

As delivered

**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
25 July 2012**

Mr. President,

1. Let me at the outset join the Secretary-General and this Council in condemning in the strongest possible terms the deadly terror attack on 18 July against a bus carrying Israeli tourists outside of the Burgas airport in Bulgaria. The explosion, reportedly executed by a suicide bomber, killed six civilians, five of them Israeli and one Bulgarian and injured more than 30 people, several critically. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and wish a speedy recovery to the injured. This heinous act provides a reminder, as noted by the Quartet in its statement on 19 July, of the need for the members of the international community to stand side-by-side in the effort to prevent terrorism wherever it may be practiced. The Quartet also reaffirmed its commitment to continuing efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in the Middle East, where all people will live in peace and security.
2. In this regard, the past month has been characterized by a continuation of the effort to restart talks amid continued worrying developments on the ground. Quiet direct exchanges between the parties are ongoing in an attempt to reach agreement on a package of measures that would create an environment conducive to talks and pave the way for high-level contacts.
3. President Abbas has emphasized the importance of a release of Palestinian prisoners arrested before the Oslo Accords were agreed. He has also underlined the critical importance of Israel allowing the delivery of weapons and ammunition intended for the Palestinian security forces that are held in Jordan. It is vital that such steps are taken to enable a continuation of effective security coordination. More generally, it is concerning that we have not seen urgently needed enabling steps or other measures that would bolster the Palestinian Authority (PA).
4. Quartet Envoys have remained in close contact with each other and the parties, and a number of high level visits have taken place. On 25 and 26 June, Russian President Vladimir Putin held meetings in Israel and with President Abbas in Bethlehem. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also visited Israel on 16 and 17 July and met with President Abbas in Paris on 6 July, where the Palestinian President also met with French President Hollande, EU High Representative Ashton, and UK Foreign Secretary Hague. The Arab League Follow-up Committee held consultations in Doha on 22 July in which it supported a Palestinian approach to the United Nations to seek further recognition without specifying a timeline.
5. In sum, the effort to restart direct talks has not reached a breaking point, but there has not been a breakthrough either and that is increasingly a concern. While talks remain stalled, events on the ground continue to move in the wrong direction.

6. To begin, the Palestinian Authority faces an acute challenge in maintaining its solvency. At the start of the year the PA announced that it owed \$1.1 billion in bank loans and \$400 million to the private sector. In addition, the PA expects a \$1 billion shortfall in funding towards its \$3.5 billion budget for 2012. At the start of July, the Palestinian Finance Minister announced the Palestinian Authority could not pay all June salaries to its 150,000 employees on time. Last week Saudi Arabia announced a contribution of \$100 million. This is positive news that has provided the PA with a welcome respite, including allowing it to pay the June salaries, but it will be brief. We call on other donors, particularly other Gulf countries, to consider a timely donation during this period of critical shortage. We have also repeatedly pointed to the need for an improved mechanism for the transfer of VAT revenues Israel collects on behalf of the PA to enhance transparency and efficiency. Last week, Israeli authorities transferred half of the monthly VAT collection to the PA two weeks early in order to assist with the payment of salaries ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.
7. On 17 July Israel approved 5,000 permits for Palestinian construction workers to work in Israel in addition to the 34,250 permits that have already been issued for Palestinian workers to work there. This initiative is welcome. But more needs to be done to ease access and movement and enable economic growth throughout the West Bank, including Area C and the Jordan Valley, and Gaza. In Gaza, next steps must include enabling exports to Israel and other countries as well as transfers to and from the West Bank. This will in turn enable economic growth and, in addition, provide much needed additional revenue through taxation for the PA.
8. Settlement announcements continued this month, with the Israel Land Authority publishing tenders for 171 new settlement units in East Jerusalem, 41 in Pisgat Ze'ev, and 130 units in Har Homa. Additionally, 13 Palestinian structures, including three residences, were demolished in the West Bank during the reporting period, leading to the displacement of 20 Palestinians, including seven children. We are also concerned about recent reports that the Israeli Minister of Defense has ordered the demolition of eight Palestinian villages near Hebron so the area can be used for military training. On 18 July, a Higher Education Committee nominated by the Israeli military commander of the West Bank approved an application by a college in the settlement of Ariel, which is deep in the West Bank, to upgrade its status to that of a University. While still pending final approval, such an upgrade would considerably increase government funding, resulting in an increase in enrolment, which now stands at 12,000 students. This represents a further encroachment into the West Bank and runs counter to Israel's road map obligations to freeze settlement activity, including natural growth.
9. At the same time, a committee led by retired Supreme Court Justice Edmond Levy and commissioned by the Israeli Government to provide recommendations on "the status of the construction" in the West Bank submitted its report to the Prime Minister on 9 July. The report claimed the Israeli presence in the West Bank was not a military occupation, recommended post-facto approval of outposts the Israeli legal system deems illegal, and proposed changes to the process of approving settlement construction. The Israeli Government has not endorsed the report, but

