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ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES SECURITY COUNCIL TO SEIZE ON PREPARATORY

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN TALKS AS 'IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY' FOR LASTING PEACE

Actions on Ground Continue to Fuel Tensions, He Says in Briefing Ahead of Day-long Discussion on Middle East

Despite continuing tensions on the ground, preparatory meetings in Jordan between the Israelis and Palestinians presented an important opportunity for lasting peace that must be seized, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council today, ahead of a day-long debate involving some 45 speakers.

"We remain hopeful," said Oscar Fernández-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, "that the preparatory meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will continue and will ultimately lead to serious negotiations based on comprehensive proposals on territory and security and reaching an agreement for a two-State solution by the end of this year." He added: "Neither the international community nor the parties can afford to let this opportunity pass by."

After 15 months without direct talks, negotiators had started meeting in Amman on 3 January, under the auspices of Jordan's King and Foreign Minister, and in the presence of Quartet envoys, he said. Since then, the parties had begun discussing issues relating to territory and security, in accordance with the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011, he said, adding that they had also been discussing confidence-building measures and creating a positive environment for the talks to succeed.

Unfortunately, actions on the ground over the past month continued to fuel tensions, he said, citing continued Israeli settlement activities, violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians, security incursions into the West Bank, the arrests of Hamas-connected legislators, continued rocket fire from Gaza and retaliatory Israeli actions, and worrying exhortations by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He expressed support for continuing efforts to advance Palestinian reconciliation, within the framework of previous commitments.

On Lebanon, he recounted the Secretary-General's visit, from 13 to 15 January, and said that security incidents in the operational area of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) showed the continuing fragility and vulnerability of conditions there. The situation along the Lebanese-Syrian border remained of concern, he said, noting that Lebanese nationals had been killed by gunfire and that an influx of refugees had arrived while escaping the violence in Syria, on which he commented: "We hope that the international community will act in a concerted and coherent manner in support of ongoing efforts for a peaceful resolution of the crisis."

Following the briefing, the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel addressed the Council. "Despite all odds, the resilient Palestinian people remain hopeful that this year will bring long-awaited freedom, justice, peace, dignity and security in their homeland," said the Permanent Observer. Maintaining that the Palestinian leadership had cooperated fully with Quartet initiatives, he added nevertheless: "The two-State solution is withering with every inch of Palestinian land seized by the occupying Power, every settlement unit constructed, every Israeli settler transferred, every wall erected, every home demolished

and every Palestinian family displaced.” He vowed to continue efforts to mobilize the United Nations as well as Member States to save the dream of a possible Palestinian State.

Israel’s representative, pointing to the magnitude of unrest, threats and civil rights violations in the region, maintained that the Israeli-Palestinian issue was not the central conflict in the Middle East. The primary obstacle to peace was not “municipal building applications” or settlements in the West Bank, but the claim by Palestinian refugees of the right of return to Israel, a culture of incitement that instilled hatred of Jews while glorifying terrorism, and the accommodation of Hamas, which did not recognize Israel. As for the negotiations, he said: “It’s time to stop negotiating about negotiating,” calling for immediate, unconditional, direct talks to resolve all issues. He criticized the Security Council’s inaction on militancy in Gaza, which was creating an explosive situation. “The silence is deafening,” he added.

Following those statements, representatives of Member States expressed hope that the current preparatory talks would lead to substantial negotiations, with many speakers urging that a comprehensive agreement on the details of a two-State solution be reached by the end of the year. Most speakers also called for an end to Israeli settlement expansion and a lifting of the blockade on Gaza, with some also calling for an end to Palestinian rocket fire and incitement.

France’s representative said his country had limited expectations for progress in the current talks, stressing that the will of the parties, while essential, was not enough. Only an international follow-up mechanism could create the necessary dynamics to end the current impasse and allow progress to a two-State solution, he maintained. Jordan’s representative said that an early agreement on border rectifications, based in international legality, was key to resolving the settlement issue politically, paving the way for the much-needed final-status negotiations, which would ultimately lead to freedom, security and peace.

