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AFFAIRS

BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
23 NOVEMBER 2010

Mr. President,

1. We are in the midst of a delicate period which will determine whether a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is possible. The continued diplomatic impasse since the moratorium on settlement construction ended on 26 September is worrying, and we believe a return to the talks is crucially important. Efforts are continuing to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu met with United States Secretary of State Clinton on 11 November and discussions between the United States and the parties are ongoing.
2. There have also been consultations in the region to support these efforts. The League of Arab States follow up Committee deferred its meeting agreed upon in Sirte to allow more time for diplomatic efforts. Senior Egyptian interlocutors met with President Abbas in Ramallah on 29 October and subsequently with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 5 November. On 20 November, President Abbas met with President Mubarak in Cairo and with League of Arab States Secretary-General Amro Moussa for discussions. United States efforts to re-start negotiations have reached a critical phase. It is essential that the parties engage seriously and make substantive progress quickly once the talks resume, with a view to resolve all permanent status issues. Quartet envoys have been in regular contact, and we support a Quartet meeting soon to help move the process forward.
3. There has been significant construction in a number of settlements since the expiry of the partial settlement moratorium. There have also been announcements of plans to construct: 1,300 settlement units in the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem; 32 units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Pisgat Zeev as part of a plan to expand by a further 220 units; and a further 800 units in the Ariel settlement deep inside the West Bank. In his letter to the President of the Security Council of 10 November, the Permanent Observer of Palestine raised concerns about the impact of this renewed settlement activity on the prospects for the talks.
4. The Secretary-General expressed his concern at these developments to Prime Minister Netanyahu when they met in New York on 8 November. We call on Israel to fulfill its Roadmap obligation to freeze illegal settlement construction and not to implement plans for additional settlement units. In its 21 September statement, the Quartet recalled that unilateral actions taken by either party cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the

international community. Previously, the Quartet has also reiterated that the annexation of East Jerusalem is not recognized by the international community, and that the status of Jerusalem is a permanent status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties.

Mr. President,

5. The Palestinian Authority's State-building agenda continues to advance steadily, in accordance with Prime Minister Fayyad's strategy. This strategy however requires adequate and sustainable financial backing. The recent and welcome support from donors has improved the Palestinian Authority's liquidity situation over the last month. However, the United Nations urges member states to find additional resources to address outstanding shortfalls.
6. During the reporting period there has been a decline in the number of violent incidents recorded in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces continued to maintain law and order and to fight extremism in accordance with Palestinian Roadmap obligations. The security forces uncovered a significant arms cache in Ramallah on 22 October and a number of militants, including a leader of Islamic Jihad, have been arrested during the reporting period. A cell of Hamas militants was arrested by Palestinian security forces in Ramallah on 17 November.
7. International efforts to improve the capacity and strength of the Palestinian security forces continue. A sixth battalion of Palestinian national security forces completed their training in Jordan on 10 November and will soon be deployed in the West Bank.
8. During the reporting period, Israeli security forces conducted 371 operations in the West Bank, in which 87 Palestinian were injured and 211 arrested, while four Israeli security personnel were injured. Those detained by Israel included Palestinians in possession of arms and members of the Hamas political wing including the Secretary of the Palestinian Legislative Council.
9. There were 15 attacks by Palestinians on Israeli settlers which resulted in injuries to four Israelis. On 30 October shots were fired at an Israeli vehicle travelling near Al-Walajah village, north-west of Bethlehem.
10. The olive harvesting season took place during the reporting period. Attacks by Israeli settlers, including arson, uprooting of thousands of olive trees belonging to Palestinians, vandalism and theft of agricultural equipment and crops were reported on an almost daily basis and in greater numbers than in the previous two olive harvests. On 22 October Israeli settlers desecrated a Palestinian cemetery on the outskirts of the West Bank village of Kfar Kadum. There were 29 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians or their property, in which 14 Palestinians were injured.

11. Construction on the barrier continues with deviations from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The number of obstacles to movement in the West Bank has remained constant at approximately 508 in recent months.
12. While recognising the Israeli government's legitimate security concerns, it is important that international organisations and their staff are given greater access to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza to implement effectively their assistance projects. In this regard, we are concerned that there may be a deterioration in access between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank as a result of proposed changes to the administration of the crossings.
13. In East Jerusalem, the situation in the Silwan neighbourhood adjacent to the Old City is tense. There have been continued confrontations between settlers and Palestinian residents and on 25 October eviction orders were handed out to eight families living in Silwan leading to violent clashes in which a Palestinian child was seriously injured by a rubber bullet.
14. The humanitarian community finalized its Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for 2011 in full consultation with the Palestinian Authority. The CAP will be presented in Brussels on 30 November and articulates specific humanitarian strategies to address critical needs in Gaza and the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. We urge donors to fully support the CAP to prevent further deterioration in living conditions, especially in areas beyond Palestinian Authority control. Residents in Gaza and Area C of the West Bank remain among the most vulnerable.

