



Security Council

Sixty-third year

*Provisional***5824**th meeting

Tuesday, 22 January 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Ettlhi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mrs. Mladineo
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/31)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/31)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Cuba, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia and the Syrian Arab Republic, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Cohen (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2008/32 and which reads as follows:

"I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Tuesday, 22 January 2008, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to

participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): 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.

I invite Mr. Pascoe to take a seat at the Council table.

I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 22 January 2008 from the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, in which he requests that an invitation be extended, pursuant to rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. Unless I hear any objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Mahmassani to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council chamber.

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.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/31, which contains a letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Pascoe: The crisis in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel has escalated dramatically since last

Tuesday, 15 January 2008. The precursor to this escalation has been daily rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilian residential areas by several militant groups from Gaza and regular Israel Defence Force (IDF) military attacks on and into Gaza. There are also the tight Israeli restrictions on crossings into Gaza for the stated purpose of bringing about a cessation of rocket fire.

The IDF entered the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, 15 January, and were engaged by Hamas militants in a heavy battle, which included IDF air and tank operations. Hamas claimed responsibility for sniper and rocket attacks against Israel.

Since then, over 150 rockets and mortar attacks have been launched at Israel by militants, injuring 11 Israelis, and a sniper attack killed an Ecuadorian national on a kibbutz in Israel.

Forty-two Palestinians have been killed and 117 injured by IDF, which has launched 8 ground incursions, 15 air strikes and 10 surface-to-surface missiles in the past week. Among the dead are a number of Palestinian civilians, who have been killed in ground battles between IDF and militants and in Israeli air strikes and targeted killing operations.

There has been a significant de-escalation in violence in the past few days, with a much lower level of rocket fire and IDF incursions. Since first light this morning until 2.00 p.m. local time, one rocket landed on an open field and three mortar shells have been fired; there have been no IDF incursions or operations. The situation, however, remains extremely fragile.

The Secretary-General has expressed his deep concern over the bloodshed and has appealed for an immediate end to the violence. He has stressed the responsibilities of all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and to not endanger civilians.

Indiscriminate rocket and mortar firing towards civilian population centres and crossing points is totally unacceptable. We have and continue to condemn it unreservedly. Such attacks terrorize Israeli communities near Gaza, particularly in the town of Sderot. They also endanger humanitarian workers at crossing points. They have been a regular occurrence since well before Israel's disengagement, causing civilian casualties, damage, school closures and high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder. Over 100,000

Israelis live within range of standard Qassam rocket fire.

We are further concerned that IDF Corporal Gilad Shalit is still being held captive in Gaza and that Hamas continues to deny the International Committee of the Red Cross access, in contravention of international humanitarian law. We continue to be concerned by allegations of smuggling of weapons and materiel into Gaza.

We equally call for strict observance of international humanitarian law by Israel and its armed forces. I must state firmly that the Israeli occupation — including with respect to Gaza — carries clear obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We are cognizant of Israel's security concerns. We also take note that Israel stresses that in using military force it does not target civilians and claims that it takes care to avoid civilian casualties. However, Israel is obliged not to take disproportionate measures or endanger civilians, and must thoroughly investigate incidents leading to civilian casualties and ensure adequate accountability. I would also like to reiterate that the basic principled position of the United Nations in opposition to extra-judicial killings is compounded by the frequency with which such operations are carried out in densely populated civilian areas. This is why the Secretary-General has repeatedly called on Israel to exercise maximum restraint.

The Gaza crossings have remained largely closed since the Hamas takeover in June 2007, except for imports to meet minimal humanitarian needs. Compared with the already precarious first half of 2007, imports into Gaza have dropped 77 per cent, and exports from Gaza by 98 per cent. Most Palestinians cannot exit Gaza; exceptions are made for some students and humanitarian workers, and some — but not all — needy medical cases.

Large United Nations construction projects, which could bring employment and housing to Gazans, including some left homeless by earlier IDF operations, are frozen because building materials are not available. At a time when United Nations security procedures are evermore critical, the requests of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to import even bulletproof windows to protect its Gaza offices have been denied.

On 17 January, Israel augmented quantities of fuel allowed into Gaza pursuant to a petition before the Israeli High Court. However, on 18 January, as rocket fire intensified, Israel imposed a comprehensive closure of the Gaza Strip, halting the import of fuel, food and medical and relief items. The Gaza power plant, which supplies electricity to Gaza City and the middle camps, shut down on Sunday evening, leaving every area in Gaza except Rafah with daily power cuts of 8 to 12 hours a day. Approximately 40 per cent of the population did not have regular access to running water. Fifty per cent of bakeries were reported closed owing to a lack of electricity and shortages of flour and grain. Hospitals were running on generators, and two reduced their activities to intensive care units only. Thirty million litres of raw sewage was pumped into the Mediterranean Sea owing to the breakdown of sewage pumping equipment.

Earlier today, Palestinian demonstrators who had tried to force open the Rafah border crossing were dispersed by Egyptian security forces, with injuries reported.

The United Nations has been actively involved, through interventions of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Special Coordinator, Robert Serry, and the UNRWA Commissioner-General, Karen Koning AbuZayd, in seeking an urgent easing of the blanket closure of Gaza.

Today, Israel reopened two crossings for fuel and the delivery of humanitarian supplies by international organizations. As of yet, it is not clear whether the crossings will stay open. We strongly urge Israel at a minimum to allow for the regular and unimpeded delivery of fuel and basic necessities. Approximately 600,000 litres of industrial fuel will be delivered today, with a target of 2.2 million litres throughout the week for use by hospitals, industrial vehicles, UNRWA operations and the power plant. The plant resumed operations at 11.30 a.m. local time this morning.

However, allow me to underline that the humanitarian situation is still extremely fragile. The 2.2 million litres of fuel will only restore the electricity flow to what it was at the beginning of January. That could mean cuts of 8 to 10 hours every day in the mid-region of Gaza and every second day everywhere in other parts of the Strip. In addition, benzine is still not being allowed into Gaza causing widespread closure of petrol stations. Unless supplies are allowed in, the

stocks of the World Food Programme (WFP), which relies on benzine, will be depleted by Thursday morning.

The entry of commercial humanitarian supplies required to meet the total humanitarian needs of Gaza is still not permitted. In December, only 43.5 per cent of basic commercial food import needs were met. It is imperative that both commercial and international humanitarian assistance be allowed into Gaza.

As the Secretary-General stated last September when the Israeli cabinet decided to intensify its closure measures, Israel must reconsider and cease its policy of pressuring the civilian population of Gaza for the unacceptable actions of militants. Collective penalties, let me recall, are prohibited under international law. In that context, I take this opportunity to reiterate the Secretary-General's strong support for the plan of Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad for the Authority to man crossings into Gaza, particularly Karni. Early implementation of that initiative should be a priority for the benefit of the civilian population of Gaza.

The events of the past week have also underlined the ever-present potential for the Annapolis process to be undermined by the deterioration of the situation on the ground and, in particular, the continuing crisis in Gaza. Less than two weeks ago, the parties launched negotiations on core issues, and President Bush visited the region to underline his commitment to assisting them to reach a peace treaty in 2008 and to implement the first phase of the road map. The Quartet representatives and the entire international community are fully engaged in that effort in what should be a year of hope and opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians. Crisis management and containment in Gaza would seem to be a minimal requirement if that process is to be given a chance to succeed.

Finally, I wish to reiterate the deep commitment of the United Nations to the welfare of the civilian population affected by the conflict. The work being performed by United Nations agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, in Gaza is one of the few things that stand between the current crisis conditions and an even more dramatic deterioration of the situation. Special Coordinator Serry and Commissioner-General AbuZayd of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East were in Gaza last week at the height of the

violence, and the Special Coordinator also visited the Israeli town of Sederot as it came under increasing rocket attack. The United Nations will continue to do everything we can to ensure that civilians are protected and assisted, whatever the political environment.

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

I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Sir, and your brotherly country, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, upon your election to the Security Council and your assumption of the Council presidency this month, and express our full confidence in your ability to wisely and effectively steer the work of the Council. We also thank you for your quick response to the request made by the Group of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to convene this emergency meeting.

We also express our appreciation to Italy for its skilful leadership of the Council last month. I further wish to congratulate the other new members of the Council and to wish them success as they collectively strive, along with the other members, to uphold the important responsibility entrusted to them.

We also extend our thanks to Mr. Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for this morning's comprehensive briefing.

