, terrorism and violence. He regretted the decision of Israel not to extend the moratorium on settlement construction. That decision threatened to derail the negotiations and was contrary to the wishes of the entire international community.

PEDRO SERRANO, Acting Head of the Delegation of the European Union, said the hope for the Palestinian Authority and Israel to engage in substantive discussions on all final status issues had turned into reality, when direct negotiations began in Washington on 2 September last and continued in Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem. Today the Council met at a moment when efforts were being undertaken to overcome the current deadlock in those negotiations. He said there was no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution, and the European Union called for both sides to keep the process active, show restraint, and refrain from actions that would hinder that process. To that end, both sides must uphold and implement previous commitments, and strive to create an environment conducive to a successful outcome. To this end, the Quartet must also continue to play an essential role in the peace process.

Settlements in occupied territory were illegal under international law, he stressed. They constituted an obstacle to peace, and threatened to make a two-State solution "impossible". The moratorium instituted by the Government of Israel last November had had a positive impact, and it was regrettable that Israel had decided against extending it. He reiterated the European Union's call for Israel to end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem, and for a complete stop to all violence, particularly rocket fire and terrorist attacks. As per the World Bank's assessment, the Palestinian Authority was well-positioned for the establishment of a State in the near future, and the European Union would support that process including through the Fayyad Plan.

He went on to say that the European Union High Representative had visited Gaza twice in the past year, and had praised the work of UNRWA in providing health, education and social protection services. The European Union welcomed Israeli steps to ease the entry of goods into Gaza, but reiterated its call for a full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained, and unconditioned opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods, and persons to and from Gaza, including from the West Bank. A solution must be reached that addressed Israel's legitimate security concerns, including a complete stop to all violence and arms smuggling into Gaza. Additionally, those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit must release him without delay.

In the spirit of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, the European Union also reiterated the importance of the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese negotiations, and supported the Secretary-General's recent statement reaffirming the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. UNIFIL also played a crucial role in southern Lebanon. The elements of the future — State building, strong economic development, and security — needed to be nurtured, in the context of ongoing talks on all final status issues, and should lead to a two-State solution. The European Union stood ready to contribute substantially to a comprehensive and sustainable solution: the State of Israel living side by side with an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine.

CEDRICK CHARLES CROWLEY (South Africa) said there had been several positive and encouraging developments in the peace process. These included the efforts to resume negotiations between the parties through proximity talks; the continued engagement of the Quartet and, separately, the United States with the Palestinian and Israeli leadership; the resumption of direct talks between the parties in September on all permanent status issues; and the continued support of the Arab League and Non-Aligned Movement in general, to see the direct talks achieving the ultimate objective of creating a two-State solution and ushering in a new era of Middle East peace and security.

However, the period of negotiations had been tested by incidents such as the ongoing imposition of the Gaza blockade, the continued construction of the separation wall, and the violent assault by the Israeli Forces against the international humanitarian flotilla on 31 May of this year. It was of serious concern that Israel had not renewed the settlement moratorium, despite the resumption of direct negotiations.

He recalled that South Africa, during its own phase of negotiations, had experienced moments that threatened to derail the process and had tested the resolve of the political leadership. However, South Africa had remained focused on the broader goal of peace, democracy, and reconciliation, defying all those who sought to detract from those objectives. Today was such a moment for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and it was essential that a climate of mutual trust and peace be created. Along those lines, Israel must take the difficult but necessary decisions that would secure a sustainable peace in the region. He also called for continued unity among the Palestinian political leadership. The Security Council in particular needed to shoulder its responsibility for ending the Israeli occupation and ensuring the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

HASAN KLEIB (Indonesia) said the Council should heed its own resolution 465 (1980) and pronounce itself collectively, and with a single voice, to urgently demand that Israel dismantle the existing settlements and cease construction and planning of further settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. As his country had been deeply concerned for a long time over the suffering of Palestinians under occupation, it supported the current surge in diplomacy aimed at relaunching negotiations.