such proposals are in direct contradiction with international law. I reiterate that any settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) including East Jerusalem is contrary to international law and Israel's commitments under the road map, and should stop. As the Quartet has stated on numerous occasions, any Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community.

10. As during previous reporting periods, clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have continued. Settlers attacked Palestinians near Hebron on 30 June and Nablus was the site of clashes during Israeli visits to Joseph Tomb on 21 June and 18 July. Settler attacks on Palestinian property, including agricultural land and orchards also continued, resulting in over 1,000 trees being damaged.
11. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the West Bank also continued, mostly consisting of stone throwing at Israeli vehicles, resulting in one Israeli injury on 11 July. On 27 June a Palestinian was shot and injured by an Israeli security guard at the entrance of the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim after allegedly hitting an Israeli police car with his vehicle. On 17 July a Palestinian was arrested for attacking an Israeli girl in Area C.

Mr. President,

12. Citing security, Israel security forces conducted 477 operations in the West Bank, an increase from previous months, resulting in 185 Palestinian injuries, including eight children, while two Israeli soldiers were also injured. A total of 246 Palestinians were arrested, including a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council affiliated with Hamas on 15 July. On 9 July a Jerusalem court sentenced two former Israeli police officers to 30 months in prison for the negligent death of a Palestinian in 2008. Most Palestinian injuries and arrests during the reporting period took place during demonstrations against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. A Palestinian demonstration in Ramallah on 30 June against a planned meeting between President Abbas and then Vice Prime Minister of Israel Shaul Mofaz resulted in clashes with Palestinian security forces. Although the meeting was canceled, demonstrations continued for two more days to protest the use of force by Palestinian police. I would like to again stress that the right of peaceful protest must be upheld and that all protests should be kept strictly non-violent.
13. Palestinian security forces continued work to maintain law and order in the West Bank. The Palestinian security operation that started in Jenin in May in the northern West Bank continues. More than 150 suspects have been apprehended, including members of Palestinian security forces. On 30 June a senior Fatah member was shot and injured in Jenin. On 8 July Prime Minister Fayyad inaugurated the Palestine College for Police Sciences in presence of the President of the European Commission.
14. On a positive note, as part of the 14 May agreement to end the mass prisoner hunger strike on 16 July, 48 relatives from the Gaza strip were allowed to visit 25 detainees in Israeli prisons, and on 23 July 33 relatives visited 27 detainees. There are more than 500 detainees from Gaza in Israeli prisons. It was the first time

since 2007 that such family visits from Gaza took place. Four detainees have continued their hunger strikes. In the West Bank, on 19 July Israeli authorities released the Speaker of the Palestinian parliament, Aziz Dweik, after being held for six months under administrative detention.

Mr. President,

15. Internal political dynamics remain fluid. On 17 July the Kadima party led by Shaul Mofaz left Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition after two months in the Government. Kadima's decision to leave the coalition emerged after disagreements on the renewal of a law regarding the military service of the Jewish Haredi community. The creation of the large coalition in May had stirred expectations for renewed momentum regarding the peace process.
16. On the Palestinian side, efforts to advance reconciliation were again delayed when the de facto authorities in Gaza decided to suspend the voter registration process that the Central Elections Commission had planned for 3 to 14 July. We have voiced our clear disappointment with this decision and continue to believe that the democratic renewal of institutions in the oPt is long overdue. On 10 July the Palestinian Authority, pending further developments on reconciliation, called for municipal elections to be held throughout the oPt on 20 October. This has been rejected by Hamas. During my recent visit to Egypt on 25-26 June, just days after Mohamed Mursi was announced Egypt's next President, I received firm assurances from the Egyptian authorities of their continued efforts to reach reconciliation. President Abbas met with President Mursi on 18 July and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal met the Egyptian President the following day. We continue to support such efforts through Egyptian auspices, under the leadership of President Abbas, and within the framework of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the positions of the Quartet, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. President,

