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BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
19 January 2011

Mr. President,

1. As a new year begins, hopefully one of progress in Middle East peacemaking, several immediate challenges are present. Israeli-Palestinian negotiations remain at a deadlock. Developments in both the occupied Palestinian territory and in Lebanon have heightened tensions in the reporting period.

2. On the Israeli-Palestinian track, we appreciate and support US efforts to engage in parallel talks on substance with the parties. US Envoy Mitchell visited the region in late December, and Israeli and Palestinian negotiators held separate consultations with the US in Washington earlier this month.

3. I would like to reiterate the Secretary-General's call on the parties to seriously engage on final status issues and welcome US intentions to be a proactive participant offering ideas and bridging proposals when appropriate. We also appreciate the diplomatic efforts of a number of other world leaders who have recently visited the region.

4. However, the target dates supported by the Quartet for reaching an Israeli-Palestinian framework agreement on permanent status and for completion of the Palestinian Authority's two-year statebuilding programme will be upon us in eight to nine months. In this regard, the viability of the political process and the credibility of the Quartet are also at stake this year. We are seriously concerned at the continuing lack of progress in the search for a negotiated settlement. Peace and Palestinian statehood cannot be further delayed.

5. Quartet Principals will meet in Munich on 5 February. The Secretary-General has also recently underlined to Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa his commitment to ensure close coordination, and efforts are continuing to hold a meeting between the Quartet and the Arab League Follow-Up Committee. We take note of the Arab League position lending support to the position of President Abbas on settlements and its call for the provision of parameters by the US and the Quartet to facilitate a negotiated endgame based on the 1967 lines. During the reporting period, a further number of Latin American countries have extended recognition to a State of Palestine based on the 1967 lines. During his visit to the occupied Palestinian territory yesterday, President Medvedev reiterated the Russian Federation's long-standing support to the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to an independent state with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Mr. President,

6. Further settlement expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues to undermine trust and prejudices final status discussions. The sharp increase in Israeli settlement

construction activity recorded at the end of the settlement moratorium on 26 September 2010 has continued, with construction work beginning on up to 2,000 units in the West Bank since that time.

7. On 9 January, the Secretary-General issued a statement deploring the demolition of the Shepherd's Hotel in the heart of a Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem. The Secretary-General expressed deep regret regarding Israel's failure to heed growing international concern at expansion of illegal settlements. We are also worried at plans being developed to expand the Gilo settlement in East Jerusalem near Bethlehem. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity in conformity with international law and the Roadmap.

Mr. President,

8. Despite mounting challenges on the ground, the Palestinian Authority continues to make strides in its statebuilding agenda. We alert donors to an estimated \$100 million shortfall in external financing of recurrent expenditures of the Palestinian Authority from last year. The Palestinian Authority continues to seek to reduce its reliance on this financing, but it is nevertheless vital that donors continue to provide predictable, adequate and timely support.

9. The Palestinian Authority has continued its efforts to promote security in Area A. We also note positively a recent decision to cease bringing civilians before Palestinian Authority military tribunals. We believe Israel can and must do more to enable Palestinian efforts to improve both security and economic conditions, by easing restrictions on movement and access and facilitating Palestinian Authority efforts into Area C.

10. We note that Israeli security forces conducted 486 search operations in the West Bank. While we are cognizant of the security concerns that Israel cites in the context of these actions, we believe that they seriously undermine the Palestinian Authority when the strategic goal should be the opposite. Eighty-seven Palestinians were injured and 251 arrested in IDF actions. However, most worrying has been the death of four Palestinians in separate incidents, which warrant more transparent investigations and measures of accountability from Israel. The authorities must take greater precautions to ensure the protection of the civilian population under occupation and refrain from excessive use of force.