He said that Indonesia recently convened an informal ministerial consultative forum on Palestine in New York, in response to a suggestion by President Abbas, attended by representatives of the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia, Brazil, India and South Africa. All of them agreed on holding regular consultations and "to assist the cause of Palestine in every forum possible". He said the commitment of his country to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours, is absolute.

LOTFI BOUCHAARA (Morocco) regretted the Israeli decision not to extend its settlement moratorium and its recent approval of new housing units in East

Jerusalem. He said that a return to negotiations hinged on a freeze on settlement activity that would include the city of al-Quds.

It was worrying, he said, that as Israel returned to peace talks, it continued the demolition of Palestinian housing and eviction of residents, along with actions that threatened Muslim religious sites, as well as other harmful practices. He called on Israel to end such practices in order to create the conditions for the negotiation of a just and lasting peace. He said Morocco continued to follow with great interest the diplomatic efforts to reconvene talks and he pledged that his country would do its utmost to assist in that effort.

SIRODJIDIN M. ASLOV (Tajikistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Group, said stalemate in the Middle East process was worrying especially if it came as a result of Israel's attempts to dictate its own terms. The peace process could not make genuine progress in the prevailing conditions. Israel should live up to its commitments and obligations, especially those stipulated by the agreements signed with the Palestinian side and enshrined in the Road Map. It was self-evident that building Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, would jeopardize the peace process, and send signals about Israel's real intentions. Israel could not pretend to make peace with the Palestinians and at the same time persist in stealing their land for settlement. It was the responsibility of the international community to make Israel, the occupying Power, refrain from actions that would undermine peace efforts. In order to have a successful peace process, Israel should halt all settlement activities, including "natural growth" in all Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The peace process, in order to be successful, should have a clear time frame and clear implementation process.

The situation in East Jerusalem was a major concern to the OIC and its member States. Israel's measures in occupied East Jerusalem were aimed at forcefully altering the indigenous character of the City, and its decision to change the structure and shape of the centuries-old walls of the City was considered an assault on human heritage. The situation in Gaza was worrying; 1.5 million Palestinians were suffering harsh conditions as a result of the shameful, illegal and unjustified Israeli blockade. Israel should lift the blockade and allow the reconstruction of Gaza.

He said the OIC remained deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and he called on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Sheba'a farms, Kfar Shouba Hills and the northern part of al-Ghajar village. The OIC joined the international community's stance in reaffirming that all measures taken, or to be taken by Israel, the occupying power, to alter the legal, physical, and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan were null and void and had no legal effect.

He said the OIC Group reiterated that peace in the Middle East would be achieved only by ending Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967. It was incumbent on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to shoulder its legal and moral responsibilities and take prompt action to implement relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

TINE MORCH SMITH (Norway) cited reports of the World Bank to donors in saying that the impressive efforts of the Palestinian Authority in building transparent and accountable institutions and economic structures could not be sustained if 60 per cent of the West Bank remained under full Israeli control. He quoted surveys suggesting that the Jordan Valley could generate \$1 billion worth of industrial and agricultural output annually. She maintained that restrictions on movement of goods and people had severed ties between Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank, harming trade and economic growth, a situation that would be exacerbated by the building of the 240 additional Israeli housing units that had been approved.

The donor community stood ready to carry its share in helping to see the Palestinian State-building process finalized, even as direct talks were stalled over Israel's decision to continue the expansion of illegal settlements. She said she strongly supported all initiatives to bring credible negotiations back on track and supported actions taken by the parties and the international community to underpin continued Palestinian State-building efforts.

KHALID ABDALRAZAQ ALNAFISEE (Saudi Arabia) said the ongoing Israeli illegal settlement activity, particularly in East Jerusalem, stalled the current negotiations. The "Jewish State" issue was an indication of the fact that Israel was not serious about reaching a lasting solution. The international community must demand that Israel restart direct negotiations, while stopping all illegal settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The widespread destruction of Gaza remained unabated as Israel's occupation had closed key crossings, built a wall that isolated Gaza and pursued a policy of collective punishment. Since Israel had annexed East Jerusalem, Israel had stripped citizens of their identity, something which was akin to ethnic cleansing, and had destroyed Palestinian homes in order to change the demographic character. He condemned continued resettlement of Arab citizens and called for dismantling of all settlements in the occupied territories.

