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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
14 April 2010

Mr. President,

1. Since the Secretary-General briefed the Council on 24 March, efforts aimed at bringing about the conditions for a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks have continued, including through a meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu in late March. The situation on the ground remains fragile and a crisis of confidence between the parties has so far prevented the resumption of talks. The United Nations will continue to engage with its Quartet partners to ensure that the circumstances which made it possible to agree to launch the proximity talks be respected.
2. The Secretary-General attended the League of Arab States Summit on 26-27 March, where he briefed Arab leaders on the meeting of the Quartet in Moscow and his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. He met with Secretary-General Amre Moussa, with whom he discussed the full range of issues of mutual interest to the United Nations and the Arab League. In his address to the summit, the Secretary-General encouraged Arab leaders to continue to support Palestinian participation in talks for the goal of the creation of an independent Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. He emphasised that this goal can only be brought about through a return of the parties to the negotiating table and testing their commitment in that framework.
3. The summit condemned Israeli actions on the ground, in particular in East Jerusalem, and conditioned continued Arab support for Palestinian participation in proximity talks on the outcome of the US efforts to create conditions conducive to the success of negotiations. In their concluding statement, Arab leaders re-confirmed their endorsement of the Arab Peace Initiative and pledged \$500 million to support the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem.
4. The Secretary-General also held discussions with Palestinian President Abbas in the margins of the LAS summit. He reiterated to the President his own and the Quartet's support for negotiations on all core issues.

Mr. President,

5. Turning to the situation on the ground, the Israeli government's partial restraint on settlement construction in the West Bank remains in effect and, as previously noted, has led to a reduction in construction activity despite some violations. Although these developments are welcome, this policy falls short of Israel's Roadmap obligation of a full settlement freeze and excludes settlement activity in East Jerusalem. The Secretary-General has reiterated that all settlement activity is illegal and must stop. We urge that the restraint be expanded into a comprehensive freeze of all settlement activity.

6. As a result of the transfer of Israeli settlers into the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah there were further incidents of violence between Palestinian residents and the settlers. We note that there have been no house demolitions carried out in East Jerusalem since January this year. We hope that this positive development will continue.

7. In the West Bank, there were almost daily clashes between settlers and Palestinians during the reporting period as well as incidents of stone-throwing at Israeli vehicles. These incidents caused four Palestinian injuries; two further Palestinians were injured and a Palestinian youth was killed in three incidents of Palestinians being hit by vehicles driven by settlers. Citing security concerns, Israeli security forces carried out 58 incursions into West Bank towns and villages and 112 Palestinians were arrested. Forty one Palestinians and seven Israelis were injured during this reporting period. On 7 April, Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres held the first in a planned series of coordinated one day hunger strikes in protest at the conditions of detention.

8. In Jerusalem, Palestinian Christian access to Easter celebrations was limited due to an extraordinary closure of checkpoints between the West Bank and East Jerusalem which lasted from 25 March to 6 April. On 28 March, a protest by Christians in Bethlehem against Israeli access restrictions resulted in the detention of 11 Palestinians including Fatah Central Committee member Abbas Zaki. There were also instances of restricted access to Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount for Muslim prayer. Demonstrations against the route of the barrier continued, in particular where it is constructed inside the West Bank, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. An increasing number of senior Palestinian officials have joined the call for peaceful popular protest against Israeli occupation.

9. We note with concern that a street in the Ramallah district had been named after a Palestinian militant responsible for the murder of a number of Israeli civilians. We would like to remind all concerned that, under the Roadmap, the Palestinian Authority has the obligation to end incitement.

10. The Palestinian Authority continues to exert efforts to meet its obligations to maintain law and order and combat terrorism in areas under Palestinian control in the West Bank. There has been continued security cooperation with Israel during this reporting period.

11. In a worrisome development, an Israeli military order that gives the military commander the power to evict a broad category of individuals that the Israeli authorities

deem are not residents of the West Bank went into effect yesterday (13 April). This could have the effect of enabling Israeli authorities to deport these individuals and has provoked strong Palestinian and Arab reaction. Special Coordinator Robert Serry raised the issue with Israeli authorities and his office will continue to monitor this development closely.