We are at a precarious juncture in the Middle East. Crisis is on the rise, endangering the lives and well-being of millions of civilians and undermining the current nascent peace efforts. The decisions and actions taken now by all concerned parties, including the Security Council, as the international community's guardian of peace and security, will either help us to cross the threshold into a new era of reason, calm and stability necessary for peacemaking, or plunge us once again into the dark abyss of violence, killing and destruction that has brought so much tragedy to our peoples and dashed our hopes for peace so often in the past.

Regrettably, despite the recent momentum generated by the revival of the peace process and the resumption of bilateral negotiations on final status issues between the Israeli and Palestinian sides for the first time after a bitter seven-year freeze, there has

been little progress and much deterioration, mainly because of Israeli actions that are destabilizing the situation on the ground and creating ever more challenges. Instead of truly turning a new page and embarking on the path of peace, Israel, the occupying Power, has pursued its ongoing illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such policies and practices have never actually ceased.

The Palestinian people, who have suffered too long under occupation and as a stateless people, have endured the dramatic intensification of their suffering and hardship in recent weeks as a result of the illegal and brutal practices being carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, against the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. The situation in the Gaza Strip is distressing and grave as Israel intensifies its collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population, escalates its military aggression and tightens its siege and closures, obstructing the entry into Gaza of even basic foodstuffs and other essential humanitarian supplies.

The current situation is absolutely untenable, humanly unbearable and morally unacceptable. The Israeli policy of aggression is creating a humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip, heightening fears and tensions, and inciting and fuelling the vicious and dreaded cycle of violence. Regrettably, our repeated appeals for real action to address Israel's illegal policies and practices and the resultant humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip have gone unheeded, and the occupying Power remains unaccountable, acting with flagrant impunity in violation of international law and all humanitarian principles and norms. Grave breaches of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War are being committed by Israel before the very eyes of the international community. The wilful killing of civilians, the wanton destruction of property and the collective punishment of civilians under occupation are strictly prohibited by the Geneva Convention, and the occupying Power must be held accountable for such crimes.

There is no pretext, security or otherwise, that can justify such inhumane punishment of innocent civilians, including children, women, the elderly, the disabled and the sick. Moreover, such illegal acts of aggression and punitive measures by the occupying Power severely poison the environment between the two sides, undermining peace efforts and reigniting the

cycle of violence, with its far-ranging negative implications for the situation on the ground and the prospects for peace.

While we had hoped to come before the Security Council to report on the positive momentum generated by the international conferences held recently at Annapolis and Paris and by the recent visit of the United States President, and to report to the Council on progress made in bilateral negotiations, developments on the ground prevent us from doing so, for they have, regrettably, obstructed any tangible progress from occurring and are rapidly draining the momentum generated at the international level and between the two sides towards the attainment of a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The ongoing siege of the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip and the brutal military assaults carried out by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip last week, which caused widespread death and destruction, are starkly illustrative of the relentless Israeli onslaught against Palestinian human rights that continues to ignite the cycle of violence. Simultaneously, the occupying Power has not ceased pursuing its expansionist aims with its unlawful colonization settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The impact on the ground is extremely negative, as is the impact on the peace process itself.

Recently, the Israeli occupying forces launched countless military assaults against the Gaza Strip by land and air — as we have heard in Mr. Pascoe's briefing. Those assaults, including extrajudicial executions, killed dozens of Palestinian civilians and caused widespread destruction to civilian property, infrastructure and farmlands. Since the November Annapolis Conference, more than 160 Palestinians have been killed by the occupying Power, including at least 12 children and 9 women, with the majority of those killed and wounded in Gaza.

The occupying Power continues to issue threats and to inflict more death and destruction, as the Minister of Defense and other Israeli officials repeatedly declare their intentions to launch a large-scale military attack against the Gaza Strip. In addition, the Israeli occupying forces have continued carrying out military raids and daily arrest campaigns in the

West Bank. The city of Nablus has been hard hit by violent Israeli military actions in recent weeks; those actions have seriously undermined the Palestinian Authority's efforts to promote the rule of law, order and security there.

The message sent by such deadly and destructive actions is one that plays into the hands of those who seek to cast doubt on the peace process. It is a message that fuels the cycle of violence and extremism with full force, a message which, if not stopped, will sabotage the fragile peace process entirely, as has occurred in the past. The international community must call upon Israel to immediately cease all illegal acts of aggression and terror against the Palestinian people. Israel must be held accountable for its actions in accordance with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Moreover, as stated earlier, as part of inflicting collective punishment on the Palestinian people, Israel has persisted with its crippling siege of the Gaza Strip, deepening humanitarian suffering and despair. Following its declaration of the Gaza Strip as a hostile entity in September 2007, the occupying Power imposed a continuous closure on all border crossings, obstructing the access and movement of people and goods, including humanitarian, food, medical and building supplies. This was followed by the reduction of fuel supplies. The occupying Power intensified its closure of the territory by sealing off all border crossings, preventing the delivery of food supplies to the population since Friday, 18 January 2008. Meanwhile, it has persisted with the reduction of fuel to the Gaza Strip, completely cutting off fuel to the main power plant on Sunday, 20 January 2008, until it stopped working completely. That inhumane and illegal siege has severely impacted the living conditions of the people in the Gaza Strip.

Such illegal measures of collective punishment threaten to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and to hasten the deterioration of the situation on the ground in all its aspects. The suspension of fuel supplies has impacted the provision of electricity to the civilian population, with the majority of the population of the Gaza Strip suffering in darkness since yesterday, with no electricity for their homes and no heating, in addition to the fact that the fuel shortages have brought vehicular traffic in the Gaza Strip to a near standstill. Health officials are reporting that hospital generators are running out of fuel supplies, endangering the lives

of sick patients, young and old, and that such fuel reductions will inevitably further obstruct the functioning of sanitation and water facilities, with the consequent negative health impact on the civilian population.

Were it not for international humanitarian assistance, including that provided by United Nations agencies, the economic, social and health situation in the Gaza Strip would have long ago collapsed. Such assistance is also now in jeopardy as United Nations agencies on the ground are warning that, if the closures continue, vital food aid to the more than 1 million refugees and other needy civilians in Gaza who are dependent on such aid for survival will have to be suspended within a few days.

The critical situation in Gaza must be addressed in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law and cannot be ignored in the drive for peace. How can the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip believe in a peace process and in an international community that permits their ongoing suffocation, isolation and suffering under the lock and key of Israel's occupation? Palestinians in Gaza are barely surviving under these circumstances; the majority of the population is now unemployed, impoverished, malnourished and hopeless. Israel, the occupying Power, must be called upon to immediately cease such illegal punitive measures and to comply with all of its international legal obligations. This is a humanitarian imperative as well as a peace imperative.

The international community, including the Security Council, cannot remain silent in the face of the perilous decline of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. We call upon the members of the international community to shoulder their responsibilities in all areas and to urgently intervene to put an end to this punishment of the Palestinian people, to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, to stem the deterioration of the security situation and to salvage the fragile peace process, which will surely collapse under the weight of such ongoing illegal Israeli policies and practices.

The Palestinian people and their leadership look to the international community at this time of crisis to take immediate and necessary measures to bring an end to the suffering of the innocent civilian population in the Gaza Strip, to give them some hope at this time of despair and to strengthen their waning conviction in

the primacy of international law in order to allow justice and peace to ultimately prevail.

The international community must uphold international law and shoulder its responsibilities, including by ensuring respect for the law. It must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease its military aggression, its collective punishment of the Palestinian people and all its other violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Today, we call upon the Security Council urgently to take specific practical measures to put an end to the crisis situation in the Gaza Strip. Israel must be called upon and compelled to lift the siege, to allow Gaza's border crossings to be opened, to permit the movement of persons and goods and the provision of immediate access to food and medical supplies, and to resume the delivery of fuel to meet the civilian population's humanitarian needs, allowing the basic activities of life in Gaza to resume.

In that regard, I should like to draw attention to the willingness and readiness of the Palestinian Authority to operate the Palestinian side of all crossings in Gaza. An integrated plan has been submitted to the Israeli side through the Quartet Representative, Mr. Tony Blair, and the Quartet has expressed its support for the plan. Today, Mr. Pascoe announced the support of the United Nations for the plan, which was originally put forward by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mr. Salaam Fayyad. Israel must be strongly urged to act on this practical initiative in order to ease the suffering of the Palestinian civilian population.

