United Nations S/PV.7584

Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7584th meeting
Wednesday, 16 December 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Power	(United States of America)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mrs. Jakubonė
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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15-43140 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: Some two months ago, the Secretary-General visited Jerusalem and Ramallah to support collective efforts to stop the violence that had begun to erupt in Israel, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

It is sad that over the past few weeks, despite a decline in attacks, the bloodshed has not stopped. with some 7 Israelis and 34 Palestinians having been killed during the reporting period. Stabbings, vehicle attacks and shootings by Palestinians targeting Israelis continue to claim victims on an almost daily basis — including, just two days ago, serious injury to a one-and-a-half-year-old baby, one of eleven victims of a car-ramming in Jerusalem — as suspected assailants are shot and killed in return and clashes continue to result in Palestinian deaths. Hebron continues to be a hotspot and the most volatile component of the current escalation.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I reiterate the United Nations firm condemnation of all terrorist attacks. Leaders on all sides have the responsibility to stop incitement and to consistently and unequivocally stand against acts of terror and violence in all its forms.

The current circumstances should not be accepted as the new normal. Israelis and Palestinians should not be resigned to living under the threat of violence. However, a comprehensive strategy to limit that threat cannot rely uniquely on enhanced security measures; it must also address the primary elements motivating Palestinian anger. I am pleased to report some positive developments in this regard. Tensions have calmed around the flashpoint of Al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, and efforts are under way to implement the understandings reached between Israel and Jordan The situation remains precarious and requires both sides to maintain an active and open communication.

Perceived impunity for settler violence against Palestinians has also driven violence. On a positive note, four months after the Dawabsha family was brutally murdered, a number of arrests have been made. I take this opportunity to underscore the need to charge and swiftly bring the perpetrators of that terrible crime to justice. At the same time, grave concerns persist on a range of issues that continue to undermine prospects for ending the violence and rebuilding trust. The injustices associated with an occupation that shows no prospect of ending feed into a perspective — particularly among young people — that they have nothing to lose by sacrificing their lives.

Palestinians continue to endure extensive movement restrictions, intensified by the ongoing violence, that negatively impact access to basic services and livelihoods. Ongoing demolitions against Palestinian communities in the Jordan valley, such as in Al-Hadidiya village a few days ago, remain troubling — all the more so as the relief provided to these households has been repeatedly seized by the Israeli security forces, despite the onset of winter. Israeli authorities have also carried out two punitive demolitions against the families of those convicted or accused of attacks. Such acts are a clear violation of international law, aggravate an already tense environment and may be counterproductive.

Turning to Gaza, during the past month, Palestinian militants fired 10 rockets towards Israel, two of which impacted Israeli territory, without injury. Palestinian militants in Gaza also conducted cross-border shooting at the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on two occasions. The IDF retaliated with four airstrikes. The United Nations reiterates its condemnation of the firing of rockets by militants from Gaza towards Israel. These indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas must stop.

Despite persistent security, governance challenges and funding shortages, the reconstruction process is advancing. More than 90 per cent of damaged schools and hospitals have been repaired, while repairs have either been completed or are ongoing on about half of all partially damaged homes. The key challenge is reconstruction of those homes — indeed, those neighborhoods — that were completely destroyed during the war, and in that regard progress has been slow. Reviving the economy and productive sectors

also remains a major outstanding task. Donors need to accelerate efforts to translate pledges into disbursements, particularly for housing reconstruction. And let us not forget that repairing the damage from the most recent hostilities will not fix the underlying chronic problems of Gaza.

Last week's global launch of humanitarian funding appeals included a $571-million projected funding needed for Palestine. It covers a range of interventions from the provision of legal assistance and the safe disposal of unexploded ordnance in Gaza to the provision of basic services, such as water and health care. The appeal represents a 19-per cent reduction as compared to 2015, but remains elevated due largely to Gaza's significant humanitarian needs in the aftermath of the 2014 hostilities.

A political horizon to end the conflict now seems more distant than ever. Leaders on both sides cannot continue to ignore the underlying causes perpetuating violence and fueling extremism on all sides. It is extremist voices that currently resonate — voices that want to capitalize on the darkest of human emotions, while seeking to sabotage any genuine effort to rebuild trust. But where are the voices urging restraint? Where are the proponents of peace, tolerance and a shared Israeli-Palestinian future? How can we begin to shift the momentum back towards these advocates of reason? These questions demand answers, first and foremost, from Israeli and Palestinian leaders. It is for them to choose whether they will show leadership in building sustainable peace and security, or allow the future of their people to drift in uncertainty as radicalism and extremism take over.

Welcome Israeli statements committing to a two-State solution have yet to be followed by actions demonstrating the sincerity of that commitment. The settlement enterprise continues to deepen its roots within the occupied West Bank. The transition to greater Palestinian civil authority contemplated by prior agreements has yet to begin. Progress in the areas of housing, water, energy, communications, agriculture and natural resources are lagging.

In the course of the past several months, the United Nations and its international partners have consistently advocated for Palestinian unity as well as for fundamental changes in Israeli policies on the ground. Such changes should bring about tangible improvements to Palestinian lives by strengthening Palestinian institutions, security and its economy. Without such steps, it is difficult to see how the parties can return to meaningful negotiations so as to reach a just and sustainable solution to this long-standing conflict.

Even as we speak, the envoys of the Middle East Quartet are in Israel and Palestine. They continue their efforts to promote significant steps on the ground, consistent with prior agreements that can restore hope to the Palestinian people and preserve the viability of a negotiated two-State solution. In addition, we continue to look to the Security Council for any additional guidance on developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict.

Turning to Lebanon, let me reiterate the United Nations support for the leadership of Prime Minister Tammam Salam under difficult conditions. While Lebanon remains resilient in the face of serious challenges emanating from the conflict in Syria, the political paralysis in the country is preventing it from managing those challenges effectively.

We note the discussions in Lebanon on the question of the presidency, which has now been vacant for over 18 months. The Secretary-General has consistently stressed the importance of Lebanese parties showing flexibility to enable the election of a president without delay. We sincerely hope that the current efforts can lead to an opening that will enable the institutions of State to function effectively.

In the wake of last month's attack in Beirut by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), we further urge the international community to redouble support for Lebanon's security and stability. The release, two weeks ago, of the members of the Lebanese Armed Forces and security services held hostage by the Al-Nusra Front since August 2014 is a welcome development. We hope for the speedy release of the remaining hostages held by ISIL.

Meanwhile, the situation along the Blue Line and in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained relatively calm. Both parties continued to work with UNIFIL through the established liaison and coordination arrangements. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on a daily basis.

Overcoming today's challenges in Israel and Palestine will require unprecedented vision by Israeli

and Palestinian leadership to see beyond today's confrontations and take bold steps to create a peaceful future. I call upon them to let go of their immediate political fears and focus on the greater good of achieving a sustainable long-term peace for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. The United Nations remains committed to supporting those efforts in every possible way.

The President: I thank Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

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

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.