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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL  
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST  
20 May 2014**

Mr. President,

1. Since the open debate on 29 April on the situation in the Middle East, political efforts towards a negotiated two-State solution have reached an impasse. It is important that international efforts continue to create the conditions for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.
2. You will recall that following the last meeting of the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East the Secretary-General appealed to all concerned — parties and international community alike, to use this time constructively to find a meaningful path forward, lest continued inaction furthers instability or jeopardizes the viability of the two-state solution. He also urged both Israelis and Palestinians to exercise prudence and avoid unilateral steps, in an effort to convince each other anew that they are partners for peace. This was also reflected in the recent EU's Council conclusions of 12 May which highlighted the EU Special Privileged Partnership on offer and called for both sides to find the political strength to identify common ground for the process to resume.
3. Meanwhile, discussions continued on the implementation of the intra-Palestinian unity agreement of 23 April between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas. On 5 May, President Abbas and Hamas political leader Meshaal met in Doha to discuss the detailed aspects of that agreement. PLO officials traveled to Gaza on 14 May for the same. The formation of a Palestinian national consensus government consisting of technocrats remains one of the top priorities of the agreement.
4. The United Nations continues to support intra-Palestinian reconciliation but notes that it is paramount to reiterate to all factions that this future Government abide by the PLO commitments of recognition of Israel, non-violence, and adherence to previous agreements. The EU also reaffirmed its support for the potential national consensus government in their Council's Conclusions so long as it adheres to the principles set out in President Abbas' Cairo speech of 4 May 2011. If these conditions are met, we hope the international community would assist this Government in developing a positive agenda to tackle difficult political, security, economic and humanitarian challenges, in particular in Gaza.
5. Following the deposit with the Secretary-General in April of the instruments of accession to a number of international treaties, on 2 and 7 May, five of the nine core human rights treaties plus one of the substantive protocols entered into force. The International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Civil and Political Rights will enter into force on 2 July. The High Commissioner for Human Rights commends the commitment of the State of

Palestine to be bound by the international human rights standards contained in these treaties and to engage with the associated human rights treaty bodies which monitor their implementation.

Mr. President,

6. While worrying trends on the ground continued, we take note that parties avoided a further escalation during this delicate period, in spite of unhelpful rhetoric from various quarters. Israel transferred 463 million shekels in VAT tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority after deducting 120 million shekels for water and electricity payments.

7. In the West Bank, Israeli security forces carried out a total of 219 search and arrest operations. A total of 331 Palestinians were arrested, with two Palestinians killed and 146 injured, including in clashes during demonstrations against the barrier. Eight Israeli security personnel were also injured. Of these, the most significant took place on 15 May, during demonstrations by Palestinians to commemorate the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what they call “Nakba Day,” which led to clashes with Israeli security forces in the West Bank including two Palestinian stone throwers, both teenagers, were shot dead with 23 more injured, including some by live fire. It is of serious concern that initial information appears to indicate that the two Palestinians killed were both unarmed and appeared to pose no direct threat. The UN calls for an independent and transparent investigation by the Israeli authorities into these two deaths and urges Israel to ensure that its security forces strictly adhere to the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

8. Settler attacks resulted in four Palestinians injured, including a child and in damage to Palestinian property, including 283 trees. On two separate incidents on 5 and 9 May respectively anti-Arab and anti-Christian graffiti were sprayed on the property of Notre Dame Church and the walls of St. George’s Church in Jerusalem. Palestinian attacks, mostly consisting of stone and Molotov cocktail throwing, resulted in injuries to two settlers, including a child, and material damage to six vehicles.

9. Demolitions continued during the reporting period with 26 structures, including ten residences, demolished, displacing 48 Palestinians, including 30 children. In a separate worrisome development, on 28 April Israeli authorities issued eviction orders to at least five out of 12 families of Palestinian Bedouins and herder communities living in Sateh al Bahr, near Jericho. The Israeli State has yet to respond to the temporary injunction issued by the Israeli court on 4 May. We are also concerned by demolitions in and near the E1/Ma’ale Adumim area, including on 19 May. Since the beginning of this year, 13 demolition incidents have been reported in this sensitive area, which is higher than the combined total of 11 demolition incidents recorded in the same area over the preceding four years, between 2010 and 2013.

10. Continued settlement activity, including in occupied East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law and erodes the hope for the two-state solution. On 14 May Israeli authorities began demolishing structures in the illegal settler outpost of Maale Rehavam, near Bethlehem after failed attempts at a voluntary evacuation.

11. We remain concerned about the conditions of some 125 Palestinian prisoners, including some 90 administrative detainees, including several PLC members, in Israeli prisons on continued hunger strike since 24 April to protest the Israeli policy of administrative detention. On 8 May, approximately 5,100 other Palestinian prisoners observed a one-day hunger strike in solidarity with those administrative detainees. It remains the Secretary-General's position that administrative detainees should be tried or released without delay.

Mr. President,

12. In Gaza, the situation was relatively calm compared to recent reporting periods. Nevertheless, Palestinians fired three rockets that landed in Israel. On 2 May, Palestinian militants reportedly shot at an Israeli military patrol near the border fence, which returned fire. None of these incidents resulted in injuries or damage. In separate incidents Israeli forces reportedly shot and injured six Palestinians near the border fence, including five civilians and one militant, causing injury to four Palestinian fishermen.

