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Monday, 15 December 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Cherif	(Chad)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Rutilo
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chile	Mr. Olguín Cigarroa
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mr. Baublys
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Ms. Paik Ji-ah
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Let me congratulate you, Sir, on your stewardship of the Council this month, and express a few words of gratitude for the support I have received over the past two years from the Permanent Representatives of Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, South Korea and Rwanda. Their presence in the Security Council will be missed.

I brief the Council today against the backdrop of a dramatic year, during which we have witnessed a serious effort to achieve a negotiated settlement stalling yet again, a devastating 51-day war in Gaza, and increased violence and tension throughout the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Israel is heading to the polls. The recent collapse of the ruling coalition, less than two years into its tenure, has paved the way for early general elections, scheduled for 17 March 2015. As the country begins this new chapter, the deadly diplomatic vacuum can be no excuse for either side to let the present situation get even worse.

Now is the time to de-escalate and refrain from provocative steps, rebuild trust and set conditions for a return to negotiations that will resolve the conflict. As the Secretary-General and I have consistently warned, hope for a lasting solution to the conflict must be restored before it is too late. Israelis and Palestinians still demand an end to the conflict, despite their strong malaise concerning the peace process itself. Making headway in at least salvaging prospects for resolving the conflict will require the active role of the international community. We cannot walk away from our responsibility to advocate for a meaningful framework for peace.

In a continuation of an ongoing trend in Europe, parliaments in France, Spain and Portugal have adopted non-binding resolutions that call upon their respective Governments to recognize a Palestinian State. These are significant developments that serve to highlight growing impatience at the continued lack of real progress in achieving a two-State solution, and that Governments are under increased public pressure to promote an end to the conflict once and for all. I note the recent League of Arab States meeting in Cairo, where it was agreed to present to the Security Council a draft resolution setting a timeframe for the creation of a Palestinian State. I understand that consultations are also ongoing among Council members to present a draft resolution outlining the parameters of an Israeli-Palestinian final status agreement.

While they are important, we must recognize that these actions are not a substitute for a genuine peace process, which will need to be negotiated between both parties. The Secretary-General hopes that Security Council action will generate constructive momentum towards the creation of a meaningful and effective framework for renewed negotiations. Such a move by the Security Council would constitute a major step on this conflict since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967) almost 50 years ago.

In the meantime, the situation on the ground remains explosive. I am deeply troubled by the recent escalation of tensions in Jerusalem and the West Bank, as daily clashes continue to take place between Palestinians and Israelis. While the conflict has consistently had religious underpinnings, what is increasingly worrying is that it is now becoming more religiously inspired.

On 18 November, two Palestinians killed five Israelis and injured several others at a West Jerusalem synagogue before being shot dead by Israeli police. The Secretary-General strongly condemned the attack, for which there can be no justification whatsoever. He rejects any attempts to honor those who carried out such crimes. On 29 November, a Jewish-Arab school in Jerusalem was set on fire and vandalized with anti-Arab graffiti. Several Israelis were arrested in connection with the crime, which was strongly condemned by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Overall, a total of 633 Palestinians, including 73 children, have been injured and another 406 arrested by Israeli security forces during the past month. Nine Israeli soldiers and 20 Israeli settlers have also been injured in clashes with Palestinians. On 10 December, Palestinian Minister Ziad Abu Ein died

after protest activity near the village of Turmus Ayya that resulted in a confrontation with Israeli security forces. The Council encouraged the parties to ensure that a swift and transparent investigation into the circumstances of his death is undertaken.

I would also like to acknowledge that constructive steps have been taken by parties concerned to de-escalate the tensions surrounding the holy sites, as per the understandings reached in Amman last month in the presence of United States Secretary of State Kerry. The Secretary-General and I hope that these commitments to maintaining the status quo regarding the holy sites will continue to be implemented. We note that there has been a decrease in the number of Jewish activists visiting the holy compound and a lifting of access restrictions on Muslim worshippers. For the first time since 2007, Palestinians from Gaza have been permitted to worship at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. These are encouraging developments that should be continued. President Abbas' calls for calm have also been welcome.

In contrast, I am very concerned that Israel has reinstated its practice of punitive demolitions after almost a complete halt for nearly a decade. During the reporting period, six structures were demolished in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, resulting in the displacement of 21 Palestinians, including 11 children. One of these demolitions was of a punitive nature; on 19 November, the Israel Defense Forces demolished the family house of the Palestinian who, on 22 October, drove his car into a light train station, killing two. These acts, targeting family homes of perpetrators of attacks against Israeli citizens, are a form of collective penalty that contravenes international law and risk undermining the already fragile situation. They are wrong and counterproductive.

I will now turn to the situation in Gaza, where despite some initial setbacks, the delivery of construction material via the temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism continues and, in fact, has been scaled up significantly over the past two weeks. As of 10 December, more than 17,000 individuals requiring construction material for shelter repairs had been cleared to purchase materials under the temporary mechanism. Of those, close to 8,000 home owners had been notified and procured materials as of last night. The Ministry of Public Works will now notify a further 10,000 individuals over the course of this week, and around 25,000 home owners are expected to have access to construction materials by the end of December.

Construction materials are entering Gaza in quantities ensuring sufficient stocks for vendors. On 7 December, 44 trucks loaded with close to 1,800 tons of cement for reconstruction entered Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing. It was the largest quantity shipped in one day in years. In total, over 22,000 tons of construction material have been imported by private sector vendors to date, of which over 17,000 tons have already been procured by individuals. I must re-emphasize, however, that the temporary mechanism is not a substitute for the lifting of all closures on Gaza, as laid out in resolution 1860 (2009). Trade between Gaza and the West bank has been re-established, yet remains much below the potential. Transfers of fish and vegetables from Gaza to the West Bank rose from one truck per day to 11 trucks per day in November.