On Syria, many speakers expressed deep concern at the continuing deaths and repression, calling for international support for efforts by the League of Arab States to end the violence and begin a Syrian-led dialogue process towards reform. Qatar’s representative, among others, supported the League’s request that the Security Council adopt its recent decisions, since “the plan is realistic and meets the different orientations of the Syrian people”.

Also speaking today were representatives of the United States, India, Togo, Colombia, Morocco, United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, China, Guatemala, Azerbaijan, South Africa, Egypt (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Lebanon, Brazil, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, Turkey, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran, Sri Lanka, Iceland, Tunisia, Syria, Cuba, Kazakhstan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Norway, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya (on behalf of the Arab Group), Venezuela, Benin (on behalf of the African Group) and Bahrain.

Also speaking today were the Head of the European Union delegation to the United Nations, and the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting began at 10:13 a.m., suspended at 1:35 p.m., resumed at 3:08 p.m. and ended at 6:28 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met today to hear a briefing by Oscar Fernández-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and to hold an open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

Briefing

OSCAR FERNÁNDEZ-TARANCO, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said he was pleased to report that after 15 months of absence of direct talks, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had started meeting on 3 January in Amman under the auspices of the King and Foreign Minister of Jordan and in the presence of Quartet envoys. Since then, a series of preparatory talks had been held and the parties had begun discussing issues related to territory and security, in accordance with the Quartet statement of 23 September 2011. They were also discussing confidence building and creating a positive environment for the success of the talks.

“We remain hopeful that the preparatory meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will continue and will ultimately lead to serious negotiations based on comprehensive proposals on territory and security, and reaching an agreement for a two-State solution by the end of this year,” he said. “Neither the international community nor the parties can afford to let this opportunity pass by,” he added.

Unfortunately, actions on the ground in the past month continued to contribute to tensions, he said, citing continued Israeli settlement activities and violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians, including the throwing of stones by both sides and Molotov cocktails thrown at Israeli cars, causing injuries, as well as the desecration of a mosque. Noting that structures belonging to unauthorized outposts had been demolished by Israeli authorities, he regretted that at the same time there were initiatives to retroactively legalize some outposts. Israeli authorities had also demolished 88 Palestinian structures in the West Bank, citing lack of building permits. Citing security, Israel had conducted 336 operations in the West Bank, resulting in 74 injuries and 273 arrests of Palestinians.

In what he called a “concerning development”, he noted the arrests of several Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as reports that the Speaker of the Council had been subjected to administrative detention. He said that Palestinian security forces had continued to maintain law and order in the parts of the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority. He noted with concern, however, the 9 January statement of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem at a televised ceremony, and reminded the parties of the commitments to end incitement.

The Palestinian Authority continued its institution building, he said, but noted that financial shortfalls could challenge the “impressive progress”. He encouraged donors to deliver their contributions for 2012 as quickly as possible. Economic growth in the West Bank, he continued, though there had been mixed figures quarter by quarter in 2011. There was a continued concentration of economic activity in services, public administration and construction. Sustained growth would require expansion of the productive base and tradable goods sector, he commented.

He said that weekly demonstrations continued against the barrier, and clashes with Israeli forces had left 28 Palestinians and 1 Israeli soldier injured. In Gaza, a total of 29 rockets and 12 mortar shells had been fired into Israel without resulting in injuries or damage. Israeli forces had conducted 6 incursions and 10 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in 4 militants killed, 7 militants injured and 15 civilians injured. He condemned in the strongest terms indiscriminate firing of projectiles, while calling on Israel to show maximum restraint. He also reiterated the call for the lifting of the Gaza closure, with due consideration for Israel’s security. At present, the United Nations had received approvals for a total of approximately \$270 million worth of projects, but key projects totalling over \$60 million had yet to be approved. He supported continuing efforts to advance Palestinian reconciliation, within the framework of previous commitments.

On Lebanon, he recounted the Secretary-General’s visit from 13 to 15 January, and said that a number of security incidents in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) showed the continued fragility and vulnerability of conditions there, including the discovery of rockets and an explosion in Tyre, both of which were being investigated, as were the rocket launching towards Israel and attacks against UNIFIL personnel that had occurred in previous reporting periods in 2011. He added that almost daily Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued.