11. The most serious incidents include the killing of an unarmed man at a checkpoint on 2 January and of a 65 year old man in his bed during an incursion in Hebron on 7 January aimed at arresting alleged Hamas militants released by Palestinian security forces the day before for lack of evidence. In addition, a Palestinian woman died on 31 December after inhaling tear gas used by the IDF to disperse demonstrators protesting the Barrier. A Palestinian man was also shot and killed at a checkpoint on 8 January – Israeli soldiers reported the discovery of two pipe bombs and a knife on his body.

12. Some 43 others were arrested while protesting the Barrier during the reporting period and an anti-Barrier Israeli activist was sentenced to 16 months in jail. In addition, 13 Palestinians were injured by Israeli settlers. Four settlers and seven members of the Israeli forces were injured by Palestinians during the reporting period.

13. On 12 January, a Palestinian involved in organizing protests against Israeli settlements in Silwan was expelled for four months to the West Bank. The fate of three Hamas-affiliated Palestinian legislators from East Jerusalem who have taken refuge in the ICRC compound since July remains unresolved, while a legislator earlier transferred to Ramallah has not been allowed to return. We continue to be concerned about the human rights situation of Palestinian East Jerusalemites and to oppose any measures of forcible transfer. On 4 January, the Israeli authorities announced the arrest of two Palestinian East Jerusalemites in connection with an alleged plot to fire a missile into the Jerusalem football stadium.

11. During the reporting period, 30 Palestinian structures were demolished in East Jerusalem and 41 in Area C of the West Bank, displacing 148 Palestinians. This is worrying and gives rise to serious humanitarian concerns, while contributing to heightened tensions. I am also concerned by the difficulties faced by impoverished Palestinian communities in Area C who have no adequate access to basic services because of problems in obtaining permission from the IDF to develop infrastructure in their areas. The Humanitarian Coordinator has supported a Humanitarian Response Plan to meet a first set of urgent needs in education, water and shelter in Area C, which has received limited facilitation by the Israeli authorities thus far.

Mr. President,

12. We remain extremely concerned about the situation in Gaza including a recent increase in tensions. Palestinian militants fired 31 rockets and 47 mortar shells into Israel, representing approximately a four-fold increase from the previous reporting period, while Israel conducted 11 incursions and 26 air strikes in Gaza. On 21 December, an Israeli child was wounded after a rocket landed near a kindergarten, while two foreign workers in Israel were wounded by a mortar on 8 January. Four Palestinian civilians, including persons apparently accessing lands in the Israeli-declared buffer zone for civilian purposes, were killed by Israeli fire. Eleven Palestinian militants were also killed. Nineteen Palestinian civilians and 15 Palestinian militants were injured. An Israeli soldier was killed and four others were wounded by "friendly fire" during a clash with Palestinians on 7 January.

13. We condemn the indiscriminate firing of projectiles towards Israeli civilian areas by Palestinian militants. We equally stress that all parties must refrain from actions contrary to international humanitarian law which target or endanger civilians. UNSCO was active during the reporting period to promote a restoration of calm. The Egyptian authorities have urged Hamas to put an end to violence. The de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza have recently stated publicly their commitment to maintaining calm and claimed that there is inter-factional agreement on this. All responsible parties should cease acts of violence. A new outbreak of major hostilities would be devastating and must be avoided.

14. We can report no progress in efforts to further Palestinian reconciliation, and we continue to monitor internal tensions.

15. A fundamental goal of the United Nations continues to be the re-vitalization of Gaza's economy, and seeking the end of the Israeli closure policy within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Import and export levels have improved from the period before Israel's June 2010 policy adjustment, but are still significantly below pre-2007 levels. On UN

projects, Israel approved an additional \$26.4 million of UNDP and UNRWA projects on 6 January, including a further 7 UNRWA schools, bringing the total portfolio of approved UN projects to \$136.4 million.