17. I visited Gaza from 2 to 5 July and was again struck by the fragility and unsustainability of the present situation, leading to unacceptable hardship for the local population. This is partially explained by growing funding challenges for UN operations. UNRWA, for example, currently requires an additional \$57 million to meet the shortfall in its core operating budget, covering all of UNRWA's operations, and an additional \$168 million to fully fund the emergency appeal, including the provision of food aid to almost 700,000 vulnerable refugees in the West Bank and Gaza. Most urgent is the funding of \$7.5 million to meet food procurement distribution needs in Gaza for 2012. This funding shortfall has already resulted in the cancellation of UNRWA's "Summer Games" for the children of Gaza, and, if not addressed, will result in cuts to essential UNRWA programming across the oPt.
18. United Nations reconstruction work in Gaza, which now totals \$360 million, has had a positive effect not only for those who receive services but also on short-term employment. However, the economic benefits of increased employment will end with the conclusion of these works. Deeper and more fundamental change is

therefore required to enable a functioning Gazan economy, beginning with authorizing exports to Israel and other countries, as well as transfers to and from the West Bank. Without this essential step, Gaza's future will remain tenuous at best. In addition, I urge donors to continue to fund UN reconstruction work in Gaza through the Palestinian Authority-UN Trust Fund. I also urge the Government of Israel to continue to grant approvals for outstanding UN reconstruction work in the Gaza strip, and emphasize once more that there should be a broader opening for the entry of all construction materials into Gaza.

19. In Gaza the violence, which resumed in early June, continued. A total of 183 projectiles fired from Gaza landed in Israel, including 27 Grad rockets and 21 mortar shells. Several rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome system. Heavy machine gun shots were also fired from Gaza at a commercial plaza in southern Israel on 9 July without casualties. Israel Defense Forces conducted six incursions and 31 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in nine Palestinians killed, including six militants and three civilians, while 54 Palestinians were injured, including 24 militants and 30 civilians. We continue to condemn these indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel and call for a complete cessation. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.
20. On 17 July the *de facto* Ministry of Interior in Gaza executed by hanging three Palestinians convicted of murder, in violation of the Palestinian legal framework that requires prior ratification by the President. Six death sentences have been implemented in Gaza since the beginning of 2012 and 14 since 2007. This runs counter to the world-wide moratorium on the death penalty called for by the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. President,

21. On a separate issue that relates to UN relations with Israel, I wish to report that on 10 July the Permanent Representative of Israel sent a letter to USG Amos enquiring about the status of OCHA and its activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Nations will work with the Government of Israel to address these issues and explain the important work of OCHA in the oPt.
22. Now, Mr. President, allow me to turn to regional events. This Council heard extensive briefings on the escalating violence in Syria last week, and will receive further briefings next week. I will therefore limit my remarks to emphasizing that the Secretary-General remains extremely concerned by the violence in Syria and the rising death toll, as well as by the continuing human rights abuses and growing humanitarian needs. Each day brings to light new atrocities and new suffering. Reports of the aerial bombardment of eastern parts of the city of Aleppo yesterday add to our serious concerns about the dangerous escalation currently at play. We are aware of the reports related to the possible relocation of alleged chemical weapon stockpiles in Syria, and to concerns raised about the risk of possible use. The Secretary-General has emphasized the fundamental responsibility of the Government of Syria in ensuring the safety and security of these stockpiles, which absolutely must not be used under any circumstances. The Secretary-General has noted with concern that Syria is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We condemn all violence in Syria which has cost thousands of lives. This

situation cannot continue. The Secretary-General urges all concerned to immediately stop the fighting and take steps towards a Syrian-led transition that will address the genuine aspirations and needs of the Syrian people. Ending violence and seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Syria will remain at the center of our efforts.