He said that the situation along the Lebanese-Syrian border remained of concern, with three Lebanese nationals killed by gunfire on 22 December. As of 13 January, over 5,660 Syrian refugees had been registered in Lebanon. Recounting the proposal for a political plan that resulted from the 22 January meeting of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States, he said that “time is pressing for violence and human rights violations to stop and for a credible, inclusive and Syrian-led political process to start in Syria and ensuring the full exercise of their fundamental freedoms. We hope that the international community will act in a concerted and coherent manner in support of ongoing efforts for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.”

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said that “despite all odds, the

resilient Palestinian people remain hopeful that this year will bring long-awaited freedom, justice, peace, dignity and security in their homeland”, maintaining that the leadership had fully cooperated with current efforts by the Quartet aimed at advancing a two-State solution. However, he added, “the situation on the ground remains appalling and totally contradictory to all legal norms, undermining peace efforts”, citing settlement activities, which he said had in 2011 exceeded all past years, increasing by at least 20 per cent, creating thousands of “illegal facts on the ground”.

The occupying Power, he said, also continued its illegal measures attempting to Judaize East Jerusalem and alter its Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Christian demography, with demolitions, revocation of residency rights, closure of institutions, creation of ghettos and other measures, which isolated the area from other Palestinian environs. He pointed to similar activities in the Jordan Valley, which he labelled ethnic cleansing, as the Palestinian population had been reduced from 300,000 to 56,000. He said that terror and crimes by Israeli settlers were also on the rise, with a 165 per cent increase of incidents since 2009, “with nearly zero accountability for such crimes”.

Turning to Gaza, he said the Palestinian population continued to suffer from the Israeli blockade, and Israel continued to evade responsibility for massive crimes and to obstruct reconstruction following the military action three years ago. He stated that Israel, as occupying Power, was forfeiting its responsibilities. He, therefore, called on the international community, particularly the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to protect the Palestinian people. He noted that the Non-Aligned Movement had mandated its Chair to request Switzerland, in its capacity as depository, to convene a Conference of the Parties to ensure respect for the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

“The two-State solution is withering with every inch of Palestinian land seized by the occupying Power, every settlement unit constructed, every Israeli settler transferred, every wall erected, every home demolished and every Palestinian family displaced,” he said. The truth of Israel’s commitment to peace could not be measured by the mere presence of its negotiators at the table and must be measured by deeds. He said that the Palestinian people and their leadership remained committed to a peaceful, just solution and negotiations on all aspects, including the Palestinian refugee problem. They would thus continue efforts to mobilize the Security Council, as well as efforts elsewhere in the General Assembly and the United Nations system for that purpose, and appeal for the strong support of all Member States.

RON PROSOR (Israel) said it had never before been so clear that Iran was seeking to build a nuclear weapon, adding that such activities constituted the single greatest threat to the security of the entire world. “Now is the time of act,” he said in that respect, adding that the “stakes are too high”, and the “price of inaction is too great”. Iran had recently announced that it would enrich uranium to a 20 per cent level, which blatantly violated numerous Security Council resolutions. Only the pressure of a united international community could stop Iran from continuing its march towards nuclear weapons, he stressed, asking those countries who had not done so to join in that effort.

Today in the Middle East “great challenges stand on the horizon”, he said, noting that human rights continued to be trampled and unrest had shaken the foundation of the region’s political order. Yet, despite such developments, the Council continued to focus its attention on the status of “municipal building applications” in the West Bank. That issue had been discussed time and again, he said, while the time dedicated to the basic challenges facing the Middle East remained scarce. Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was important on its own merits, but the misallocation of the Security Council’s time and energy eroded its credibility.

