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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL  
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,  
INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE  
23 June 2011**

Mr. President,

1. Since we have tried to brief the Council regularly on the situations in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, I will today keep this briefing on the traditional topics.
2. As popular protest and political change continue to sweep the region, the Israeli-Palestinian political process remains at a dangerous standstill. The Secretary-General is increasingly worried about the *impasse*. Resumption of meaningful negotiations is urgent.
3. In this context, the Secretary-General hopes that both parties will demonstrate a renewed determination to achieve a peace agreement that provides for two States living side-by-side in dignity, security and peace, consistent with long-established and recognized parameters. He believes that President Obama, in his speech of 19 May, has offered important ideas which could help the peace talks move forward, consistent with international positions and responding to the legitimate core concerns of both parties. He encourages Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to respond positively to this important speech.

4. The Quartet agrees that moving forward on the basis of territory and security provides a foundation for Israelis and Palestinians to reach a final resolution of the conflict through serious and substantive negotiations and mutual agreement on all core issues. In a statement on 20 May, the Quartet reiterated its strong appeal to the parties to overcome the current obstacles and resume direct bilateral negotiations without delay or preconditions. The Secretary-General strongly supports the convening of the Quartet at Principals level soon. Special Coordinator Serry is in close contact with fellow envoys in this regard, and with the parties. In addition, French Foreign Minister Juppé made proposals for resumed negotiations, and EU High Representative Ashton visited the region to impress the EU's sense of urgency and concern upon the parties.

Mr. President,

5. During the reporting period, Fateh and Hamas leaders met under Egyptian auspices to discuss implementation of the reconciliation agreement concluded in Cairo on 4 May. Factional representatives also met in Moscow and Ankara. The Arab League, on 24 May, discussed ways to support the implementation of the Palestinian reconciliation agreement and to provide financial assistance to the Palestinians. President Abbas also held consultations in Saudi Arabia on 13 June. However, no agreement has yet been reached on the composition of the proposed government.

6. We recall the Secretary-General's consistent support of efforts for Palestinian unity in line with Security Council resolutions 1850 and 1860. We wish to see unity in the framework of the positions of the Quartet and the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab Peace Initiative, and urge the parties to implement their agreement accordingly. It is vital that, until elections, any government is committed to the programme of President Abbas and maintains security cooperation in the West Bank and calm from Gaza.
7. Security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel in the West Bank continues, and must be maintained. I welcome the announcement that an eighth battalion of Palestinian security forces will be trained in Jordan with international assistance, bringing the number of internationally trained Palestinian security forces maintaining law and order in the West Bank to around 4,000.
8. We count on Israel's continued cooperation in keeping up regular transfers of VAT and customs revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, in line with its international obligations. These transfers help to ensure the payment of salaries for essential state functions, including security. It is also critical that donors commit additional funds to support the Palestinian Authority's recurrent budgetary expenditures, given an estimated projected budget gap of approximately US\$300 million for the year.

Mr. President,

9. We will continue to work for the full implementation of all aspects of Security Council resolution 1860 regarding Gaza. An overall state of calm between Israel and Gaza has generally prevailed for the past ten weeks. However, during the reporting period, two rockets and two mortars were fired at Israel from Gaza, causing no injuries or damage, while Israel conducted six incursions and one air-strike. One Palestinian civilian was killed by Israeli fire on 21 May while approaching the border fence during the night, and two civilians were injured by Israeli forces on 20 and 29 May, respectively. We continue to urge calm and restraint for the sake of civilian populations on both sides.

10. On 16 June, UNRWA summer games were launched in Gaza, providing thousands of children with recreational and learning activities. We welcome Israel's approval earlier this week of a further US\$100 million of UNRWA construction projects, in particular 1,100 UNRWA housing units in Khan Younis and Rafah and a further 18 UNRWA schools, bringing the total of approved UN reconstruction in the past 15 months to a value of some \$265 million. We continue to stress that the market in aggregate, steel bar and cement can and should be liberalized by the Israeli authorities.

11. On 25 May, Egypt announced extended working hours and eased crossing procedures for persons at the Rafah crossing point between Gaza and Egypt, subject to security checks. Difficulties have surfaced

between Egypt and the de facto Hamas authorities in the implementation of this adjustment. Efforts continue to combat smuggling of weapons through tunnels.

12. In relation to reports that a new flotilla is planned in the next few days, I want to reiterate today the strong view of the United Nations that assistance for the population of Gaza should be delivered through official crossings. The Secretary-General has called upon and written letters to Governments concerned to use their influence to discourage flotillas, which carry the potential for dangerous escalation. All involved must act responsibly and with caution to avoid any violent incident.

13. Israeli staff sergeant Gilad Shalit will have spent five years in Hamas captivity on 25 June. We urge humanitarian access and his immediate release, and hope that prisoner exchange efforts bear fruit. This would impact favorably on the situation of several thousand Palestinian prisoners in Israel and the broader political atmosphere. UNSCO uses its contacts with all parties to support efforts in this regard.

Mr. President,

14. Israeli settlement activity continued in violation of international law and the Roadmap. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, construction was under way on 1,774 units in the first quarter of 2011 in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. The Ministry of Defence approved an additional 294 units in the settlement of Beitar Ilit during

the reporting period. Settlement activity is continuing in East Jerusalem as well. I note with concern the conduct of a dedication ceremony at the settlement of Ma'aleh Zeitim, in the heart of the Palestinian East Jerusalem neighborhood of Ras-al-Amud, in the presence of the Knesset speaker and senior Cabinet Members.