He said the international community had demanded the cessation of settlement activity on the basis of legitimacy; it was a call to the Council to take action to compel Israel to comply. Israel's threat to the sovereignty of Lebanon complicated a complex situation there. Good-faith negotiations should also be started to return the occupied Syrian Golan to Syria. Recalling that in September President Obama had stated that Palestinians waited for a full membership seat at the General Assembly next year, he said that Israel must prove it was a real partner in negotiations towards reaching a two-State solution.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar) said that 2010 had witnessed a serious move by the Quartet and other sponsors of the peace process. The Arab countries had created a favourable climate for negotiations, but that climate could not continue indefinitely. The Israeli Government evaded its internationally agreed obligations, however, and persisted in its policy of illegal settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan. There was international consensus that the solution to the Palestinian question came through the two-State solution. Israel's expansion of settlement, particularly in East Jerusalem, undermined any chance of such a solution. The "natural growth" concept was unacceptable, because the settlements were not legal to begin with. It was necessary to dismantle all settlements established since 1967. The Arab Peace Initiative would be reconsidered because of lack of confidence in Israeli intentions.

He said it was important to provide protection from Israeli criminal acts and to ensure their non-recurrence as they were catalysts for acts of terrorism. The illegal and inhuman siege on the people of Gaza must be broken. He rejected the illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the demographic composition and religious character. Those measures were null and void and had no legal consequence. They also violated the obligations of Israel as occupying Power. The Israeli occupation of Lebanese territories continued as did continuous Israeli violations of resolution 1701 (2006). Those violations, as well as the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan, were acts of provocation and arrogance.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON (Pakistan) said that in order to prevent the collapse of negotiations, the international community, the Council and the Quartet must act in tandem and call upon Israel to announce unconditional cessation of all settlement activity. The most worrying of such activity took place in and around East Jerusalem, and routine settler violence against Palestinian neighbours was a regrettable corollary. The negotiation process must run in parallel with improvement in the lives of the Palestinian people. The policies of checkpoints, road blocks, military siege and separation walls could not indicate a peace process and must end. Israeli measures to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank and to improve access to Gaza must be sustained by a deeper political commitment to improve livelihoods in Palestine, through respect for human rights, freedom of movement and unrestricted flow of commerce.

He said the international community must upgrade its assistance to the Palestinian Authority, especially regarding the 2009 plan to build State institutions within two years. The projected 8 per cent growth rate in the West Bank and Gaza could be a solid edifice for Palestinian Statehood and its people, and could "rebuff" violence. It held immense promise for lasting peace in the region. He also urged parallel progress on the Israel-Lebanon and the Israel-Syria tracks, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. He said he looked forward to substantive and objective investigations by the Panel of Inquiry on the freedom flotilla incident. Justice must prevail and those affected must be compensated.

GHAZI JOMAA (Tunisia) said he regretted that Israel had not extended its moratorium on settlement activity and instead renewed its colonial actions. Recalling his President's recent statements, he called on the international community, in the attempt to bring about a just and lasting peace in the region, to exert more

pressure on Israel in order to stop its colonial policy and its efforts to change the nature of Jerusalem. He called for the resumption of dialogue and negotiation and also an end to actions that raised tensions. He called, in addition, for the end of the occupation of the Syrian Golan and other Arab territory still held by Israel.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI (Iran) said the warm reception given to the President of Iran in Lebanon last week was indicative of the constructive role his country played in the region in general and in Lebanon in particular. He urged the United Nations to take that role into account and benefit from it. To end the miserable plight of the Palestinian people, on the other hand, it was necessary to stop allowing the peace and stability of the region to be constantly threatened by the Israeli regime that had no desire for peace. He said Israel's policies of restrictions and blockades destroyed any move towards a lasting peace in the region. The most important prerequisite for that peace, he said, was an immediate end to the illegal Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people, in order to build trust. There was also an urgent need to address the Israeli nuclear weapons programme, as it presented a real threat to regional and global peace and security "in the hands of a regime with an unparalleled record of State terrorism and resort to aggression". The creation of a nuclear-weapons free zone in the Middle East should be actively pursued. In accordance with its primary responsibilities, the Security Council had a crucial role in all those efforts, he affirmed.