We are facing a critical period that requires us to take immediate action to protect the peace process before it has been irreparably damaged. The international community, particularly the Security Council, must shoulder its responsibility if peace and security in our region are to be more than mere words. Therefore, we call once again on the Council to take immediate measures to address the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. We also urge the Council to remain engaged, including through the Quartet, to work effectively to uphold international law and to implement its own relevant resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Now is the time for concrete action by all concerned parties in a collective drive to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace through an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab lands occupied by Israel in 1967; the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the achievement of a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We must not miss this historic opportunity, because the alternatives and the consequences would be dire. We must not continue to allow conflict, despair and injustice to prevail over peace, hope and justice.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Cohen (Israel): The situation in the region today did not develop overnight. It is the consequence of many choices — repeatedly the wrong choices — made by the Palestinians, to adopt terrorism and violence over peace and negotiations with Israel.

In contrast, Israel has shown that it understands the consequences of making the right choices. More than two years ago, Israel made the choice to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, uproot families and remove all its forces, in order to create a new horizon for peace in the region. We chose to disengage, despite all the difficulties, and despite the fact that the Road Map did not require it at that stage.

Ever since then, Hamas has ruled the Gaza Strip, first politically and now physically, using the area as its personal base for launching rocket attacks against Israel. The Palestinians in Gaza did not choose to engage Israel in dialogue and reconciliation to advance the two-State vision. Rather, they chose Hamas, which uses terrorism and violence to advance its vision to destroy Israel.

Since the year 2000, more than 7,000 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel by terrorists in the Gaza Strip. Last year alone, that number was more than 2,000. And, since Hamas's violent takeover of Gaza in June 2007, the frequency of rocket attacks has risen 150 percent, to more than 250 rockets and mortars a month. That means that, on average, one rocket is fired at Israel every three hours. Most of these rockets fall on the southern city of Sderot. Normal life in Sderot is a thing of the past. Not a day goes by when the red alert warning system does not sound, which gives children on playgrounds and in schools, and parents at

home and at work, less than 15 seconds to find the nearest shelter before the next rocket comes slamming into their lives.

Liora Fima, a Sderot mother and head of a local elementary school, knows first-hand the traumatic impact of these rockets on the young people of Sderot, where up to 94 per cent of children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, including sleep and concentration problems and even bed-wetting. Listen to her words: "For the children in Sderot, red is not the colour of roses, but of blood and flames".

Why is the Security Council not concerned with the safety and security of Israel's children, women and elderly who live in the southern city of Sderot? Why is the Council silent as they live in fear and panic each and every day? With Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip and with its rocket launchers pointed at Sderot, Israel faces an impossible situation. Israel must and will protect its civilian population from these rocket attacks. It is the duty of all States to ensure the right to life and safety of its people, especially from vicious acts of violence and terrorism that are carried out with the sole purpose of maiming, terrorizing and murdering the innocent.

I ask each member of the Council: what would you do if London, Moscow, Paris or Tripoli were to be attacked and fired on? Would you sit back and do nothing? I am certain that no Member State on the Council — and certainly no country in the world — would be silent. Israel is no different. It will act in accordance with its inherent right under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter to protect and defend its people. That is the very obligation and right of all States.

Hence, it is deeply disturbing that some falsely equate Palestinian terrorism with Israel's actions taken in self-defence. A clear distinction must be made between Palestinian terrorism and Israeli defence — not only in terms of practice and tactics, but also in terms of their morality and legality.

Palestinian terrorists choose to directly target Israeli civilians and even use their own civilians as human shields. Hamas's brutality towards its own people can also be seen in the daily violence on the streets of Gaza, where attacks on civilians have become routine. Terrorists produce, transport and launch rockets and mortars from inside densely populated Palestinian residential areas. By firing on

border crossings, the terrorists cynically force closures, which hamper efforts to deliver humanitarian aid and relief. Recently, we even saw humanitarian convoys being used by terrorists to smuggle explosives and weapon materials into Gaza — yet another cynical act to harm their own people.

In this regard, Israel chooses to ensure the humanitarian welfare of the Palestinians in Gaza, even as Hamas chooses to abuse those efforts. Hamas chooses to divert fuel from domestic generators for its own terrorist purpose, including the production of Qassam rockets. In contrast, Israel chooses to allow electricity and fuel, as well as medicines, into Gaza and works closely with humanitarian organizations and relevant agencies on the ground to ensure that needs are met. Since June 2007, my Government has allowed more than 9,000 Palestinians to enter Israel to seek medical treatment. Contrast this fact with the more than 1,700 rockets and mortars Hamas has fired out of the Gaza Strip at Israel during the same period of time.

While the rockets hit Sderot and other towns in southern Israel, we must not forget that Gilad Shalit is still held captive by the terrorists in the Gaza Strip. More than 20 months have passed since his abduction, and his whereabouts and condition remain unknown.

Hamas controls the fate of Gaza. If terrorism ceases, life in Gaza will change. The Palestinians must understand that they will not profit from terrorism. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian national vision. Hamas is the antithesis of the idea of two States living side by side in peace and security. Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist. There is no hope in choosing terrorism and there is surely no hope in the Hamas leadership. Abu Mazen himself said on Friday that Hamas "destroyed and tries to destroy our dreams, future and national aspirations".

There can be no moral equivalence made between the choices of Israel and the choices of Hamas. Israel is not only mindful of the humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip; it is a neighbour interested in the well-being of the population living next door, with whom it wants to work in order to advance the vision of two States.

The international community must make it clear that Hamas's actions are unacceptable, and that continuing to choose Hamas will only lead to continued suffering for both Israelis and Palestinians. It is up to the international community to tell those States

that initiated this debate, and those States that think that singling out Israel and condemning it will bring about change, that Israeli security cannot be sacrificed. Guaranteeing the welfare of all Israelis and Palestinians begins, first and foremost, with an end to terrorism and violence.

It is the international community's choice to make clear that the path of rejection, of violence and of terrorism will not be tolerated by this Council. Those who seek to subvert the bilateral process and use violence to achieve their aims will not secure the support of the international community.

Peace begins with the people and their choices. Adrianna Katz, an Israeli doctor living in Sderot, was recently asked what would make her life easier. Her answer is an important reminder for all of us of what needs to be done. She said, "We need all the help we can get. But the best thing that can happen would be a lasting peace".

Let us remember those words, and let us hope that the right choices are made.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): Let me first of all thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his exhaustive briefing, which gives us a clear, though extremely worrying, picture of the situation on the ground. Italy fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union presidency later today. But let me add just a few remarks on the events of recent days.

We are extremely concerned about the 1.5 million people living in Gaza in extremely severe conditions as a result of the closures of the crossing points, as well as of the Israeli decision to drastically reduce the supply of fuel to Gaza, which is jeopardizing if not totally hindering the functioning of the power plant, with all the consequences that we may imagine. Due to this blockade, all the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip have been indiscriminately affected. We are very concerned over the current events, which are putting at risk the regular supply of humanitarian aid.

In this respect, we were also startled by the recent statement by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), who stated that in two more days UNRWA would run out of its own fuel supply. Although the agency had sufficient food stocks in Gaza, it would not be able to continue its support to 860,000 directly assisted Gaza residents.

We condemn the continuous launch of rockets against Israeli territory, which threatens the lives of the civilian population. However, we believe that what is happening in Gaza is a reason for extremely grave concern. Thus, we invite all parties to cease military operations in Gaza so as to allow all forms of humanitarian aid to be delivered to the Gaza population.

All parties must be consistent with the spirit of Annapolis and recreate the conditions that will prevent any hindrance to the peace process. In this respect, we are partially relieved by the significant de-escalation of violence referred to by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe, as well as by indications of a possible easing of the blockade by Israeli authorities, allowing for a more adequate flow of fuel into Gaza.

We strongly hope that this reverse trend is a lasting one, and that it can permanently break the dangerous chain of violence of recent days and enable us to regain the spirit that animated the Annapolis talks in November.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): We would like at the very outset to thank Mr. Pascoe for his update on the situation in Gaza.

This emergency meeting is necessary in view of the very tense and worrisome situation prevailing in Gaza, stemming, as we know, from a resumption of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians and aggravated by the draconian coercive measures taken by Israel against the inhabitants of Gaza.

It is not for us today to engage in a rhetorical exercise, but to concretely consider, through a careful review of the situation, what the Council and the international community can do to put an end to the blockade of Gaza. This blockade is unacceptable because it holds hostage a whole population subject to all types of privation.