To say that that conflict was the central conflict in the Middle East, or that Israeli settlements were the primary obstacle to peace, was not true. The primary obstacle to peace was, in fact, the so-called “claim of return”, which would mean the destruction of Israel. The idea that Israel would be flooded with millions of Palestinians would never be accepted, he stressed, but still the Palestinians would not “hear it”. The gap between their perception and reality was — and would remain — the major obstacle to peace. “You have a responsibility to stand up and say that the so-called ‘claim of return’ is a non-starter,” he told the Council, stressing that it was the job of the international community to tell Palestinians “the truth”. Additionally, he said, the Palestinian’s refusal to recognize Israel went hand in hand with a culture of incitement in mosques, schools and the media. Day after day, children were taught to pursue violence and to hate, vilify and dehumanize Israelis and Jews. In the West Bank, it was not possible to turn a

corner without seeing terrorism and terrorists glorified. A recent sermon by the Palestinian Authority's most senior religious leader had presented the killing of Jews as a sacred goal for all Muslims. The refusal of the Palestinian leadership to stand up against such messages was disturbing, and their silence "speaks volumes", he said.

With regard to negotiations, he continued, the path to peace was clear. Unilateralism on the part of the Palestinians was a dead end, and direct negotiation was the only way forward, he said, adding that recent talks in Amman were a positive step in that regard. "It's time to stop negotiating about negotiating. It's time to stop meeting about meeting. It's time to stop talking about talking," he stressed. "The bar could not be set any lower", he said, but still Hamas refused to satisfy the three conditions set by the Quartet — that it renounced violence, recognized Israel and abided by prior Palestinian agreements.

Turning to Gaza, he said that almost two rockets a day were fired into Israel last year and he stressed that the situation on the ground was very serious, and one spark could ignite a dangerous escalation. The Council had an obligation to act boldly and immediately in that respect. Yet, it had still not found the time or the will to utter a single syllable of condemnation against those attacks. "The silence is deafening," he said. Noting that the Secretary-General would visit Israel later in the month, he said he hoped the trip would bring a new perspective to the United Nations about the real obstacles to peace and security — the real issues of extremism, terrorism and incitement in the Middle East.

SUSAN RICE ([United States](#)) said that King Abdullah of Jordan had "taken a bold step and shown tremendous leadership" in bringing the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict together. Those discussions were showing promise, as the parties had already met several times. The Council's focus should now be to support the Jordanian effort and to help them take advantage of the opportunity presented by the talks. She further urged the Council to encourage the parties to create an environment conducive to progress, and condemned in the strongest possible terms any incitement to violence and terrorist attacks against Israel, meanwhile expressing concern about the safety and well-being of Gazans. She also reiterated that the United States did not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement activities on the part of Israel. "We should not lose sight" of the ultimate goals of lasting peace and security, she said.

Last fall, President Obama had reiterated the United States position, as well as the basis for successful negotiations, during the General Assembly's general debate. In an effort to operationalize that vision, on 23 September 2011, the Quartet had called on the parties to overcome the current obstacles and resume direct negotiations without delay or preconditions. Taken as a whole, that statement provided a robust framework for continued negotiations, she said. "We are now at a critical juncture", she added, stressing that the Amman talks had begun a "difficult, but necessary" process.

Turning next to Syria, where the situation continued to deteriorate dramatically, she said that scores of Syrians continued to be killed every day. As a result of the regime's failure to fulfil the requirements of the Arab League plan, there were more and more calls from the region for Security Council involvement, she said. The United States welcomed the Arab League's efforts to facilitate a transition in Syria, and believed that it was essential that the international community work together to support that stable transition. The Council should fully support that transition and the League's efforts in that respect, she added.

For its part, the United States had been very clear in its approach, having long said that President Assad needed to step aside and allow a peaceful transition to occur. It had approved sanctions last year, and continued to increase them, as had the European Union and several other nations. "It is long past time that this Council pass a strong resolution that supports the Arab League's efforts." The United States fully supported the Syrian people's demand for a democratic and inclusive Government that respected human rights and provided equal protection under the law for all citizens. She called for the opposition to refrain from violence, recalling that the Arab League Secretary-General had stated in his report this week, that the opposition was forced to carry arms, in response to the actions of the Government. "We hold the Syrian regime duly responsible for the worsening cycle of violence," she stressed in that respect. The United States was also concerned about recent reports of arms transfers to the Syrian Government, and called on States to halt any weapons transfers to the Assad regime.

