



Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5999th meeting

Wednesday, 22 October 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Zhang Yesui.	(China)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Belle
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. De Rivièrè
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Mubarak
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Pascoe: I am grateful for the opportunity to brief once again on the situation in the Middle East. Let me turn first to the political process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Bilateral contacts between Israel and the Palestinians continued, with meetings held between Israeli negotiators and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and the lead Palestinian negotiator, Ahmad Qurei, on 23 September; between President Abbas and President Peres on 26 September in New York; and between advisers.

In Israel, the process of political transition is ongoing. On 21 September, President Peres commissioned newly elected Kadima Party leader Livni to form a new Government. As of this report, coalition negotiations are continuing, with the deadline extended by President Peres to 3 November.

On 26 September, the Secretary-General convened a meeting of the Quartet principals at United Nations Headquarters. The Quartet called upon the parties to make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008 and underlined its commitment to the irreversibility of the process leading to the creation of a Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel.

The Quartet principals welcomed the parties' suggestion to brief the Quartet on the negotiations and expressed interest in coordinating such a meeting at mutually acceptable time, hopefully in the coming weeks. The Quartet also agreed that spring 2009 could be an appropriate time for an international meeting in Moscow.

The Quartet commended Egypt for its efforts to help reunite the West Bank and Gaza within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. Quartet members and Arab League representatives held a constructive discussion, over an iftar hosted by the Secretary-General on 26 September, on how to work together in the crucial period ahead in support of the Israeli-Palestinian process, Palestinian reunification and regional peace. The meeting also reaffirmed the central importance of the Arab Peace Initiative.

In that context, the Secretariat continues to work closely with Arab countries. Last week, Special Coordinator Robert Serry visited Amman for an audience with King Abdullah II of Jordan and meetings with other senior officials.

On 22 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee comprising the parties and key donors, as well as Quartet Representative Blair, met on the margins of the General Assembly. The Committee commended the efforts of the Government of Prime Minister Fayyad to implement its reform and development agenda and encouraged the continuation of ongoing security and institution-building efforts.

It urged further steps, including the easing of movement and access restrictions. Donors have contributed over \$1.3 billion in budgetary aid during 2008 towards Palestinian Authority recurring costs and development initiatives.

The security efforts of the Palestinian Authority, in accordance with the Road Map, focus on deepening progress in the Jenin governorate, which Special Coordinator Serry visited today. Efforts are being extended to Hebron, where Palestinian security forces recently discovered a tunnel allegedly used by militants. We also note positively that considerable progress has been made by the Palestinian Authority in defining a strategy for the development of the judicial sector and that the number of judges and prosecutors has doubled during the past year.

Despite those efforts, the situation on the ground is not improving in the way that is required. Israeli-Palestinian violence this past month claimed the lives of seven Palestinians, two of them children, while injuring 116 Palestinians and 34 Israelis. Among the incidents were the killings of a 61-year-old Palestinian woman and a 15-year-old child when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired at stone-throwers in the West Bank. There were clashes in Ni'lin village on the first day of the annual olive harvest and an incident in Ni'lin on 23 September in which Israeli border police reportedly fired tear gas at a civilian delegation including a European Commission official and local Palestinian officials and members of non-governmental organizations. There were also physical assaults by settlers against Palestinian farmers and the burning down of an olive grove on 15 October. This year's olive harvest is in its early days, and concerns exist for the safety of Palestinian farmers as they harvest crops in the vicinity of settlements and outposts, as well as about their ability to gain access to land isolated between the Barrier and the Green Line.

Israeli Defence Minister Barak has denounced those attacking olive pickers and has stated that the IDF is making a major effort to protect farmers, but he has said that it is impossible to guard all locations. We reiterate the call of the Quartet for the enforcement of the rule of law, given continued settler violence against Palestinian civilians.

On 23 September, 19 Israelis, among them eight IDF soldiers, were injured when a Palestinian man from East Jerusalem drove a car into a group of pedestrians. The driver was shot dead by an IDF officer at the scene. Tensions were heightened by communal clashes in the city of Acre in Israel on and in the days following the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

While the Government of Israel has taken some positive steps aimed at easing certain internal movement for Palestinians in the West Bank, there are, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, currently 630 obstacles to Palestinian movement throughout the West Bank. Barrier construction has also continued in occupied Palestinian territory, contrary to the International Court of Justice advisory opinion.

The United Nations continues to engage Israeli authorities on access restrictions imposed on United Nations staff in both Gaza and the West Bank and the

facilitation of the import of materials still required for the resumption of stalled United Nations projects in Gaza. The Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator is seeking solutions to the operational problems of the United Nations in a manner consistent with Israel's security concerns and is looking to work even more closely with the Israeli Government and, in particular, with those who are able to provide solutions.

There has been no progress in the reporting period on Israel's key Road Map and Annapolis commitments, that is, a genuine settlement freeze, removal of outposts and opening of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. Settlement construction continues across the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. The United Nations position on their illegality is well known. The Quartet's clear statement expressed concern about increasing settlement activity and called on Israel to meet its obligations. These must be heeded.