At this stage, we are not discussing whether there is justification for the present crisis — who is right and who is wrong — even though it is clear that the Israeli reprisals are a response to rocket fire from the Gaza Strip against the Jewish State, something we condemn. Let us consider only the facts, which could result in a large-scale human tragedy. On the fifth day of the clashes, we see continued desolation, concern and dread among the Palestinians. The most important issue is the fate of the civilian population, victims of a

war in which they are not the main protagonist. That is why international humanitarian law must be applied here — in this instance the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is very critical and poses problems of survival for more than a million people, in particular defenceless women, children, the elderly and the disabled. By depriving these populations of electricity, running water, medical care and other vital services, Israel is violating the rules of international law, which state that in times of conflict the rights of civilian populations should be preserved and fully respected. Unfortunately, that is not the case here. My delegation is especially concerned because the blockade also impedes the efforts of humanitarian organizations, whose activities on the ground at this very moment are crucial.

In view of all that I have said, and in the face of such suffering among the inhabitants of Gaza, Burkina Faso cannot remain unmoved. We urge Israel to put an end to the blockade, in particular by fully opening the crossing points with Gaza in order to permit international aid to reach the Palestinian population, and by facilitating fuel deliveries for the resumption of power plant operations. This should lead to the resumption of full supplies for the people, as well as for hospitals and other facilities. We also call on the Palestinian side to scrupulously observe the ceasefire.

We believe that only on that condition can Israelis and Palestinians continue, calmly and hopefully, the bilateral negotiations launched in December 2007 in the framework of the Annapolis agreements with a view to the establishment of two States — the State of Israel and the State of Palestine — living side by side in peace and security. My delegation calls upon both sides to demonstrate restraint and to favour dialogue over any military solution. Above all — and returning to the issue that has brought us together today — we urgently call upon Israel to avoid the risk of plunging the Gaza Strip into a humanitarian catastrophe whose consequences could certainly be incalculable.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): Let me begin by saying how much we appreciated the very clear briefing by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe. The situation in Gaza has been of growing concern for many months, and the latest escalation is extremely grave. We share Israel's frustration and its anger at the continued rocket and mortar attacks aimed at its

civilians, as described by the Israeli representative today.

Israel has a right to defend itself from such attacks. But it is not acceptable that Israel should respond to these attacks by taking action that is designed to cause suffering to the civilian population of Gaza. The British Government cannot condone Israeli closure of the crossings. We have taken note of the announcement yesterday by the Israeli Defence Minister that Gaza would immediately begin to receive fuel for electricity and humanitarian aid. That is a welcome step. But it is crucial that further steps be taken to halt the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We call on Israel to work with all parties to reopen the crossings and to allow basic humanitarian supplies and civilian trade to flow.

There is a peace process in place. The recent meeting in Annapolis gave us reason to hope that there could be an end in sight to this conflict, and we support the goal of an agreement in 2008. It is encouraging that bilateral meetings between Israelis and Palestinians have continued. However, the political process does not take place in a vacuum. There is a very real risk that the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation will undermine the progress being made at the political level.

The Security Council must play its role in persuading the parties of the need to break this cycle of violence. The rocket attacks by Palestinian militants in Gaza into Israel are unacceptable. The number of Palestinian civilian casualties caused by Israeli military action is unacceptable. People on both sides are suffering. Israel has legitimate security concerns, but the solution is not to cut off supplies. Similarly, the Palestinian argument is not advanced by launching rocket and mortar attacks. The actions of both sides are counterproductive to the stated objectives of the leaders of both sides. Neither justice for Palestinians nor security for Israel will be achieved by firing rockets and cutting off fuel.

The Palestinians must address Israel's security concerns, and the Israelis must take steps to reverse the current humanitarian situation. My Government has provided significant humanitarian assistance and financial aid, and we will continue to do so. But it is clear that money will not be enough. There needs to be strong leadership at the political level to move forward,

and we look to Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to provide that leadership.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): My delegation commends you, Mr. President, for convening this urgent Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, based on the letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/31).

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We also thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing to the Council.

The situation in occupied Palestinian territories, in particular in Gaza, cannot be ignored any longer. In particular, the Security Council cannot remain silent and hope that the situation will change as time goes by. The recently reported easing of the situation, which has resulted in the delivery of some fuel supplies to Gaza, appears not to be guaranteed and could end at any time, thereby continuing to subject the people of Gaza to even more suffering.

The deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza, in which 1.5 million residents have been left without water, electricity and basic sewage systems, have drawn global condemnation. The European Union called it the "collective punishment" of the 1.5 million Gaza residents. Mr. Christopher Gunness, a spokesperson of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), warned that food distribution to 860,000 Palestinians may have to end. The International Committee of the Red Cross has said that hospitals have limited fuel and medicines that can last only a couple of days more. Amnesty International has stated that

"This action appears calculated to make an already dire humanitarian situation worse, one in which the most vulnerable — the sick, the elderly, women and children — will bear the brunt, not the men of violence who carry out attacks against Israel. The rocket attacks should cease, and immediately, but the entire population of Gaza should not be put at risk to bring this about".

My delegation believes that the Security Council should call on Israel to permanently lift the blockade on Gaza, including by restoring the electricity supply. The border crossings must remain open to permit the unhindered access of humanitarian supplies. The Council must do that by adopting without delay the draft presidential statement before us and send a message to the people of Gaza — indeed, the people of the entire Middle East — that the international community cares and has not abandoned them.

During his recent visit to the Middle East, the President of the United States called “for an end to the Israeli occupation [of the West Bank and Gaza] that began in 1967”. My delegation wishes to reiterate that the pursuit of peace must mean that neither side creates conditions that would undermine possible confidence-building measures. Any process to find a peaceful solution should also translate into parallel progress on the ground. The continuing occupation undermines the credibility of the peace process.

It is for that reason that South Africa has always condemned attacks on civilians, whether they are Palestinian or Israeli. We call on elements within Israel and Palestine to cease attacks on civilians. The firing of improvised Qassam projectiles towards Israel is unacceptable. We also reiterate that the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army, including the collective punishment that is being meted out against the Palestinian people in general, is also unacceptable and cannot be justified on the basis of self-defence.

For that reason, my delegation fully shares the view of Ambassador Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine, set out in his letter to the President of the Security Council dated 15 January 2008, in which he says that

“Such illegal acts of aggression by the occupying Power poison the atmosphere, inevitably undermining peace efforts and fuelling the dreaded cycle of violence that has so long plagued our peoples”. (S/2008/23)

The international community has the duty to assist and support the parties to reach a settlement, as well as to ensure that political progress is coupled with a change for the better in the lives of Palestinians and Israelis. In that regard, we commend previous regional and international efforts to take the peace process forward, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the

Annapolis process. The United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, must be committed to assist the respective parties in their quest for lasting peace.

Two years after the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the territory of Gaza remains under de facto Israeli occupation. Israel controls Gaza’s borders, Gaza’s airspace and Gaza’s territorial waters. By virtue of its illegal occupation, Israel continues to be bound by the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is for that reason that we call upon the Security Council to send a clear message, through the draft presidential statement before us, that the collective punishment of the people living in Gaza cannot be allowed to continue, as it threatens the peace process that must lead to the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing alongside the State of Israel.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing, which provided us with a sombre picture of the dire humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Israeli measures to permit Gaza to have access to fuel for its power plant are clearly insufficient. Much more needs to be done to avert a genuine humanitarian disaster.

We would like in particular to underscore our unreserved condemnation of all acts of terrorism, including the firing of rockets against Israeli cities. Those rockets are not only striking civilians; they are also killing the hopes of Palestinians for a prompt settlement of the situation. However, Israeli reprisals should not lead to suffering and death among Palestinian civilians.

Russia has consistently called for the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip and for addressing the humanitarian situation there. Moscow’s view is that the Palestinian population should not be hostage to the tensions within and surrounding the Palestinian Authority. The international community should help Palestinians to overcome the current crisis, prevent a collapse of the socio-economic situation, avert humanitarian disaster and help to establish Palestinian governmental institutions and restore inter-Palestinian harmony, thereby establishing favourable conditions for progress towards a Palestinian-Israeli political settlement.