13. At the same time, the persisting dire economic and humanitarian situation as a result of a tightened access regime and violence remains of serious concern. Unemployment rates reached 41 percent in the first quarter of 2014, ten percentage points higher than the first quarter of last year. An alarming 66 percent of economically active 20 to 24 year old Gazans were jobless at the beginning of this year. Gaza remains in urgent need of materials to maintain essential services and to upgrade critical infrastructure, such as water network and sanitation. We repeat our calls for immediate steps to help improve conditions and ensure a full opening of crossings into Gaza, including Rafah, to allow legitimate trade and movements of people.

14. The current situation further highlights the need to advance a sustainable structural solution to Gaza's energy problems. Gaza's only power plant, facing near shutdowns every couple of months, continues to operate as a result of a second Qatari contribution of another US\$ 32 million to procure industrial fuel for the plant. The Qatari contribution is expected to enable the Gaza Power Plant to continue generating until mid-June. Meanwhile, the emergency stop-gap donation by the Turkish Government to replenish on site reserves for critical health and water facilities has been implemented. Another such donation by the Islamic Development Bank is scheduled to expire in June. So we appeal to donors to step in and sustain this interim safety net to redress Gaza's electricity needs which are bound to increase with the summer months approaching.

15. In the meantime, we welcome the resumption of some ten UN construction projects, worth around US\$ 14 million, as well as the approval of an UNRWA housing project in Rafah valued at around US\$ 17 million. A remaining six pre-approved projects worth US\$ 12 million remain stalled. In addition, an estimated US\$ 105 million worth of construction projects has yet to be approved by the Government of Israel. In short, much more is required to address Gaza's humanitarian and development needs and alleviate the deteriorating conditions of the civilian population, including a more predictable Israeli Government approval process.

16. In a separate development, on 7 May two Palestinians, one of them a civilian, were executed in Gaza. Both were reportedly convicted based on the claim that they were

collaborating with Israel. The executions were carried out without the approval of President Abbas, as is required by Palestinian law. We have serious concerns with regard to lack of due process, the use of military courts to try civilians, the lack of compliance with rigorous fair trial standards in Gaza, and the allegations of ill-treatment and torture during interrogations of persons later sentenced to death. The United Nations urges the de facto authorities in Gaza to impose an immediate moratorium on executions.

Mr. President,

17. Council members were briefed on 6 May on developments in Lebanon. I would note here that the two-month presidential election period there started on 25 March. Four parliamentary sessions have been scheduled so far by Speaker Berri for the purposes of the election. In the first none of the declared candidates gained the required number of votes. In the subsequent sessions, most recently on 15 May, there was no quorum and therefore no vote took place. The term of President Sleiman, whose leadership in difficult times the Council has recognized, expires on 25 May. Council members have in the past underscored the importance of successful elections in Lebanon for the continuity of state institutions.

18. On 11 May, in a statement on behalf of the International Support Group for Lebanon, the UN Special Coordinator emphasized that the process should be an entirely Lebanese one, free of foreign interference, but equally stressed the keen interest of the international community in its successful completion, on time and in accordance with constitutional practice. I take this opportunity to reiterate that call: We hope that members of parliament will engage fully in the coming days to secure a president by the date set in law. It is important for confidence and stability in Lebanon that a vacancy in the presidency be avoided.

19. The security plan approved by the Government of Prime Minister Tammam Salam has continued to contribute to an improved security situation in Tripoli and in the Bekaa, though there have continued to be incidents connected with the conflict in Syria close to the border particularly in the area of Aarsal.

20. Additionally there have been violent incidents in Palestinian refugee camps. On 7 April, clashes in Mieh Mieh led to eight fatalities. On 9 and 21 April, there were incidents in which two persons were killed by gunmen in Ein el Hilweh. On 12 May, further clashes between armed groups occurred in the same camp.

21. The situation in the UNIFIL area of operations and along the Blue Line has remained relatively calm. Close cooperation of the parties with UNIFIL during these fragile times and continued efforts in this regard are critical in safeguarding the calm along the Blue Line. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis.

Mr. President,

22. You were extensively briefed on Syria last week by Joint Special Representative Brahimi so I will not repeat his clear messages. However, in the Golan, ongoing clashes in the central and southern parts of the area of separation, underline the volatility of the situation. On 8 May, heavy

fighting between the Syrian armed forces and the armed members of the opposition occurred east of Quneitra, in relative proximity to the crossing gates between the Alpha and Bravo side, further threatening the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. In the context of these clashes, tank rounds and an artillery shell landed across the ceasefire line. There was no response from the Alpha side. These developments have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and jeopardise the ceasefire between the two countries.

Mr. President and in conclusion,

23. Last month, Mr. Serry reminded the Security Council that, without a credible political horizon – we risk putting the Oslo paradigm in real jeopardy. Yet we cannot rush the parties back to the table without the proper parameters in place. The current pause in the talks allows for both parties to consider their next steps, building on the intensive engagement by the US over the past nine months. The Secretary-General remains committed to working with the parties and 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 with Israel within secure and recognized borders, 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. It is the responsibility of the two sides not to take unilateral steps, which will further complicate efforts to return to negotiations.

Thank you.