16. Looking ahead, the quick scaling-up of the scope of goods allowed for export and the scale at which they are permitted to exit the Strip remains a key priority. The United Nations will also continue to put forward new programmes of work to the Government of Israel that complement those already presented, including programming to revitalize the private sector and rehabilitate public health infrastructure. These are already under active discussion with the Israeli authorities. We appreciate the strong support of the Palestinian Authority for these efforts. We continue to engage the Israeli authorities on the need to ensure sufficient crossings capacity.

17. Allow me to reiterate our continuing concern at the detention by Hamas of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit and to once again appeal for his release and for humanitarian access to be granted without further delay. We continue to follow the situation of Palestinian prisoners, including women and children and persons held without trial, and underline the importance of progress in prisoner releases by Israel.

Mr. President,

18. We regret the lack of progress in the effort to promote peace between Israel and Syria, despite continuing contacts by diplomatic actors, including reportedly French and US envoys. While the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained stable despite continued settlement activity, the resolution of the conflict between these two countries on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions is critical for regional stability, and an essential part of realizing the vision of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. President,

19. Let me now turn to developments in Lebanon, where the political crisis provoked by divergent views over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon has continued to deepen. On 12 January, the resignation of ten cabinet ministers from the opposition along with one minister from President Sleiman's bloc forced the collapse of the government of national unity.

20. The Secretary-General called for continuing dialogue among the parties and respect for the Constitution and the laws of Lebanon, while emphasizing the importance of preserving calm. The Secretary-General also reiterated his full support for the independent work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

21. On 13 January, President Sleiman issued a statement accepting the resignation of the Ministers but requesting that the Government continue functioning in a caretaker capacity. The President announced that he would conduct Parliamentary consultations to designate a new Prime Minister. The consultations, originally scheduled for 17 January, were postponed until 24 January. Let me comment here that it is essential for all Lebanese leaders to continue to address the current political situation through dialogue, within the parameters established by the Constitution of Lebanon.

22. A trilateral meeting was held in Damascus on 17 January to discuss the situation in Lebanon attended by Syrian President Assad, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa of Qatar. On the following day, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, together with the Foreign Minister of Turkey, held a series in Beirut with all concerned parties.

23. On 17 January, the Prosecutor of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon announced that he had submitted an indictment and supporting materials to the pre-trial Judge for his review on the same day. The content of the indictments would remain confidential at this stage. In this regard, the Secretary-General noted that the filing of an indictment by the Prosecutor was in pursuit of the Special Tribunal's mandate to end impunity for the terrible crimes that took the life of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others, and related attacks. The Secretary-General reiterated his call on all parties to refrain from attempts to interfere in or to influence the work of the Special Tribunal, underlining that the independent judicial process should not be linked with any political debate and that it was important not to prejudice its outcome.

24. In the early hours of 18 January, organised groups of unarmed men, reportedly from Hezbollah, deployed in various parts of Beirut for several hours. They withdrew before 8am, without causing further disruption to normal life and business in the city. The Lebanese Army eventually deployed personnel in several locations of Beirut, citing the need to reassure citizens.

25. The overall situation in the UNIFIL area of operations was generally calm and stable. Almost daily intrusions into the Lebanese airspace by Israel Defense Forces aircraft, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006), have continued in high numbers.

Mr. President,

26. Preserving the stability of Lebanon and ensuring an end to impunity there is essential, if only because the Lebanese themselves have a right to both. But it is also critical to the broader fate of a region which needs, more than anything else, all elements to be conducive for progress towards comprehensive peace.

27. Efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians to engage seriously on final status issues will be at the top of the agenda when the Quartet meets in Munich. Our collective task remains to spare no efforts to support the search for a negotiated solution that will end the occupation that began in 1967 and end the conflict, establishing an independent and viable Palestinian State, with Jerusalem emerging as the capital of two states living side by side in peace and security. We will continue to do all we can to promote dialogue and preserve the stability and security of the region as a whole, in the pursuit of the comprehensive regional peace envisaged in the Madrid terms of reference, the relevant resolutions of this Council and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Thank you, Mr. President.