Russia is participating in collective efforts to provide assistance to the Palestinian people. In August

2007, Russia dispatched to Amman a major consignment of humanitarian assistance destined for Palestinian civilians. In October 2007, following lengthy negotiations with Israel, the food and medicines were sent to the West Bank of the Jordan River to be forwarded to the ultimate recipients, namely, the residents of the Gaza Strip. We plan to provide additional humanitarian supplies during the first half of 2008.

We are currently working to resolve practical issues relating to the provision of humanitarian and financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the amount of \$10 million, as announced on 17 December 2007 at the international donors' conference, held in Paris. That assistance will go towards addressing pressing humanitarian, social and economic needs in the Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip.

There is currently a need for the parties to make the utmost effort to stop terror, violence and armed confrontation, thereby creating favourable conditions to promote a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and implement the decisions adopted at Annapolis. The issues surrounding the peace process in the Middle East, and especially the situation in and around Gaza, were at the centre of concerns at the recent negotiations in Moscow between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. During the talks, the Russian side reaffirmed the need for the parties to refrain from any steps that could undermine confidence, heighten tensions and prejudice the settlement of final status issues. The relevant obligations to be implemented by all parties are clearly set out in the Quartet's Road Map.

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will serve to promote a comprehensive resolution of the question of the Middle East. Such a resolution must be comprehensive and on solidly based international law, and it must include the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Russia is consistently working towards that goal, including during the current visit to the region by Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Sultanov, Russia's presidential special representative for the Middle East.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): The Security Council's consideration of the present grave situation in the Gaza Strip is timely and pertinent. That situation has seized the attention of the international community at large. We acknowledge, in particular, the efforts of

the League of Arab States to deal with the crisis in the Gaza Strip by holding an emergency session on the issue in Cairo.

We would like to join other delegations in thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

At this juncture, our delegation will limit its remarks to the crucial issue at hand and the main theme of this debate, namely the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Indonesia is deeply concerned about the current humanitarian situation in Gaza, deteriorating as a result of Israeli actions. Fuel shortages closed down the only remaining power station in the region, plunging the area into darkness and leaving a third of the population of 1.5 million without electricity. Hospitals, water treatment facilities and food supply have been severely affected. The Palestinian people are living in truly appalling and inexcusable conditions.

We condemn this unjust and inhumane collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza, which constitutes a grave breach of international humanitarian and human rights laws. It must not go on. Israel must lift the fuel blockade and open the border crossings into Gaza immediately. The passage of imports and exports and the access of humanitarian workers to Gaza are imperative. Continuous and uninterrupted supplies of fuel, electricity, medical and relief items, food and water to Gaza are urgent.

Yesterday we noted the decision by Israel to ease the blockade of Gaza for one day. It is our call that all crossings be opened and all blockades lifted permanently. Israel must abide by its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and immediately cease all its illegal measures and practices against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

The burden that Palestinians are bearing has now been made heavier by the continuing military incursions and operations by the Israeli occupying forces into Gaza. Military incursions, border closings and continued rocket firings will not offer a solution to the crux of the problem in the region. On the contrary, they perpetuate the cycle of violence and undermine efforts to create an environment conducive to the achievement of the goals within the Annapolis

framework. All parties concerned on the ground must exercise restraint and refrain from any action that could undermine those efforts.

The role of the international community in providing emergency and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza to meet their dire humanitarian needs remains critical. We fully commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and funds and numerous non-governmental organizations for their continued dedication and commitment under the most strenuous conditions. Their presence and coordinated contribution will remain critical in the months ahead. Israel must ensure unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza to alleviate the situation.

Beyond immediate humanitarian concerns, we underline the need to find ways to sustain Palestinian economic activity, including in Gaza, and the importance of creating circumstances that would allow for the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. That is particularly relevant in view of the impact of crossings on the economic, social and humanitarian conditions of the Palestinians on a daily basis.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reiterate its full support for the realization of the two-State vision as envisioned in the Road Map and the efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to first thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

We are meeting today to consider the situation in Gaza, which has seen dramatic developments over the past few days. Given the seriousness of those developments, France believes that it is timely that the Security Council consider this issue.

However, we believe that we must first recall the context in which the situation in Gaza is taking place. In fact, we must bear in mind the prospect laid out in Annapolis by the parties themselves, the goal being that all those involved should pursue the creation, by the end of this year, of a democratic and viable

Palestinian State, living in peace and security alongside Israel. That is a prospect and a process that involves all of us.

Achieving that goal first entails support for the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority in their negotiations that have recently begun on substantive issues. Israelis and Palestinians will both need to be daring and creative in order to follow the difficult path towards a settlement. It also entails maintaining political and financial support for the Government of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, so that they can make their vision of a future Palestinian State both credible and achievable.

Specifically, achievement means that the strong signal sent during the international donor conference for the Palestinian State held in Paris on 17 December must lead to action. In Paris and since that time, the delegations of 87 countries and international organizations have undertaken to provide an amount of money that to date totals \$7.7 billion to support the institution-building of the Palestinian State and economic reconstruction in the coming three years. All — States and international organizations — must henceforth deliver on their pledged assistance. Otherwise, the Palestinian people will see no specific improvements in their living conditions and those who oppose the peace process will be strengthened.

For our part, we continue to be strongly committed. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs is this very day meeting in Paris with the co-chairs of the Paris conference, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mr. Tony Blair and the European Union Commissioner involved in order to ensure that there is political follow-up to the conference of 17 December.

Returning to the situation in Gaza, France has consistently highlighted the importance of confidence-building on the ground. To maintain the momentum of the Annapolis conference, the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must be able to see positive developments in their situation in terms of both security and economic issues. For the time being, alas, the opposite is true.

It is up to the parties to meet their commitments to immediately implement the first phase of the Road Map. We are all aware of what that entails on the ground. Israel needs to do more with respect to the release of prisoners and the lifting of restrictions on movement in the West Bank. Israel needs to stop all

settlement expansion and dismantle rogue settlements. Palestinians, on their part, need to step up their efforts in terms of security and fighting terrorism.

It is in that context that we need to analyse the recent developments taking place in Gaza. In fact, since June 2007, when Hamas took power by violent means, Gaza has been in a crisis situation that can not continue and that could be resolved by the establishment of inter-Palestinian dialogue. Hamas, of course, also must agree to accept Israel's right to existence, renounce violence and meet its previously undertaken commitments.

The reality on the ground, as just explained to us in detail by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, has been a clear increase in violence and a serious deterioration in the humanitarian situation. That situation is untenable and must be remedied.

France condemns the current violence in all its forms. Hundreds of rockets have been fired over the last several months into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. We call, in the strongest possible terms, for a stop to those launchings. No State can tolerate such a threat to its civilians without making use of its legitimate right to defend itself. That right should, however, not be exercised indiscriminately. Israeli Defence Forces need to spare civilians, who once again have been victimized, killed or wounded by the operations of the recent days. Furthermore, the humanitarian situation in the territory, which had already deteriorated, has become of grave concern in recent days.

We can only greatly deplore the decision of the Israeli Government to implement the blockade of Gaza, and particularly its resultant cut-off of electricity. The measures amount to the collective punishment of all civilians, who were already deeply affected. That is unacceptable. France calls for an immediate resumption of all fuel delivery and for the maintenance of essential services.

With our European Union partners and at the urging of the Secretary-General, we also reiterate our call for the lifting of all obstacles to humanitarian activities, in particular the opening of crossing points to goods and persons. Such a development, in particular through implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, is critical to the implementation of plans undertaken by the Palestinian Government as a result of the Paris conference. Like the Under-

Secretary-General for Political Affairs, we call for both parties to meet their obligations under international law, particularly with respect to international humanitarian law.

We have received the draft presidential statement circulated by the Libyan presidency. France is prepared to work to adopt a text that would stress the Council's concern with respect to the entire situation. In that regard, we believe that the proposed text should be amended to take all dimensions of the current deterioration of the situation in Gaza into account.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing, which confirmed a very alarming situation of which we had already been aware.

I also thank the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their statements, which provided additional information for our discussion of the situation.

The circumstances that have brought us to meet today in the Security Council are a cause of sorrow and concern to all. Restrictions of access to the Gaza Strip, the lack of fuel supplies and the power cuts — regardless of their scope and consequences for the population — dash the hopes that had arisen for a peaceful and lasting settlement in the region.