PALITHA T.B. KOHONA (Sri Lanka) reaffirmed his country's strong belief that the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and an end to settlement activities remained central to finding a viable and just solution to the question of Palestine. This would not only fulfil the aspirations of the Palestinian people but would be a major contribution for world peace. Toward that objective, he expressed hope that United Nations resolutions would be implemented without delay.

He called on all parties to the conflict to stop all violence, exercise restraint, and exploit all avenues in the quest for a lasting solution in which both sides could live side by side as neighbours within recognized borders that brought Israel greater acceptance in the region and the world. He reiterated support for the Government of President Abbas and commended the decision by the Arab League to keep the doors open for peace talks despite the current deadlock. He finally stressed the importance of Palestinian unity, and the continued building of Palestinian institutions, as they would be the bedrock of a future Palestinian state.

MARIA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua) said that soon after the negotiations had begun in September, the occupying Power announced its intentions to hold a referendum on the possible outcome and took the illegal and provocative decision to continue to build housing in East Jerusalem. Its policy of "xenophobia" incited its citizens to be violent and forced the Palestinian population to leave the land that was theirs. She condemned the criminal blockade of the Gaza and demanded that Israel meet its obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and Council resolutions. The Israeli decision in June to ease restrictions, after having murdered nine Turkish activists on the humanitarian flotilla, was nothing more than "a cosmetic touch up of the genocidal blockade".

She said Israel, with its characteristic impunity, had refused an international investigation into the assault on the humanitarian flotilla and had resorted to the argument of self-defence. She condemned the continued violations of sovereignty of Lebanon and violations of Council resolutions there, as well as in the occupied Syrian Golan. She called upon all countries that had not yet done so to recognize the Palestinian State and called on the Council and the General Assembly to take concrete steps regarding such recognition so that the Palestinian entity could become a full-fledged Member of the Organization. It was unacceptable for the Organization to recognize a State that resorted to violence as a policy, while not recognizing the Palestinian State.

GUNNAR PÁLSSON (Iceland) said Israel was mostly responsible for the serious risk that the peace process might stall once again since it had refused to renew its moratorium on settlement construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in East Jerusalem. Settlements were illegal under international law and were designed to further entrench the occupation. To call on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity was therefore a legitimate request.

He said the raid on the humanitarian flotilla earlier in the year had been condemned by his Government. Experts, mandated by the Human Rights Council, had now concluded that Israel had broken international law by attacking the flotilla. He urged the Israeli authorities to work with the United Nations on the follow-up to that report. Israel and the Palestinian side should also conduct an independent and credible investigation into the serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law reported by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict. He furthermore called upon the Government of Israel to bring the blockade on Gaza, which constituted collective punishment, to an end and to ensure that the overall needs of the population were met.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela), saying he supported the self-determination of the Palestinian people, asserted that the Government of Israel had violated the Charter of the United Nations on several occasions. He said "numerous reports by [United Nations] rapporteurs also confirmed the outrages committed by the State of Israel". He urged action by the Council to adopt measures to get Israel to comply with international law. With its settlement activity, he said, the occupying Power was carrying out "an explicitly racist and xenophobic policy leading to the de-Arabization of Palestine".

He said the Security Council, by allowing Israeli impunity to continue, had shown itself "a prisoner of the veto". That was why Venezuela stressed the need to rebuild the United Nations, including, among other things, eliminating the right of veto in the Council, and giving the decisions of the General Assembly a binding character, including those that have to do with peace and security. He noted that Venezuela had been admitted as a full member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and pledged to support the struggle of that people from that platform.

PABLO SOLÓN (Bolivia) condemned what he called continued Israeli violations of international law, and saluted the endurance of the Palestinian people. He said that the negative trade balances between the territories and Israel outstripped international aid, and he further condemned the use by Israel of access to water as a way to remove Palestinian population from its territory. He called on Israel to put an end to its illegal policies, including settlement activity and the blockade of Gaza.