15. We are concerned that continued demolitions in Area C are displacing Palestinians from their communities. The IDF demolished 81 Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including two in East Jerusalem, displacing 260 people including 145 children. This included the demolition of 29 structures in Al Hadadiya in the northern Jordan Valley on 21 June. The planning regime applied by the Israeli authorities in this area prohibits residents from constructing any structures in their community.

Mr. President,

16. On 5 June, large crowds of demonstrators in two locations on the Golan attempted to breach the cease-fire line and cross the technical fence. This incident has been reported by the Secretary-General in his current report on the UN Disengagement Observer Force, and Assistant Secretary General Mulet will brief you after this meeting. The IDF first responded with verbal warnings through a loud speaker, use of tear gas, and warning shots above the crowd. It then employed live fire to prevent demonstrators reaching the fence, resulting in reports of 23 people killed and many more wounded. UNDOF helped calm the situation and is seeking to confirm facts.

17. The Secretary-General, who had sent appeals for calm, responsibility and restraint to all parties throughout the region, regretted the loss of life, condemning the use of violence and all actions intended to provoke violence. He called for maximum restraint on all sides and strict observance of international humanitarian law to ensure protection of civilians, while reminding the Syrian authorities of their obligation to protect UNDOF personnel and facilities.
18. Riots took place the following day in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria during funerals for those killed, apparently in frustration against Palestinian factions based in Syria that had encouraged the breach attempt, resulting in a reported 12 killed.
19. There were no demonstrations along the Blue Line on 5 June during the “Nakhsa Day” events. Following the confrontation on 15 May, UNIFIL had discussed measures to prevent further incidents with the parties. On 2 June, the Lebanese Armed Forces decided to strictly forbid demonstrators from entering the area south of the Litani River and to impose strict security measures along certain portions of the Blue Line. Following this decision, Palestinian organizations cancelled protests along the Blue Line and opted instead to hold a day-long sit-in in refugee camps.
20. Demonstrations in the West Bank resulted in some 120 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier injured and 15 Palestinians arrested by the IDF. In other demonstrations during the reporting period, violent clashes

between anti-barrier protestors and Israeli security forces resulted in 95 Palestinian injured as well as numerous arrests and cases of gas inhalation. The IDF conducted 386 search operations in the occupied West Bank, in which 139 Palestinians were injured and 329 arrested, among them three members of the Palestinian Legislative Council from PFLP and Hamas, and two Fateh leaders, while 25 Israeli security officers were also injured.

21. Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians and their property in the West Bank resulted in 13 Palestinian injuries and extensive material damage. Palestinian property was vandalized in Nablus on 29 May by Israelis visiting Joseph's tomb, a nearby Palestinian-controlled religious site. In response to the IDF dismantling a settlement outpost on 2 June near the Shilo settlement, settlers attacked Palestinians and their property under the so-called "price tag" policy. A mosque in the village of Al-Mughayyir was set on fire and its outside walls were sprayed with graffiti on 7 June. The Israeli government condemned this attack. The Special Coordinator condemned the desecration and called on the Israeli government to ensure the accountability of those responsible and to protect the human rights of Palestinians and their property, including religious sites.

Mr. President,

22. Allow me now to turn to the situation in Lebanon. On 13 June, Prime Minister Mikati announced the formation of a new Government, which in large part is composed of the 8 March coalition. According to the



Lebanese Constitution, the new Government must present its programme to Parliament and gain its confidence within 30 days. Let me be clear: the Secretary-General expects the new Government to reiterate its commitment to the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 and to all of Lebanon's international obligations.

23. On 18 June, armed clashes between the predominantly Sunni neighborhood of Bab Tabbaneh and the predominantly Alawite neighborhood of Jabal Mohsen in the northern city of Tripoli left six people dead and 22 others injured. The clashes erupted after demonstrations in support of anti-regime protests in Syria.

24. The United Nations continues to monitor developments along Lebanon's northern border. The influx of Syrian nationals into Northern Lebanon, which reached an estimated 4,000 persons in mid-May, has virtually stopped since early June. This is attributed to the imposition by Syrian authorities of additional security measures along the border. The United Nations is coordinating closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to the displaced, as well as on matters of protection and the determination of their status.

25. The situation faced by Palestine refugees living in Lebanon continues to be a matter of concern. I urge donors to continue and, if possible, increase, their support for UNRWA's regular programmes, aimed at delivering basic services such as education and health care to Palestine refugees, and for the reconstruction of the Nahr el Bared camp in Northern Lebanon, destroyed in 2007.

26. As the sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 is to be submitted soon, I will not elaborate today on the important developments in recent weeks that fall under the purview of that resolution. Mr. President,

27. With both the Palestinians and Israel stressing their desire to negotiate, President Obama's speech contained ideas that the international community can rally behind to offer a framework to resume talks and seek an agreement. The Secretary-General looks forward to the Quartet giving impetus to this objective through a meeting at Principals level soon.

28. But what is most important is that the leaders on the ground rise to the challenge. They face political risks and there are many questions in the minds of their publics. There is also a gulf of confidence between the parties. But we appeal to them to return to negotiations in the interests of their respective peoples, without further delay, and to negotiate seriously in order to reach an agreement. We will continue to work with the parties and our regional and international partners in this cause.

Thank you, Mr. President.