All the news agencies, many non-governmental organizations and other actors in the region have reported on the unsustainable situation created by recent Israeli measures. However, it is not this Council's job to act solely on the basis of reports from such people and organizations. The Council's job is principally to analyse the official reports and balanced assessments of the situation provided by its own representatives. If we fail to heed those who act as our eyes in the field — as we noted just a few days ago when we were discussing the attack on a United Nations convoy in Darfur — we will be opening a veritable Pandora's box and end in total chaos. I would therefore recall the recent words of certain representatives of our Organization.

My delegation recalls that, last Friday, the Secretary-General made a statement in which he very clearly said that the Israeli decision to close the border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip that are used for humanitarian assistance deprives the population of the critical supplies of fuel needed to pump water and generate power for housing and

hospitals. After calling on Israel to abstain from taking measures that would harm the welfare of the civilian population in Gaza, the Secretary-General also expressed regret for actions that affect the communities of southern Israel. He reminded both sides of the need to comply with international humanitarian law.

That very day, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Holmes, said that the restrictions on access to the Gaza Strip are unjustifiable and unacceptable. Having noted the disastrous consequences of those measures, Mr. Holmes said that, although the attacks on Israel from Palestinian territory should be repudiated, the response of the Israeli forces has not been proportionate. The Under-Secretary-General asserted that it was his firm position that “[t]his kind of action against the people in Gaza cannot be justified, even by those rocket attacks”.

Those are the assessments of the highest representatives of this Organization, which prompt us to urge the Security Council today to send a clear message, first and foremost to the Government of Israel. We believe that the appeal should be pure and simple, but we also deem it essential to ensure that all actors in this tragedy understand that the Security Council has a complete overview and full grasp of the lack of compliance by several protagonists with their responsibilities.

We are witness to a drama in which the various actors have, so to speak, common but differentiated responsibilities, if I may borrow language usually applied to other spheres of the Organization’s activities. From our perspective, the Palestinian authorities are obligated to control the activities of terrorists on their territory. That is their responsibility in this drama, and their obligations must also be recalled here. The State of Israel should also be urged to meet its obligations as a subject under international law and a Member of this Organization.

The Security Council needs to act definitively and decisively. The inclusion of the item under discussion on the Council’s agenda over the past six decades is a cause of concern to all of us and should act as a stimulus for the decisive and sustained action of which I spoke earlier. Now if a peaceful and definitive settlement of the problem appears on the horizon, the Council must carefully assess its actions to identify those that could effectively contribute to a sustained improvement in the situation.

My delegation shares the view that the Council should today offer a clear demonstration of its resolve to protect the 860,000 suffering civilians in Gaza. We have heard with optimism the news that some restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government have begun to be lifted as a result of the concern expressed by the international community and of a timely exercise in self-criticism within the Government of Israel itself. We hope and trust that the situation will soon be normalized as a result of recent progress in the peace process necessary to put an end to the tragedy.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Sir, for convening this debate, the objective of which we, like the Ambassador of Indonesia, understand is to assess the situation in the Gaza Strip and the humanitarian situation there in particular.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of the United Kingdom and Costa Rica.

The information we received today on the situation in the Gaza Strip is frankly alarming. The actions of the Israeli Government have brought the humanitarian situation in Gaza to the brink of catastrophe and cannot from any point of view be justified. Although the attacks by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza against Israel do not contribute to the peace process and, on the contrary, work against the peace process, the Government of Israel must not allow the full weight of its retribution to fall upon an innocent civilian population.

We understand and accept that the State of Israel has the right to defend itself, however measures for self-defence should be carried out in a restrained manner that is proportionate to the threat. Even during outright war, a civilian population cannot be deprived of the basic means for its survival, which endangers the lives of hundreds of innocent people. The actions of the Government of Israel violate all humanitarian standards, including the most basic rules of international law. These actions are not those of a liberal democracy that wishes to be a fair partner in the peace process and can only serve to intensify the conflict.

Panama takes note of Israel’s decision to partially lift the blockade of Gaza that it began four days ago. However, we are far from being in a position to state that the situation has improved. This Council must call

for the cessation of all acts of violence and demand that the Government of Israel immediately lift the humanitarian blockade of Gaza. Only in that manner can we hope that the peace process in the Middle East will continue to progress in line with the expectations of the international community.

Mrs. Mladineo (Croatia): I would also like to join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his in-depth but disturbing briefing that we have heard.

While Croatia associates itself with the European Union statement to be delivered later today, I would like to make a few additional remarks. Croatia has joined the Council at a moment marked by renewed hope for reaching a peaceful compromise in the Middle East, after the promising outcome of the Annapolis Peace Conference. The commitment with which both sides promptly began bilateral negotiations was reassuring. It is therefore disturbing to begin 2008 with a debate on the Middle East that was prompted by the recent upsurge in violence and worsening humanitarian conditions on the ground. The deteriorating humanitarian situation and the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza is cause for our deep concern. The recently imposed restrictions are all the more troubling, given that they affect an area where already four out of every five persons are dependent on foreign aid to satisfy their basic needs.

We are seriously alarmed by the escalation of deadly violence in and around Gaza. We share the concern that the hostilities will hurt the chances for peace that have been generated by the political process, and we urge an immediate end to the hostile acts from both sides. Once again, it should be stressed that both parties are under the obligation to comply with international humanitarian law and to respect the lives and well-being of civilians. We fear that disproportionate reactions and measures that affect the population as a whole are a serious detriment to the peace process.

We are encouraged by the news that the Government of Israel is easing the restrictions imposed last week on Gaza and hope to see an increasing number of crossing points opened and the continued provision of essential services. That said, let me stress that we recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns and its right to self-defense, and we call for an

immediate end to the continuing rocket and sniper attacks on Israeli soil.

We believe that progress in the political and diplomatic process remains inextricably linked to tangible improvements on the ground. The sense of vulnerability caused by the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza and exacerbated by the latest crisis is dangerously destabilizing, as is the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory. We therefore call upon all sides to act with prudence and restraint and to follow up on the commitments agreed to at the Annapolis Conference, notably, to continue to negotiate in good faith, while implementing the obligations contained in the first phase of the Road Map.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing and for United Nations continued support to achieve peace in the Middle East.

The United States shares the concerns of the international community about the very difficult current situation in Gaza and the plight of the Palestinian people, a plight that warrants our attention. As we do so, we should not lose sight of how that situation came to be, nor of what we are working to achieve, that is — Gaza as an integral part of a future Palestinian State.

I want to make clear that the United States will not abandon the people of Gaza. We will continue to provide humanitarian aid to help meet the basic needs of the Gazans. But we believe that the current situation is the result of Hamas policies and actions, especially the ongoing rain of rockets into southern Israel despite a complete Israeli withdrawal in 2005. Therefore, Hamas is ultimately responsible for the current situation.

The United States condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing firing of rockets and mortars from Gaza into Israel by terror groups. These attacks on innocent Israeli civilians must stop. We expect the Government of Israel, when responding to these attacks, to take all possible steps to avoid civilian casualties and to minimize the impact on innocent civilians in Gaza.

The Government of Israel has stated that it will not allow a humanitarian crisis to develop in Gaza and has said that it will ensure the continued flow of

humanitarian supplies, so that the most basic needs of Gazans will continue to be met. The Israelis have said that they understand the need to permit fuel and electricity in Gaza. In our private discussions with the Israeli leadership, we have stressed the importance of avoiding a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We do not want innocent Gazans to suffer. We also believe that Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's idea of allowing the Palestinian Authority to have a greater role at the border crossings could be examined.

Hamas, which violently seized power in June, is seeking to exploit the current situation, a situation of its own making. The Council should not fall into that trap. If Hamas cared more about the well-being and the future of Gazans than it did about its own political agenda, it would put an end to the ongoing rocket attacks on Israel and relinquish its illegitimate control of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority, under the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad.

We look forward to Gaza being reunited with the West Bank under the legitimate and responsible leadership of the Palestinian Authority. Until that time, the international community should focus its efforts on supporting the legitimate leaders of the Palestinian Authority — President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad.

The aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to peace and security will never be realized through violence. A better future for both peoples can be realized only through negotiations and peaceful means. That is why President Bush just completed a trip to the Middle East, in order to reinforce the full support of the United States for a negotiated peace settlement.

As we deal with the current situation in Gaza, we must maintain focus on the long-term goal of establishing a Palestinian State that is democratic, contiguous, independent and viable. Achieving that goal is so important to the United States that we have invested a significant amount of political capital. In addition to the personal efforts of President Bush and Secretary Rice, the President has appointed Lieutenant General William Fraser to monitor and facilitate progress on the Road Map, Lieutenant General Keith Dayton to help the Palestinians as they work to professionalize their security forces, and General Jim Jones to work with the parties and regional partners to

develop some ideas for a security concept for a future Palestinian State.