Turning finally to Lebanon, she stressed that the United States remained committed to relevant Security Council resolutions and condemned a 9 December attack against United

Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers. She welcomed the Secretary-General's recent visit to Lebanon. The United States also continued to support the Lebanese armed forces, which played a crucial role in maintaining stability in their country.

HARDEEP SINGH PURI (India) said that in September, when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had presented the United Nations membership application to the Secretary-General, the Quartet had issued a statement proposing a series of steps towards restarting the peace process, which included convening a preparatory meeting between the parties within a month, commitment by the parties to submitting preliminary proposals within three months, substantive progress within six months and the holding of a donors' conference, followed by agreement to be reached on final status issues by the end of 2012. During the past four months, the Quartet had been engaging the parties separately seeking proposals on security and border issues. Meanwhile, a series of meetings had been held in Amman under the auspices of King Abdullah II. While the possibility of direct talks between the parties had remained elusive, it was encouraging that they had remained engaged in those processes, he said, adding that India believed such interaction needed to become "more serious and purposeful", aiming to resolve the main issues in a time-bound manner.

He said that if the Quartet's end of year time frame was to be realized, it would be necessary for Israel to completely stop settlement activities. Settlement construction on Palestinian land contravened international law and was incompatible with the two-State solution. Reports had shown that such construction was on the rise and that it had exacerbated the already troubling humanitarian conditions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. That situation had also ratcheted up social tensions between the Palestinian population and Israeli settlers. Turning to the situation in Gaza, he said the ongoing blockade and export restrictions continued to have far-reaching consequences. Poverty and aid dependence had increased and demand for emergency services was putting even more pressure on the already overstretched resources of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

There was an urgent need, he said, to further ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies going into the Gaza Strip. He went on to express India's support for the ongoing intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts, and urged the parties to speed up implementation of the agreement reached last year. He called for all violence in the region to end and for the international community to remain vigilant regarding the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the peace process. Recent developments throughout the Middle East made it necessary for the international community to consolidate its efforts to help countries undertake inclusive political processes and implement reforms that met the aspirations of their people. "It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue and negotiations, rather than resort to arms. No action should be taken from outside that may exacerbate the problems and give rise to extremism," he said. Finally, he said India remained convinced that Palestine met all criteria for membership in the United Nations, and he hoped the Council would support the application "sooner rather than later".

KODJO MENAN (Togo), noting the difficulties on the ground and in the peace process in the Middle East, regretted that the international community's efforts had not brought more progress. In that context, new Israeli settlement activity, the blockade of Gaza and the situation of Palestinian refugees also raised concern. He appealed for adequate funding for UNRWA, for that reason. He also called for the end of rocket fire from Gaza. Citing recent positive developments, he praised the efforts of the Quartet to bring about preparatory talks, and called on the parties to overcome their differences. He stressed that his country had good relations with both Israel and Palestinians, and had consistently supported a two-State solution, to be brought about through negotiations. He called for the end to all acts that could lead to violence, and for the Quartet to act as guarantor of any agreements reached. The Council must also bring sufficient pressure to bear on both parties to ensure that they negotiate in good faith.

NÉSTOR OSORIO (Colombia) reiterated his country's view that a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East must be comprehensive, well-structured and based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the two-State solution, which must be negotiated between the two parties. The parties must both make efforts to remove obstacles to progress and take advantage of the opportunity presented by the preparatory talks. In that light, he regretted continued settlement activity in the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza, as well as violence against Israelis and threats to Israeli security. The international community must act to ensure that both peoples could enjoy their human rights. He also remained concerned over the situation in Syria, insisting that all violence there must be ended. He urged the parties in Syria

to initiate political dialogue towards a Government of national unity and free and fair elections.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) said the international community was “at a turning point” with regard to the Middle East peace process. That process faced great challenges due to obstacles imposed by Israel, and there was a lack of political will to allow Palestinians to enjoy their rights. Those challenges, among others, had meant that a two-State solution could, unfortunately, not be achieved. Settlement policies in particular had had a negative impact on the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. There were systematic attacks carried out by those settlers against Palestinians, which were not punished by the Israeli authorities. In Jerusalem and neighbouring areas, settlement activities had increased. Respect for that city must be ensured. Moreover, the Council should shoulder its responsibility and help find a solution to that complex problem.

