



Security Council

Sixty-third year

5963rd meeting

Wednesday, 20 August 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Grauls	(Belgium)
<i>Members:</i>	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Renié
	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. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): 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 Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

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

Mr. Pascoe: This reporting period has seen a number of significant developments in the region. On 30 July, Prime Minister Olmert announced that he will not be seeking re-election as leader of the Kadima party in a primary scheduled for 17 September, and will therefore be stepping down as Prime Minister. Mr. Olmert is expected to remain in office until either a new government is formed by the new party leader or after general elections are held.

Despite that development, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations continue, as do the indirect talks with Syria. There was a rise of internal Palestinian violence as Hamas took action to consolidate its hold over the Gaza Strip. The fragile ceasefire between Hamas and Israel continues to hold, but the situation on the ground in the West Bank and East Jerusalem remains a cause for concern.

The negotiations with the Palestinians as part of the Annapolis process are ongoing at both a political and a technical level, and on 6 August, Prime Minister Olmert met again with President Abbas. It would appear that the gaps between the parties' positions remain, and I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for the need to press ahead to make real progress in overcoming differences to reach the goal of an

agreement by the end of this year, despite the political constraints.

During this reporting period, there was a major increase in Palestinian internal violence, contributing to an overall total of 43 Palestinians killed and 366 injured. One Israeli soldier died of injuries sustained on 11 July in East Jerusalem, and nine Israelis were reported injured.

The rise in internal Palestinian violence stemmed from an incident on 25 July in which five Hamas members and a child were killed in a beachside bombing in Gaza. Hamas claimed that the Fatah-affiliated Hillis clan were sheltering the perpetrators and attacked the clan's stronghold in eastern Gaza City, the last bastion of the Fatah military presence in the Gaza Strip. The ensuing violence left 10 members of the Hillis family dead, and dozens of members of the clan fled to the West Bank through Israel. Members of the Hillis family were detained by Hamas along with dozens of Fatah and other activists, and there have been allegations of torture committed by Hamas against detainees.

Following the 25 July bombing, Hamas initiated a well-orchestrated campaign for total control of the Gaza Strip. Hamas forces raided over 200 community-based organizations in Gaza and closed them down. The closures of those organizations disrupted activities involving thousands of beneficiaries, as 23 of the institutions are supported by United Nations agencies. Eighty of the organizations have been re-opened following Hamas review of their operations. Hamas also seized control of the last remaining Palestinian Authority institutions within the Strip, most notably the Governorates, which Hamas had previously recognized as legitimate Palestinian Authority structures and which had continued to report to President Abbas. Three Governors were detained by Hamas forces and two Governors are still in prison. Those actions severely prejudice the prospects for Palestinian reunification within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. We are also concerned at the potential consequences for United Nations operations in Gaza.

In reaction to Hamas's actions in Gaza, Palestinian security forces in the West Bank arrested dozens of Hamas activists, most of whom were later freed on the orders of President Abbas. Palestinian Authority security forces closed a number of Hamas-

linked institutions in the West Bank. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority should both release detainees seized as a result of the recent violence. That could serve as a first step in a process leading to reconciliation and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority, to which the Secretary-General remains committed.

The Egyptian-mediated ceasefire that began on 19 June has largely held but remains fragile. Ten rockets and one mortar were fired from Gaza into Israel, without causing casualties. During this reporting period, no Israel Defense Forces (IDF) air strikes or incursions were reported, although one Palestinian child was injured by IDF shooting near the border. Twelve other Palestinians were killed and 34 were injured due to the collapse of tunnels along the Gaza-Egypt border. Over 25 tunnels were closed as a result of Egyptian efforts against smuggling.

Talks for the release of Israeli captive Gilad Shalit are stalled. The International Committee of the Red Cross has still not been provided with access to him after two years in captivity. We welcome Israel's decision on 17 August to release approximately 200 Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture to President Abbas.

In the West Bank, three Palestinians, including two children, were killed, and 185, including 47 children, were injured during the reporting period. Both children that were killed were shot by the IDF using live ammunition against Palestinian demonstrators at Naalin village. There has also been a rise in settler violence during the reporting period, including at least 34 settler attacks on Palestinians, resulting in 35 injuries, including nine children, and extensive property damage, including an attempt to set fire to the Ar-Ras mosque in Hebron on 13 August.

Settlement activity continues across the West Bank, and particularly in East Jerusalem. On 24 July, approval was given for 20 permanent housing units at Maskiyot in the West Bank, outside the footprint of any existing settlement. We are also concerned at reports that the trailers of the Migron settlement outpost are to be evacuated in exchange for the construction of permanent residential units in other nearby settlements. Also in this reporting period, tenders were announced for over 400 new settlement units in East Jerusalem. The Secretary-General has repeatedly stated that all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory,

including East Jerusalem, is contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention and Israel's commitments under the Road Map and the Annapolis process.