It is our judgement that efforts to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians must progress along four tracks. First, both sides need to fulfil their commitments under the Road Map, as the parties reaffirmed at Annapolis. For the Israelis, that includes ending settlement expansion and removing unauthorized outposts. For the Palestinians, it includes confronting terrorists and dismantling their infrastructure.

Secondly, the Palestinians need to build their economy and political and security institutions, with the help of Israel and the international community. Quartet Representative Tony Blair is making important progress on Palestinian economic reform and institution-building, and he has established good working relationships with Prime Minister Fayyad and Israeli Defence Minister Barak.

The third track is the international track. The international community has shown, both in Paris and in Annapolis, that they fully support this effort. The United States appreciates the Arab Peace Initiative and believes that THE Arab States that are committed to regional peace should reach out to Israel.

Finally, the parties' bilateral negotiations are essential in establishing a peace settlement that ends the occupation that began in 1967. The only way to have a lasting peace is for both sides to come together to make difficult choices and implement them, in order to establish trust. The United States believes that President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will make such choices, because they both value the importance of democracy in creating conditions of security and stability. It is our hope that their teams will negotiate seriously and touch upon all of the difficult core issues between them.

It is important to sustain the momentum for the two-State vision that was generated in Annapolis in November and further built upon at the donor conference in Paris in December. We remain committed to the creation of a Palestinian State. A Palestinian State will enhance stability in the Middle East and will contribute to the security of the people of Israel. And, as President Bush said, the establishment of the State of Palestine is long overdue. The Palestinian people deserve it.

We know that the members of the Council share that vision. We will look for their support as we continue our work to realize a better future for the Palestinians, the Israelis and all the peoples of the Middle East.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes the convening of this emergency meeting of the Security Council at the request of the League of Arab States. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

We regret to see that, just as Palestine and Israel are beginning to negotiate on the core issue of final status, the security and humanitarian situation in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has continued to deteriorate. The confrontation and conflict between the Israeli army and armed Palestinian elements have caused large numbers of casualties on both sides, including many innocent civilians. The total blockade of Gaza carried out by Israel since last Friday has created shortages of food, drinking water, fuel, electricity and other daily necessities, making the humanitarian situation in Gaza even more serious.

China is deeply concerned about this situation. The current plight of Gaza's 1.5 million residents is unacceptable. The international community must take immediate action to prevent a further deterioration of the situation. As a first step to ease the humanitarian crisis, we call upon Israel to put an immediate end to all of its military operations in Gaza, to lift its blockade and to open all crossing points so as to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian supplies to Gaza. In addition, the international community should provide new humanitarian assistance to Palestine.

Ensuring that all Palestinians' basic humanitarian needs are met so that they can live free from fear and deprivation and with dignity is both the ultimate purpose of peace and the fundamental means of achieving it. While the international community has high expectations of the process begun at the Annapolis Conference, the Palestinians in Gaza are seeing further suffering in their daily lives, rather than the dividends of peace. How can we expect them to have confidence in and support the peace process?

We understand Israel's security concerns and are opposed to any attacks that target innocent Israeli civilians. However, history has proved once again that answering violence with violence and imposing

collective punishment will neither provide security for anyone nor contribute to the resolution of issues; they can only aggravate the confrontation and mistrust between the two parties, which in turn will bring further suffering to both peoples. If the armed conflict between the two parties should continue, the prospects of Israel and Palestine as two independent States living in peace will become more remote.

At this juncture, the effort to achieve peace in the Middle East faces both new opportunities and complex challenges. If we are to ensure that 2008 becomes a year of hope for both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, the efforts of all parties are needed to overcome the difficulties and obstacles on the path towards peace. The current crisis in Gaza has become a real challenge; whether it can be properly managed and resolved will have a significant impact on the prospects of the peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

To that end, the international community should step up its diplomatic efforts and ensure that the provisions of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949, are implemented in the Middle East. Both Palestine and Israel should be urged to exercise restraint and to refrain from any action that could lead to a worsening of the situation. Meanwhile, parallel actions should be taken to establish stability in the Gaza Strip and to find a long-term solution that will improve the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Once again, we call on the parties concerned to act in the overall interests of the peace process in the Middle East and to take measures to resolve the crisis. We also call on them to reject any interference, to reach internal consensus and to push the negotiation process forward. The international community, including the Security Council, should stand ready at all times to provide any help that is useful.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): First of all, like others before me, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing. My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made later by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

The situation in the Gaza Strip and the south of Israel is indissociable from the question of Israel and Palestine as a whole and we cannot, of course, remain indifferent. Like the European Union, Belgium has, on many occasions, expressed its deep concern at the

explosion of violence over the last few days. Belgium condemns the repeated rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. While we recognize Israel's right to see to its security and that of its citizens, Belgium nevertheless believes that any Israeli response must respect the principles of proportionality and distinction that lie at the heart of humanitarian law. Belgium deplores the excessive number of civilians on both sides that have been victims of uncontrolled violence and calls upon the two parties to exercise maximum restraint.

The humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip is very serious and is a direct result of the escalating violence. But it would not be honest to impute the responsibility for this situation on one party alone. The launching of rockets against Israeli civilians must be condemned without reservation, but that in no way justifies a blockade with the Gaza Strip that holds an entire civilian population hostage, especially when it is already in a humanitarian and health crisis.

To protect civilians and assist them is an obligation that is incumbent upon all members of the international community. We therefore call upon the Israeli authorities to completely lift the restrictive measures in place so that medicine, food and fuel shipments can resume normally and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), other United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors can continue their work.

As I said just now, the violence in and around the Gaza Strip is part and parcel of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is at the heart of our diplomatic concerns. The peace process has just been relaunched in Annapolis and seeks to establish an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State side by side with the State of Israel, within secure and internationally recognized borders. The parties to the conflict, both the Israelis and the Palestinians, have invested in this process, as have the Arab countries. Our duty today, on an individual basis and as responsible members of the international community, is to do everything to preserve the integrity of this process and, in so doing, to safeguard the hopes that have been raised among the Israeli and Palestinian populations, who have suffered far too long from a deadlock that has lasted so many decades already. This hope for peace cannot be held hostage by an uncontrolled escalation of violence.

The worrying events of the last few days have brought us into a situation with which the Middle East peace process has only made us too familiar. Two months after the Annapolis meeting and one month after the Paris conference, my delegation refuses to believe, however, that the dichotomy that has arisen between the diplomatic process and the situation on the ground can jeopardize the hopes legitimately born of the joint commitment of the parties and of the international community.

The urgent attention required by the situation in the Gaza Strip and the south of Israel should not make us forget the concrete signs of the ongoing commitment of President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert. Apart from their regular meetings and the negotiations of experts, we were happy last week to see the beginning of a dialogue between Minister Livni and the Head Negotiator Ahmed Korei on the issues that are at the heart of the final status.

The time has come for an effective implementation of commitments entered into, starting with those of the Road Map, both on the Palestinian side, in terms of security, and on the Israeli side, which means, in particular, total cessation of settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem. More than ever, the international community must look to the future and commit itself decisively together with the parties. This approach is the path that Belgium has taken together with its European partners and the members of the Quartet. In the light of the Arab Peace Initiative and the support expressed for the Annapolis peace process, we trust that the Arab countries will do the same.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): The convening of this emergency meeting of the Security Council is necessary and timely in response to the urgent humanitarian situation in the occupied Gaza Strip. I thank you, Mr. President, for the efforts undertaken in your capacity as President of the Council to make this meeting happen. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing, as well as the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their views on the matter.

As this meeting is convened in response to the emergency humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, I will confine my statement to this particular issue. We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered

later by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The humanitarian situation in the occupied Gaza Strip, an issue that has for a long time been of grave concern of the international community, the United Nations and the Council, has gone from bad to worse since the recent escalation of the military campaign waged by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population living there. It has led to the loss of lives of dozens of innocent people, among them women and children, and has injured many dozens of others.