Mr. President,

15. I'll turn now to the situation in Gaza. During the reporting period, Palestinian militant groups fired eight rockets, including two "grad" rockets, and 41 mortars from Gaza into Israel. The Israeli security forces conducted ten air strikes and 23 incursions into the Strip. Four Palestinian militants were killed, including three who died in targeted killings carried out by Israeli security forces. Without prejudice to Israel's right to legitimate and proportionate self defence, we reiterate our consistent opposition to extra-judicial killing. Twenty civilians were injured during the reporting period, of whom 12 were injured collecting rubble in the restricted area along the perimeter fence. Three Palestinians died in accidents while working in the smuggling tunnels.
16. In a worrying escalation, Palestinian militant groups fired four phosphorous mortar shells into Israel on 19 November. Israel subsequently conducted three air strikes against tunnels along the Rafah crossing and a militant training facility. We continue to condemn rocket fire, which indiscriminately endangers civilians, and must cease. We urge all parties to show calm and restraint and respect international humanitarian law.

17. On 21 October there was a large explosion near Rafah which resulted in more than 12 injured Palestinian civilians and extensive material damage. Hamas subsequently admitted that this explosion was an accident which took place inside a training facility for its militants. On 10 November a land-to-sea missile was test-fired by Palestinian militants over a densely populated Palestinian neighbourhood of Gaza on 10 November. I reiterate my deep concern at all armed activity which puts civilians in danger, or is aimed at civilian populations.
18. The priority of the United Nations remains the re-building of a viable Gazan economy in the framework of full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). This will take time, but there are a range of important steps that can begin this process: a resumption of exports; the free movement of people into and out of Gaza; and the return of the Palestinian Authority to the crossings all represent achievable steps that are fundamental to Gaza's long term recovery. Access to agricultural land along the Gazan border and to fishing areas which are currently prohibited are important elements for economic recovery together with revival of the construction industry with multiplier effects across all sectors.
19. The 20 June Israeli government decision on Gaza was a welcome and positive step but it has not yet fully been translated into practice. The United Nations continues to work to both expand the flow of its reconstruction works in the Gaza Strip and to increase the pace of implementation of that work. Both UNRWA and UNDP have now received written Israeli approval for the implementation of programs of work worth approximately \$80 million. However, approval and implementation procedures remain slow and bureaucratic. Capacity at the crossings is critical, and as noted in the last Security Council briefing the United Nations remains concerned about capacity at the Karni crossing for the entry of aggregate and essential wheat grain. We call on Israel to facilitate the timely entry of construction material for implementation of approved UN work and to allow UN Agencies to continue to expand the flow of UN reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.
20. During this reporting period there has been an increase in the weekly number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip to 1,026 up from 940 during the last reporting period and 566 in June 2010 before the announcement of the new Israeli measures. However, the total number of truckloads is still short of the 2,800 entering Gaza in June 2007 on a weekly basis.
21. The water and sanitation situation in Gaza remains dire. \$15million of funding has been secured for the UNDP Khan Younis wastewater project which was approved in March. I appeal to donors to assist in funding the outstanding \$40 million required for the project to be implemented.
22. The Rafah crossing continues to remain open for humanitarian passage to Egypt. I note that there was good cooperation between all of the relevant bodies to enable the departure of pilgrims from Gaza for the annual *hajj* to Mecca.

23. Representatives of Fatah and Hamas met in Damascus on 9 November for further discussions on Palestinian reconciliation. Reports indicate that the meeting was inconclusive. We continue to support efforts to advance Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority and the commitments of the PLO.
24. 11 November marked 1,600 days since the capture of Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, and we reiterate our call for his immediate release. Humanitarian access to him should be granted without conditions. There has been no apparent progress on efforts to complete a prisoner exchange for some of the 9,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Mr. President,

25. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained stable although settlement activity continues. On 2 November the Israeli Government encouraged further settlement activity through announcement of an initiative to give 140 one dunum plots of land free to Israeli settlers to build further units. Also, legislation was passed yesterday in the Knesset that requires a two thirds majority or, failing that, a national referendum to approve the return of any occupied territory in East Jerusalem or the Syrian Golan in the context of any political settlement.

Mr. President,

26. I will not cover the situation in Lebanon in this month's briefing, as it was addressed last week in detail by the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Mr. Michael Williams, and DPKO ASG Khare, when they presented to the Council the latest report of the Secretary-General on the state of implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

Mr. President,

27. In the period ahead we must work to bring about a return to direct talks between the parties and to support an atmosphere on the ground conducive to quick and concrete progress in those talks, including a freeze on settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory.. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas must show vision and leadership and rise above their domestic constraints and seize this opportunity to secure a historic and lasting peace. The Secretary-General remains committed to working with the parties and his international partners for an end of the occupation that began in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Roadmap and the Arab Peace Initiative.