On 10 August, two major checkpoints in the West Bank were partially reopened for Palestinian traffic, leading to significant improvements in access to those areas. However, the overall number of closures during the reporting period remains unchanged at 608, as some previously removed obstacles were reinstalled. The weekly average of flying checkpoints stood at 80. Construction of the barrier around East Jerusalem and within the West Bank continues, in deviation from the Green Line and contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The Palestinian Authority faces a budget shortfall of approximately \$400 million from October to the end of the year, meaning that Palestinian Authority salaries may not be paid from the end of September. We urge, again, donors to fulfil outstanding pledges and direct external assistance to budget support. The fiscal performance of the Palestinian Authority has continuously improved and measures have been taken to strengthen the line ministries' capacity for preparing the 2009 budget and a medium-term expenditure framework for 2009-2011.

The implementation of Quartet Representative Tony Blair's May 2008 package advanced during the reporting period. Selected obstacles to movement have been eased, and on 28 July a telecommunications contract was signed between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, enabling a second mobile phone operator to launch in the occupied Palestinian territory. This deal was an important part of the package intended to stimulate economic growth. However, to achieve significant economic impact, all outstanding measures need to be implemented rapidly and as originally negotiated.

While the number of trucks entering Gaza during this reporting period increased by over 75 per cent compared to the previous period, it represented only 54 per cent of that in May 2007. Most basic commodities, from school stationery to mechanical spare parts to bedding, remain in short supply. Forty-two per cent of the imports were gravel, while the import of necessary complementary building materials, such as cement, steel bars and flooring materials, et cetera, remained low. Ninety-five per cent of Gaza's local industry remains closed.

There is a severe lack of fuel in the Gaza Strip, which has an impact on agriculture, as farmers are unable to run water pumps for irrigation. A lack of both fuel and spare parts means that approximately 84,000 litres of raw and partially treated sewage continue to be dumped into the Mediterranean Sea every day. Power cuts continue to occur for at least four to five hours a day across Gaza.

Normal economic and daily life is extremely difficult throughout Gaza, due to petrol shortages and the corresponding lack of transportation. The benefits of the ceasefire have not yet translated into any significant improvement in the living conditions of the people of Gaza.

Further to the Secretary-General's discussions with Prime Minister Olmert in Paris last month concerning stalled United Nations projects in Gaza, the Israeli authorities are positively considering the import of additional quantities of construction materials for United Nations priority projects focusing on housing, school construction and water sanitation. We welcome movement in this regard and hope for the early resumption of all suspended United Nations projects in Gaza.

On 29 July, a further round of indirect Syrian-Israeli talks was held under Turkish auspices. Another round of talks scheduled for this month has not yet been held, following the announcement of Prime Minister's Olmert's decision not to take part in the Kadima party primary. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained quiet during the reporting period, with one incident of a Syrian infiltrator lightly wounded by the IDF on 14 August. Settlement activity in the Golan continues.

If I may turn now to Lebanon, the past month was marked both by positive political developments and continued security concerns. After several weeks of discussion among members of the national unity Government, the cabinet's ministerial declaration was agreed upon and presented to parliament. The parliamentary session that followed witnessed differences of opinion on certain elements of the proposed ministerial declaration, including the role of Hizbullah's weapons. On 12 August, the declaration received a vote of confidence through an overwhelming majority of the members of parliament. That vote represents a new and important milestone in the implementation of the Doha agreement. We

welcome the intention to begin the national dialogue led by the President of the Republic, as referred to in the ministerial declaration and to consolidate the sovereignty, stability and security of the Lebanese State. The United Nations looks forward to working closely with the new Government to meet those objectives and Lebanon's obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On 13 August, Presidents Sleiman and Assad met in Damascus in their first summit meeting since the Lebanese President was elected in May. Among other commitments, the two heads of State agreed to establish diplomatic relations, to reactivate a joint committee charged with the delineation of their two countries' common borders and to take joint action to address cross-border smuggling activities. The Secretary-General welcomed those constructive decisions and encouraged both parties to begin implementation as soon as possible, in keeping with relevant Security Council resolutions.

These positive developments were shadowed by security incidents, which continue to take place in and around the northern city of Tripoli. On 13 August, hours before the Damascus summit, an improvised explosive device was detonated at a bus stop frequently used by Lebanese army soldiers in Tripoli. Fifteen people were killed in the bombing, including 10 soldiers. The Secretary-General and the Security Council vigorously condemned that brutal attack. We welcome the steps taken by the Government of Lebanon to contain the violence in Tripoli and to address the root causes of the situation.

During the period since the last Security Council briefing, the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has remained generally quiet. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces have continued coordinated operational activities throughout the area south of the Litani River, in accordance with their responsibilities under resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL continues to record Israeli air violations, which have occurred on an almost-daily basis.

The Quartet will meet here in New York on the margins of the General Assembly in September. That will be followed by an iftar hosted by the Secretary-General with Arab partners, as well as by a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. Those occasions will enable us to take stock of the progress that has been

made and the gaps that remain to be bridged, as well as to assist urgently in the implementation of donor pledges to address the impending Palestinian budget crisis.

The Secretary-General remains committed to a just and lasting comprehensive regional peace in the Middle East, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

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

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. 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.