The measures undertaken by Israel over the past few days, such as the intensified closure of the occupied Palestinian territory by sealing all border crossings, preventing the delivery of food supplies, continuing to reduce fuel supplies, and even completely cutting off fuel supplies to the main power plant in Gaza, have made the humanitarian situation in the occupied Gaza Strip deteriorate to an appalling level. As reported by the representative of Palestine, such collective punishment measures are already affecting the people on the ground, who have to live in darkness and with no heat owing to the electricity and fuel supply suspension. More seriously, the stoppage of generators in hospitals as the result of this fuel supply suspension is affecting the lives of sick patients and creating the potential for negative health impacts on the civilian population.

Member States always insist that any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue must be based on guaranteeing not only the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State of their own, but also the security of Israel, a State with which Viet Nam has established and maintains normal relations. Nevertheless, we consider the acts undertaken by the Israeli authorities against Palestinian civilians, like any act that literally targets the innocent civilians of a country, to be unjustifiable, even in the name of security or under any other pretext. Those acts, which constitute violations of international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law, are not only causing great suffering to the people on the ground; they are also undermining the Middle East peace process, which had gained new momentum following the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis and Paris conferences.

Viet Nam joined other countries in calling upon Israel to respond to the appeal of the Secretary-General and of the international community to immediately put an end to those measures, to open border crossings, to restore normal fuel, medical and food supplies and to ensure unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in the occupied Gaza Strip, thereby relieving the Palestinian civilian population living there of suffering of a magnitude hardly ever seen before and helping to bring the Middle East peace process back on track.

We call upon the international community, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to extend necessary emergency and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in the occupied Gaza Strip, with a view to helping them to overcome this humanitarian crisis. For its part, Viet Nam stands ready, as ever, to contribute to the collective efforts of the international community in this connection. We support, and will join, the Council's timely action in issuing a presidential statement on the matter. We look forward to working constructively with other Council members with a view to adopting such a statement on the basis of the draft text already circulated.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

At the outset, I would like to extend my thanks to Mr. Pascoe for his briefing to the Council this morning.

As the Permanent Observer of Palestine has said, since the end of the Annapolis Conference, just a few weeks ago, Israeli occupation authorities have escalated their aggression against the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Israel kills, intimidates, terrorizes and causes starvation. What is the purpose of that escalation directly in the wake of the Annapolis Conference? Finding the answer to that question does not require much intelligence or a great deal of thought. Regrettably, there is nothing new about Israel's actions, including its ignoring of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and its imposition of collective punishment. I believe we would all agree that Israel's behaviour is consistent. However, our memory may sometimes be highly selective.

It is unthinkable that an occupying Power should deprive 1.5 million people living on a narrow piece of land of the freedom of movement, even preventing them from having access to life's basic needs — food, medicine and fuel — from any source, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has been unable to deliver supplies.

Meanwhile, Israel is continuing its military attacks with the most modern and lethal sorts of weapons. The primary victims of those attacks are civilians, including women, children and older persons. It is indeed unfortunate and regrettable that the Israeli representative attempted this morning to imply that Israel was punishing Palestinians because they elected one particular Palestinian movement and not another.

I am beginning to wonder how to describe this situation. How can we categorize preventing access by 1.5 million people to food, medicine, fuel, movement and other necessities? Members can see with their eyes what is taking place in the territories occupied since 1967, and have heard the statements by officials on the ground, as Ambassador Urbina has reminded us. As UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd has said, we are very concerned and feel great fear with regard to what is taking place on the ground. The Commissioner-General has also said that more than 600,000 Palestinians living in Gaza City are now living in complete darkness. Bakeries have closed and hospital generators are no longer working. Mr. Pascoe also confirmed that to us this morning. This desperate appeal went on to recall that Gaza cannot live on food convoys alone; what is required is to preserve human dignity in Gaza. Does that human dignity mean nothing to the Security Council?

We do not believe that these practices against civilians can be justified on any pretext; nor can they be equated with any other acts. Due to the unjust closures, the humanitarian situation in Gaza has reached an unprecedented level of deterioration. Civilians, including children, are being killed and sick people are dying because the occupying Power is preventing patients and medical personnel from reaching hospitals and is blocking deliveries of medicine. Some people even face death by starvation because they can no longer get food. People are living in darkness. Much of the Gaza Strip is under waste water, because the sewage pumping station is not working due to the lack of fuel as a result of the

closure of all crossing points in Gaza. All of that is due to the fact that the occupying Power has decided to label Gaza a "hostile entity". That is unprecedented. Never in history has an occupier made such a claim.

The humanitarian situation in occupied Gaza has reached a state that requires the Security Council to urgently shoulder its responsibility. We must remember what has happened in the past when the Council has not acted in other places. Need I recall those events? The Security Council must assume its responsibility under the Charter. It must adopt urgent measures to protect the civilian population in Gaza from attempts at genocide by the occupying Power. I am sorry, I cannot find another word to describe what is happening there. The Security Council must adopt urgent measures to lift the siege on Gaza immediately, before it is too late.

Have members not heard yet another appeal by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which stated that it would be forced, in two days' time, to halt the provision of supplies upon which 900,000 Palestinians entirely depend if the situation continues as it is? Even from a moral point of view, the Council must not let the Israelis have a free hand to close and open crossings whenever they please, to allow a fuel convoy to pass through today but not tomorrow. The Council must force the occupying Power to respect international law by putting an end to the policies of siege and closure.

Allow me to remind the Council that we have a draft presidential statement before us that focuses on the humanitarian aspects of the situation in response to the concerns that members expressed yesterday in consultations. I am hoping that it will receive sufficient support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council

I give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Sallam (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a pleasure for me, on behalf of the Group of Arab States to convey to you, Sir, and to your brotherly country our most sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are certain that you will guide the work of the Council with skill and wisdom. We also congratulate your predecessor, the Permanent

Representative of Italy, for having steered the work of the Security Council in a wise and noteworthy way last month. On behalf of the Group of Arab States, we congratulate the new members of the Security Council and wish them every success in their efforts. The Arab Group also thanks you, Sir, for your prompt response to the request to hold an emergency meeting of the Security Council to review the latest developments in the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

War crimes are currently being committed against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank by Israel, the occupying Power, which, in spite of all of the efforts to restore peace, continues to commit crimes against Palestinians and blatantly violates their human rights. I would like to state, in this context, that despite all efforts, the occupying Power has in the last 10 days killed at least 40 Palestinians, including seven children. In the latest escalation of its operations, the Israeli occupying forces launched on 15 January 2008 a broad-scale attack against residential neighbourhoods in Gaza, specifically the Zeitoun and Sajaayin districts. The occupying forces invaded the area with armoured vehicles, tanks and bulldozers, covered by its military aircraft and helicopters.

The occupying Power needs to work to calm the situation and to undertake confidence-building measures in order to support the renewed direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. Instead, its illegal aggressive acts poison the atmosphere, undermine peace efforts and reignite the cycle of violence under which our peoples have suffered far too long. The aggression under way in Gaza raises doubts about the seriousness of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that began with the Annapolis Conference. Those negotiations ultimately aim at putting an end to the occupation and restoring the Palestinian territories. As I said, current doubts regarding those negotiations are a result of the recent developments in Gaza.

We call for an immediate end to the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and a lifting of the siege imposed on the Palestinian territories. We also call for a reopening of the border crossings in order to facilitate the passage of emergency international humanitarian assistance, which the occupying forces have prevented from reaching affected areas. Electricity and gas cut-offs have led to a humanitarian tragedy and worsened daily

life to the point that even hospitals, clinics and distribution points for humanitarian aid are unable to provide basic medical relief.

All of that is due to the fact that the Israeli Government considers the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity". The Israeli Government is acting in violation of international law and norms, which state that the actions of that Government are illegal and illegitimate. The Arab States call upon the Security Council, at this emergency meeting, to shoulder its legal, political and humanitarian responsibility to put an end to acts of aggression that flout basic human rights and that run counter to the expectations and positions of the countries that have co-sponsored the peace process. We call for an international inquiry on Israeli crimes of aggression in the Gaza Strip, in order to put an end to those crimes, which contravene international legitimacy and international humanitarian law and norms. We also call for prompt action by the Quartet, which should fulfil its responsibilities with respect to what is taking place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The international community needs to step up its efforts to bring about a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement on the basis of internationally legitimate agreements: resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 1397 (2002), the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid terms of reference. They should implement all of their obligations, as defined under the Road Map endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003), to end the occupation of Palestinian territories and other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, in order to establish an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. They also must justly address the situation of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in order to bring about a just, lasting and comprehensive peace among all peoples and all States in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting, and with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.