Today, the Council should work quickly to respect the moral and political obligations incumbent upon it and the United Nations with respect to the Palestinian people. That included their right to see their independent State come to fruition. Morocco supported all efforts to re-launch the peace process, in particular the Jordanian initiative. Morocco would not hesitate to promote all efforts to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of international legitimacy. “This conflict had lasted far too long,” he continued, adding that the ultimate solution was now clear to all. Israel must show its political will and determination to arrive at a solution taking into account the aspirations of all parties. It must show that will, and its willingness to cooperate, on the ground.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) said it had been more than one year since the start of the “Arab Spring” in Tunisia, and the process of change and reform continued across the region. While the process would be long and difficult, the United Kingdom believed that it would result in the fulfilment of the aspirations of the people. While the United Kingdom and the United Nations would support that process, the primary responsibility for that fulfilment lay with the people themselves. In Syria, he said, the regime must stop its provocations and immediately end all violence, release all those arrested during the recent protests, withdraw its military and allow international media to enter the country. It was time for the international community to take action in support of the Arab League as it worked towards a transition in that country. The United Kingdom was concerned about the sale of weapons to Syria, and strongly disagreed with the recent statement by one Council member that “continued sales [of arms] had no effect on the situation at all”.

The Palestinians, too, must secure their legitimate rights. The Amman talks had ended the protracted impasse, but they must be more than an effort to shift the blame for failure. Plans must be put forth by both parties, and talks needed to be in an atmosphere conducive to making progress; it was difficult to see how that would happen while Israeli settlements continued. Those activities threatened the very idea of a future Palestinian State. The United Kingdom, along with other Council members, was very clear that all settlement activities should end immediately, and that Israel must reverse its related plans and policies. If the parties failed to present and negotiate on issues of border and security, he stressed, it would not be for a lack of ideas, but for a lack of political will. Neither party could afford such a lack of progress.

PETER WITTIG (Germany), aligning himself with the statement to be made by the European Union, warmly welcomed Jordanian support for direct contacts between Israelis and Palestinians. The viability of a two-State solution must not be threatened by events on the ground, however, particularly settlement activity that threatened the viability of a Palestinian State. Comprehensive proposals on borders and security, as well as confidence-building measures, were needed. He welcomed Israeli actions against settler violence, and called for the halt of evictions, demolitions and restrictions on movement in Area C. Much more access was needed to Gaza, particularly for trade that could empower legitimate enterprises. Rocket fire from Gaza must end. He also strongly condemned the speech made by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. On Syria, he said that a clear signal was needed from the Council to support the decisions of the League of Arab States, which he supported in all their aspects. He would, therefore, welcome a Council briefing from that organization as soon as possible, to ensure Arab ownership of a solution with strong backing from the Council, which must speak on the issue with one voice.

JOSÉ FILIPE MORAES CABRAL (Portugal), also supporting the European Union statement to be made and expressing appreciation for those facilitating talks, called on the parties to make progress towards the two-State solution by the end of 2012, at the latest,

through negotiations in good faith and avoidance of inflammatory actions. He called on Israel to make clear proposals on borders and urged the country to lift blockages to Gaza, while he condemned rocket fire into Israel. Israel's unquestionable right to security must not come at the price of unnecessary suffering by Gazans, he stressed. He criticized the expansion of settlements and isolation of Jerusalem in the West Bank, calling on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and reiterating his country's support for the Arab Peace Initiative. He expressed continued deep concern over repression and violation of human rights in Syria, supporting the efforts of the League of Arab States and urging authorities to abide by their commitments in order to achieve a peaceful resolution of the situation.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON (Pakistan) said that while delegations debated endlessly in the Council, Palestinians, their dreams of peace and tranquillity shattered, continued to suffer at the "cruel hands" of an occupation force. Israel's settlement activity continued apace, the Quartet remained frozen in a state of "suspended promises" and the Palestinians seemingly had no recourse to address the matter. It was clear that Israeli settlement activity was illegal and was systematically reducing the space for establishing a viable Palestinian State. It was a major roadblock to peace and the Security Council should deliver a firm message to Israel that it must stop all settlement activity immediately and move towards peace. He also stressed that life in the Gaza Strip could not return to normal without free movement of persons and goods, including those essential for reconstruction.