He said that the international community had an obligation to investigate violations of human rights committed by Israel, maintaining also that Israel was imposing a unilateral solution through its continuation of settlements. He appealed to the international community to ensure that Israel abide by all its commitments under international law and expressed his country's continuing support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) said all Member States should pledge complete commitment to a durable and sustainable resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the issue of Palestine, and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. For its part, Bangladesh was always ready to play a constructive role in that collective endeavour, and reaffirmed its full support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation. The international community had failed, collectively, as it had not guaranteed the fundamental rights for the Palestinian people. A solution required Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied lands.

It had been heartening to see a new beginning in the peace process in the talks, begun last month, between President Mahmud Abbas and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The international community eagerly awaited a breakthrough in the peace process — stalled since 2008 — and hoped for a lasting peace and a two-State solution that saw an end to Israel's illegal eviction of Palestinian residents. Direct negotiations would only be successful if there was sustained regional and international support. The international community, especially the Quartet, should also ease the financial burden of the Palestinian Authority, and renew commitments to increase assistance to Palestine. The illegal occupation of Palestine for the past six decades was the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the Middle East, and a lasting peace must be found for all inhabitants of the region.

SAUL WEISLEDER (Costa Rica) said the situation in the Middle East had been before the Council for more than six decades, with a repetition of statements denouncing one party or the other. Only if leaders had lifted themselves above the immediate disputes and focused on the human costs had meaningful steps been seen. Now there was again renewed hope that through direct negotiations all final status issues could be settled. There was a need for the leaders to break the routine and substitute it with cooperation.

He said both Palestinian and Israeli leaders were aware of the central aspects of what was to be a final agreement. The basis of a solution must be the acceptance of two States with safe and recognized borders, cooperating with each other to increase production, thereby creating conditions of health, education and a peaceful future. There was an agreement on the table; details to the negotiations were only complementary to it. The only sustainable solution must be founded on the full respect for international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and not on strength. The parties must focus on the essential aspects of the conflict.

He said he welcomed the implicit support the Arab League had given to the Palestinian Authority to continue negotiations despite the non-extension of the settlement moratorium.

ABDERRAHIMOULD HADRAMI ([Mauritania](#)), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said Israel persisted in its disrespect for the international community as it chose a policy of settlement construction and destruction of houses on a daily basis. That behaviour was a breach of international law and Council resolutions so the Council must shoulder its responsibilities in that regard. The reality on the ground should not be separated from efforts to achieve a two-State solution on basis of pre-1967 borders. He welcomed United States President Obama's statement before the Assembly in which he called for the establishment of a Palestinian State within a year.

He said the Arab Group called on the international community to urge Israel, the occupying Power, to retreat to its pre-1967 borders regarding the Syrian Golan, and called upon the Council to force Israel to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding Syrian prisoners. It also called on the Council to force Israel to withdraw unconditionally from parts of Lebanon it still occupied. As for East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, he said that Israel must end policies aimed at establishing a Jewish majority in East Jerusalem through the eviction of Palestinian citizens.

He said that the inhuman three-year long blockade of Gaza had undermined health and living conditions of the Palestinians there. The Arab Group called upon Israel to lift the "inhuman blockade" in Gaza, and further demanded the unconditional and immediate cessation of all settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem. Negotiations could never resume as long as settlement activity continued. The Group called upon the international community, in particular the Council, to insist that Israel halt all its blatant violations of international law, stop settlement activity and return to negotiations towards establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

JENNY LALAMA ([Ecuador](#)) said her delegation urged full compliance by Israel with standards of international law and with United Nations resolutions and condemned continuing acts of violence in the region. The international community must demand that Israel put an end to its illegal activities, in particular settlement expansion. Settlements were illegal, undermined the principle of land for peace and constituted an obstacle to peace.

She said the Council should take concrete steps to ensure that Israel suffered consequences for its violations and crimes, in particular those committed in East Jerusalem and Gaza. The parties should work towards a peaceful and lasting solution, through establishing a dialogue based, among other things, on the Madrid understanding and the Road Map.

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