We continue to follow closely all developments pertaining to the Old City of Jerusalem. The month of Ramadan passed with smoother coordination than in previous years, but a majority of Palestinian Muslims were not able to pray at Al-Aqsa mosque due to permit and access restrictions. Under increased Israeli security presence in the Old City, a synagogue was opened by settlers in the Muslim quarter on 12 October. The Secretary-General continues to call for an end to unilateral action in Jerusalem and reminds all parties that the status of the city remains an issue for permanent status negotiations.

The calm brokered by Egypt is by and large holding between Gaza and southern Israel, although incidents have taken place, including the firing of a rocket into the Negev yesterday and the subsequent closure of border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The Erez crossing was reopened, but commercial crossings remain closed today.

Unfortunately, there has been no improvement in the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza. During the period, supplies of petrol, diesel, cooking gas and industrial gas fell short of weekly needs. The number of the truckloads of imported goods allowed into Gaza decreased compared with the previous period. Construction projects valued at \$240 million, including \$149 million-worth of United Nations construction projects, remain on hold owing to the absence of construction materials.

The number of people who entered Israel for medical treatment during the first four weeks of September decreased by 38 per cent compared with the first four weeks of August. Some 150 students were denied permission to leave Gaza to reach their places of study abroad. On 8 October, the IDF, citing security concerns, denied entry into Gaza to eight Israeli medical volunteers who had been issued permits.

Fourteen Palestinians were reportedly killed as a result of collapses, closures or accidents in tunnels along the Gaza-Egypt border during the reporting period. Media reports suggest that several thousand Palestinians gain income from the tunnel industry, which is reportedly regulated by Hamas. The current situation underscores the importance of a sustained and orderly reopening of crossings into Gaza under the Palestinian Authority, in accordance with the 2005 Agreement on Access and Movement, as called for by the Quartet.

The continued split between the West Bank and Gaza is having increasingly adverse effects. Two Palestinians, including one child, were killed in Gaza in internal violence. The teachers' strike reported last month continued, affecting around 250,000 pupils. Thousands of new substitute teachers are being brought into the schools by Hamas, and frictions were evident on 21 October when a student was declared clinically dead after having fallen three stories following an altercation involving a Hamas-appointed teacher. The health workers' strike continued, causing concerns over the quality and timely provision of services and delays in elective surgeries and referrals. The percentage of essential drug items jumped from zero to 22 per cent, double that of the essential drug items out of stock in August, when responsibility for delivering medical supplies to Gaza was transferred from the World Health Organization to the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health.

The Egyptian-mediated process aimed at the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority is ongoing. Earlier this month, Egyptian mediators completed a round of meetings with Palestinian factions, which have now received a draft proposal for consideration. President Abbas has also continued regional consultations, including a recent visit to Damascus. We look forward to all regional States lending their support to Egypt's efforts under the

auspices of the League of Arab States, which will meet at the foreign minister level in Cairo next month.

We continue to call for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be granted access to Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit, now in his twenty-sixth month of captivity, and for his release. We reaffirm our support for efforts to secure his release, as well as that of a number of Palestinian prisoners.

No further indirect Israeli-Syrian negotiations under Turkish auspices took place during the reporting period. The Quartet expressed its desire to see those talks intensify with the goal of achieving peace in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference, and we hope they will resume soon. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained quiet during the reporting period, although Israeli settlement activity is ongoing.

A car bomb exploded in Damascus on 29 September, reportedly killing 17 civilians and injuring more than a dozen others.

On 16 October, Lebanon and Syria signed an agreement providing for the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. That is a landmark event that should bring benefits to both countries and to the region. The Secretary-General reported on that development in more detail in his recent report to the Council on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) (S/2008/264).

In an important milestone in the implementation of the Doha Agreement, the Lebanese Parliament adopted a new electoral law on 29 September. The law reflects the electoral districting agreed upon at Doha and incorporates some of the reforms that had been proposed by the Boutros commission.

A year after the end of the fighting in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared, the first phase of rubble removal began on 17 October and is expected to last for approximately eight months. That is a welcome development for the more than 27,000 people who were displaced as a result of the fighting. Funding is urgently required to meet reconstruction costs and the humanitarian needs of the displaced.

Security incidents continued to occur in the northern city of Tripoli during the reporting period. On 29 September, a bomb that targeted the Lebanese Armed Forces in the city killed six people, including four soldiers. Alleged members of a terrorist cell that

the Lebanese authorities believe is affiliated with Fatah al-Islam were subsequently arrested on 12 October by Lebanese security forces. The terrorist cell is believed to have been behind two other deadly attacks against the Lebanese Armed Forces earlier this year.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remained tense but generally quiet during the past month. Israeli air violations continued at an average of 10 per day during the month.

The United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael Williams, began work as of 1 October. Mr. Williams is responsible for coordinating the work of the United Nations in Lebanon and for representing the Secretary-General on all political aspects of the Organization's work in the country. He is also responsible for following up on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Notwithstanding the transition currently under way in Israel, we hope that Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will not only continue but intensify between now and the end of the year, within the Annapolis framework. We look forward to the parties

briefing the Quartet in the near future. Conditions on the ground in the West Bank must significantly improve through parallel actions and the meeting of Road Map commitments, especially on settlements. Conditions in Gaza must be eased, the calm extended and unity pursued under Egyptian auspices. We encourage the continuation and intensification of the indirect Israeli-Syrian talks. Further work is also essential to build on recent positive developments in Lebanon.

The Secretary-General will continue to work intensively for the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions and for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.