Despite these positive developments, the situation remains very fragile. Up to 80,000 families are living in houses that have sustained varying degrees of damage, while 18 school buildings belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continue to serve as collective centres for some 19,000 internally displaced persons. The urgency of addressing these needs is compounded by the extreme weather Gaza has experienced in recent weeks with the early arrival of the rainy winter season.

As the mechanism begins operating at scale, forging a clear and realistic plan for Gaza will be vital if we want to give Gazans hope. I envisage the following three priorities to be achieved in the next three years. We must deliver affordable energy, sufficient water and the physical reconstruction of Gaza. The Strip's chronic electricity shortages cannot be met by endless and costly interim measures, however necessary in the short term. Gaza needs access to natural gas if its only power plant is to create affordable energy, as well as a desalinization plant that will meet its pressing water needs. I believe that it is possible to address these pressing needs if we can be assured that crossings will be open for all required materials to enter the Strip in predictable and transparent flows, while addressing reasonable Israeli security concerns. The temporary mechanism is an important tool only in this regard.

Let me be clear, those ambitious goals cannot be reached without urgent and consistent international engagement. But any vision for Gaza's future cannot escape the current reality on the ground. The acceleration of Gaza's reconstruction process is being held back by several factors, many of which are political:

the ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza has still not been solidified; and the Government of National Consensus in Gaza has still not taken up its rightful governance and security functions and has no control over the crossings; civil service reform is urgently required and thousands of Government staff are still not being paid. Perhaps most urgently, the reconstruction effort still requires funds. Firm donor commitment to fulfill pledges made at the Cairo conference in October is crucial. The lack of progress on those fronts can fatally undermine our capacity to face the challenges ahead and bring back hope to the people of Gaza.

I also hope that challenging security considerations will soon be overcome for Egypt to reopen the Rafah crossing, which remains crucial as a terminal for people to leave or enter.

If those and other challenging issues are not addressed, the atmosphere in an already devastated Gaza will only worsen. We are beginning to see the security implications of those persistent pressures on Gazan society. Recent incidents include one Palestinian civilian being shot and killed by Israeli security forces on 23 November — for the first time since the ceasefire — and militants reportedly test-fired a total of 20 rockets towards the sea. Reports are also increasing that extremist elements are seeking to gain a foothold in Gaza. On 12 December, an explosion took place on the perimeter of the French Cultural Centre compound in Gaza, injuring two guards. That was the second time that the French Cultural Centre had been targeted. We note the condemnation of the attack by Hamas. Pending the transfer of security responsibilities to the Government of National Consensus, we continue to hold Hamas responsible for the safety of United Nations and all international staff in Gaza.

I must warn that Gaza can now go both ways. We have an opportunity to make advances. But if critical issues remain unresolved, I fear we may be heading towards another implosion with dire consequences.

Before concluding, let me say a few words about Syria, the Golan and Lebanon. The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, is continuing consultations on his proposed action plan for conflict, including operationalizing a freeze in the city of Aleppo. The precise parameters of the freeze plus arrangements are now being negotiated separately with the Syrian parties and on the basis of wide consultations inside and outside of Syria. The Special Envoy completed a visit to Istanbul and Gaziantep last week and will visit Riyadh later this week. His deputy recently visited Tehran and arrived in Damascus on 12 December. The proposed Aleppo freeze is distinct from previous local ceasefires and is intended as a building block towards an inclusive national political process, without preconditions, based on the framework of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

The situation in the Golan remains volatile, with intermittent heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups occurring in the areas of separation and limitation. On 7 December, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force observed two aircraft from the Alpha side flying north-east over the area of separation and entering the area of limitation on the Bravo side. That is a violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Those events jeopardize the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. On 17 December, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations will brief the Council on the situation.

Turning to Lebanon, the Deputy Secretary-General is currently in Beirut for a two-day visit on the occasion of the launch of the new Lebanon crisis response plan to address the refugee presence in the country. The visit is an opportunity to reaffirm the solidarity and commitment of the United Nations, consistent with the Security Council's support for Lebanon' stability and security, which remains fragile.

On 8 December, three Syrians in Arsal were killed by a Syrian air strike. On 5 December, a member of the Lebanese security forces was executed by his captors, while 25 other Lebanese soldiers and security personnel are still being held hostage by the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. On 2 December, six Lebanese soldiers were killed in an attack on an army patrol by militants near Ras Baalbek, by the Syrian border. We strongly condemn all attacks on the Lebanese Armed Forces.

On the political front, Speaker Berri has announced that preparations are under way for dialogue between Hizbullah and the Future Movement, and that a first session may be expected before the end of the year. We encourage such efforts, which may ease tensions and help address outstanding concerns, the most pressing of which remains the resolution of the seven month-long vacuum in the presidency.

In conclusion, we have reached a dramatic moment in the quest for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, particularly if that peace — as we have consistently advocated — is to be based on a two-State solution. I feel that 2014 changed the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the future is more uncertain than ever. As I have alerted the Council, I am deeply concerned that a one-State reality is on the parties' doorstep if they fail to address the present deadlock.

The people of Israel and Palestine deserve better. They are in need of hope — hope that their future will see peace and the end of conflict at last. Reversing the trust deficit must now take precedence. Prolonging the status quo is a sure-fire route to failure. The international community, including the Security Council, has a responsibility and an important role to play in shaping a way ahead. Yet ultimately it is for Palestinians and Israelis and their leaderships to take the courageous steps, now more necessary than ever, to salvage a peaceful and secure future for their people.

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

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.