23. The situation in Syria is increasingly impacting the region. Council members will recall that on 19 July 2012, DPKO informally communicated information regarding the entry and operations of armed Syrian security forces, including soldiers, inside the area of separation in UNDOF's area of operation on 18 and 19 July 2012. Since then, security operations by Syrian armed forces have continued, mostly in Jabbata and Trunje. The numbers of armed forces involved in these operations has varied from 47 up to 396. UNDOF reported heavy gun firing and many explosions in Jabbata, Al-Baath and Trunje. UNDOF has lodged its protest with the Syrian authorities, as the entry of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation is a violation of the Agreement of Disengagement between the Israeli and Syrian forces. In addition, UNDOF has reported seeing a total of approximately 100 civilians aboard vehicles and on foot with personal belongings heading east through the Bravo line. UNDOF will continue to liaise with Israeli and Syrian military authorities to prevent an escalation of tensions.

Mr. President,

24. Nowhere else, perhaps, does the impact of the Syrian crisis loom larger than in Lebanon. As recently as last week following a briefing by the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Mr. Derek Plumby, this Council in a press statement on 18 July expressed grave concern over repeated incidents of cross-border fire, incursions, abductions and arms trafficking across the Lebanese-Syrian border. The Council reiterated the importance of full respect for Lebanon's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and the authority of the Lebanese State. In this context, Council members welcomed President Sleiman's initiative to reconvene the National Dialogue of Lebanon's political leaders and the declarations following the first two meetings last month, stating that they looked forward to the continuation of his process.
25. Since then, a pattern of Syrian army violations of the Lebanese-Syrian border has continued, including intermittent shelling from Syria into Wadi Khaled. In response, the Government has deployed additional troops of the Lebanese Armed Forces to its northern border and authorized the LAF to fire back. New cross-border incidents have been reported since, including on 21 July in the area of Al-Qa'a, in the north-east of the Beka'a valley, involving machine-gun and RPG fire, and a brief incursion of Syrian soldiers. Adding to almost 30,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, the surge in the number of Syrians crossing into Lebanon last week was estimated at some 18,000 over a two-day period, many of whom have travelled back into Syria. UNHCR is updating its contingency plan in the event of a mass or increased influx requiring a comprehensive humanitarian response.

26. Lebanon has also continued to face significant challenges to its security and stability domestically, linked directly or indirectly to the crisis in Syria. Incidents in different parts of the country reflect confessional tensions exacerbated by the conflict in Syria. On 18 July, following the bomb attack in Damascus, fresh clashes erupted between groups from Sunni and Alawite neighbourhoods in Tripoli. This coincided with a speech by Hezbollah leader Nasrallah reiterating support for the Syrian regime. As for the National Dialogue, the opposition March 14 coalition decided to boycott its third session, scheduled for yesterday. President Sleiman has announced that the process is postponed until 16 August. It is hoped that the obstacles to continuing the National Dialogue will be overcome in order to allow the next session to take place as planned. As stressed by this Council, the commitment of the country's leaders to safeguarding Lebanon from the impact of regional tensions at this difficult time is particularly important.
27. Meanwhile, the situation in the UNIFIL area of operations has remained cautiously calm and stable. As the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed some troops out of the South Litani Sector to reinforce its efforts along the north-eastern border, UNIFIL increased operational activities in its area. The Lebanese Armed Forces assured UNIFIL that this is a temporary measure and that troops would be sent back to the South as soon as the situation allows. Israeli violations of the Lebanese airspace, meanwhile, have continued on an almost daily basis.

Mr. President,

28. In conclusion, I address you today only two months before the General Debate in September, and almost a year since this Council was presented with the Palestinian application for membership in the United Nations. When I was last before this Council in May I warned that we are increasingly moving away from a two-state solution into a one-state reality, which would also diminish the prospects of regional peace in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative. The continuous negative trends, as reported today and in previous briefings, are just further manifestations that this reality is consistently undermining our common goal of a negotiated two state solution that will end the conflict and end the occupation that started in 1967. The international community should understand that, absent a credible political horizon for the establishment of a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel, its own efforts in pursuit of this goal will increasingly lack credibility. The parties must now do their part to overcome admittedly difficult obstacles and take the steps necessary to enable an environment conducive to serious engagement. But I fear time is running out.