12. Palestinian municipal elections planned for 17 July are an important democratic element of the state-building agenda. The Central Election Commission has now completed the registration of over 200,000 new voters in the West Bank. Nomination of candidates is scheduled to take place from 1 to 10 June and campaigning will be between 3 and 15 July. Hamas has not allowed voter registration to take place in Gaza and has called for a boycott of the poll. We reiterate our call for Hamas to allow Gazans to exercise their right to participate in elections. We call on parties to ensure that the elections are free, fair and transparent.

Mr. President,

13. Turning to the important Palestinian state-building agenda and United Nations and international community support to those efforts, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) met in Madrid at senior official level on 13 April. The meeting was chaired by Norwegian Foreign Minister Støre and hosted by Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos. The AHLC was also joined by Quartet Representative Blair and the United Nations was represented by Special Coordinator Serry. The AHLC discussed measures necessary to support the Palestinian Authority's budget and institution-building as part of the state-building agenda aiming at Prime Minister Fayyad's goal of readiness for statehood in 2011.

14. The AHLC reconfirmed its support to the Palestinian Authority state-building agenda. During the meeting, Prime Minister Fayyad said that the Palestinian Authority was approaching 'the home stretch' in the implementation of its program and expressed confidence that the remaining tasks of the program can be implemented over the period June 2010-June 2011.

15. The Palestinian Authority requires an estimated US\$100 million a month in external financing for recurrent budgetary expenditures, but since January, only an estimated US\$174 million has been transferred. Projected shortfalls in the Palestinian Authority's budget could undermine its reform and state-building agenda. Member states are encouraged to commit funds they pledged, wherever possible through direct support to the Palestinian Authority. We take positive note that the Palestinian Authority has requested budget support of \$1.2 billion in 2010, down from \$1.35 billion in 2009 and from \$1.8 billion in 2008, thus reflecting what Prime Minister Fayyad termed an effort to secure a reduced reliance on the international community.

16. The 2010 draft budget projects expenditures at US\$3.9 billion, of which half will be allocated to Gaza. Reflecting positive Palestinian Authority reforms, the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics reported that real GDP increased by an estimated 6.8 percent

in 2009 as compared to 2008. However, it is of concern that this figure is driven by the growth in the West Bank whilst the Gazan economy continues to stagnate. The United Nations has aligned its programming in support of the state-building agenda and intends to focus its efforts in critical areas, including Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

17. Let me turn to progress that is now being made on the entry of materials for a number of approved United Nations projects since the Secretary-General's visit to Gaza on 21 March. As a result of Israeli approval of the entry of aggregate and cement, work has now begun on the sewage pumping station project at Tel el Sultan while work on the other approved projects, including the 151-unit Khan Younis housing project, is expected to commence shortly. The commercial import of wood and aluminum has been approved and will be allowed entry this week. There have also been other positive measures carried out by Israel, such as the continued exports of cut flowers during the reporting period and an increase in the amount and type of goods entering the Strip, including clothing, shoes and further imports of glass. However, the entry of materials still falls far short of what is required to address the immense reconstruction and development needs of Gaza.

18. The approved United Nations housing, water and sanitation projects are a modest start of what needs to be done in Gaza. More than half of the population is under the age of 18—and it is their future that should concern us most. More schools need to be built in Gaza to ensure that Palestinian children receive an education that broadens their horizons and prepares them for a better future. The quality of health care is also declining, due in part to the lack in building materials, equipment and supplies necessary for health facilities. In all these critical areas the United Nations will continue to exert its utmost efforts to expedite the entry of needed materials and to expand the scope of its activities in Gaza to address these needs. In order to enable these goals and United Nations projects in both Gaza and the West Bank, the United Nations and the Palestinian Authority have agreed that a Trust Fund will be established at an appropriate time. I would encourage all donors to consider supporting the United Nations' work through this mechanism.

19. Beyond the entry of materials into Gaza, other key elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) remain unfulfilled and continue to contribute to the instability in the Strip. In particular, the resolution's calls for the commitment of the parties to a durable and sustainable ceasefire and intra-Palestinian reconciliation are yet to be implemented. Without renewed and determined efforts to implement resolution 1860 (2009) in all of its aspects the situation in Gaza cannot be fully addressed. A more comprehensive and strategic approach to Gaza is urgently required.

Mr. President,

20. It is of serious concern that the security situation in Gaza is again volatile. On 26 March, a clash near Khan Younis led to the deaths of two Israeli soldiers and three Palestinians militants. The military wing of Hamas, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and a group called Palestine Taliban, all claimed responsibility for the action. In another

incident on 13 April, two Palestinian militants belonging to Islamic Jihad were killed by Israeli security forces, reportedly while trying to place IEDs near the Gaza-Israel border.

21. During this reporting period, a total of 35 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza and 16 reached southern Israel, with no damages or injuries reported. One Palestinian civilian was killed and 15 others were injured in the course of 14 incursions and six air strikes by Israeli security forces. There are reports that Hamas is trying to prevent further outbreaks of violence and the major factions in Gaza have agreed with Hamas that they will maintain calm, however rockets continue to be fired from the Strip. We condemn rocket fire and call for calm to be respected and for international humanitarian law to be upheld.

22. Egypt is continuing its efforts to combat smuggling and on 31 March uncovered a significant cache of missiles and shells in northern Sinai which are reported to be destined for the Gaza Strip. Smuggling of all goods, including arms, continues through tunnels into Gaza and one Palestinian died and six were injured in tunnel collapses during this reporting period. It is vital that all legitimate crossings for imports and exports are opened as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). There has been no progress in efforts to secure the release of Corporal Shalit in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

23. The Arab League summit stressed the importance of Palestinian unity; however, there has been no further progress in finalizing an agreement based on the Egyptian proposal. We reiterate the Quartet's call for the promotion of Palestinian unity based on PLO commitments and the re-unification of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority.

24. On 29 March Hamas took over the bank assets of a benevolent society in Gaza. Such measures jeopardise the whole banking sector and aggravate the humanitarian situation. There are also reports of increasing human rights' abuses. We are concerned at public statements by Hamas authority figures indicating the intention to carry out executions of prisoners.

Mr. President,

25. At the LAS Summit, the Secretary-General held a bilateral meeting with Syrian President Al-Assad to discuss a range of regional issues. The United Nations continues to support all efforts to revive the Israeli-Syrian track and a broader resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict as envisaged in Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. In the occupied Syrian Golan, settlement activity continued, including the approval for 100 new housing units in the settlement of Nimrod. However, the situation remained calm.

26. In Lebanon, on 9 March President Sleiman reconvened the committee of National Dialogue for the first time since the Parliamentary elections of last June. In its new

configuration, the National Dialogue now has a total of 20 participants. Participants agreed to hold the next meeting of the committee of National Dialogue on 15 April.

27. On 30 March the Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud announced that municipal elections will take place on schedule on four consecutive Sundays in the month of May. In the meantime, Parliament is still pursuing its consideration of the draft law for municipal elections that was submitted to it by the Government.

28. On the security front, a few unrelated incidents took place in various parts of the country during the reporting period. The most significant was an exchange of fire amongst Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) military personnel that took place on 8 April at the Kussaya PFLP-GC military base near the border with Syria, resulting in one person killed and at least two injured. Four individuals were later turned in to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

29. Continued support by the international community for the reconstruction of the Nahr el Bared refugee camp remains a priority. Additional funding is urgently required if progress achieved so far in the reconstruction of the camp is to be sustained.

30. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally quiet in the period under review. Violations of Lebanese airspace have continued on an almost daily basis, mainly using UAVs but also occasionally involving fighter planes.

31. The Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on the implementation of its resolution 1559 (2004) will be issued in the coming week.

Mr. President,

32. The Secretary-General has made clear the United Nations' commitment to the goal of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. As he outlined last month to the Council, for that to be achieved there is no alternative to the urgent resumption of negotiations on all core issues for a two-state solution. This must be enabled by positive developments on the ground. Peace is in the hands of the parties themselves but the international community must continue to play a crucial role.

33. The situation is critical. We cannot afford to lose this opportunity to reach an agreement that will end the occupation that began in 1967 and result in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours in accordance with Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the Roadmap, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Thank you, Mr. President.