"Palestine faces a dual conundrum — the continued inaction of the international community and the intransigence of Israel," he said, further stressing that despite "the clarity of our common goal and the framework for peace", the Security Council and the Quartet were unable to act. The Palestinian people had nonetheless surmounted overwhelming odds to make progress during the past two years in establishing State institutions. The Palestinians were indeed entitled to full United Nations membership. His Government supported lasting peace for all inhabitants of the Middle East, irrespective of religion, ethnicity and nationality. The framework for forward progress was based on relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet-backed Road Map. "Mustering and sustaining the political will to implement the framework is imperative," he said, expressing the hope that the international community would lend its moral and political weight to nudging the process towards the shared goal of an independent State of Palestine, living in peace with all its neighbours.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said the role of the international community in the political changes sweeping across the Middle East should be to assist in smoothing its path. Efforts by some to bring one group to power over another in order to serve their own interests were fraught with consequences. As had been underscored during the recent visit of Palestinian President Abbas in Moscow, efforts to break the stalemate were critical for the stabilization in the region, and would play in favour of Israel's security. The establishment of a viable and independent State of Palestine, living in peace and security with Israel, and a solution to the refugee crisis were also essential and could be achieved only through negotiations.

The Russian Federation welcomed the talks in Amman, which were aimed at achieving an equitable and lasting solution, and hoped that both sides could take a constructive approach and refrain from any unilateral actions. His country, along with the Quartet, would work towards the re-launching of substantive negotiations. The speedy cessation of Israeli settlement activities was critical, as they were illegal and eroded efforts to achieve a two-State solution.

The Russian Federation was also concerned about increased acts of violence by Israeli settlers who went "virtually unpunished" for their actions. Such violence must cease, he stressed. In addition, the detaining of a leader of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other provocations were hardly conducive to creating the atmosphere of trust necessary for productive negotiations. In particular, he called on Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza. Furthermore, it was the full right of Palestinians to achieve membership in international organizations, and they could count on the support of the Russian Federation in that respect.

LI BAODONG (China) said his country was deeply concerned about the continued stalemate in the Middle East peace process. China had continually supported the peace process as an effort towards a two-State solution, and welcomed any attempt to break the deadlock, including the recent peace promotion by Jordan. It hoped that substantive results would be achieved. China also supported a greater role for the Security Council in resolving the Middle East issues.

Israeli settlement activities and their continued expansion were another source of concern. China urged Israel to cease such construction immediately, to be prudent in its actions and to align itself with the international peace promotion effort. The security and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territory “remained grim”, he said, calling on Israel to fully lift the Gaza blockade. China had long held that the building of an independent State was a legitimate right of the Palestinian people. It supported the creation of such a State, as well as its membership in the United Nations. Finally, he said, the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks were also important to the comprehensive solution of the Middle East conflict. China supported those countries in recovering their occupied territories.

GERT ROSENTHAL (Guatemala) said that, in the past two years, events in the Middle East had evolved “at breathtaking speed” and with “contradictory trends”. In particular, the concrete expression of the Arab Spring had taken various forms from one country to another, with differing outcomes. There were fresh signs of growing tensions, within countries and between States. In that context, Guatemala believed that any action assumed by the Council to accompany parties directly involved in processes which involved conflict should be addressed primarily through measures of preventive diplomacy, with the invocation of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter used as a last recourse. It also favoured working very closely with regional and subregional entities, including the League of Arab States.

With regard to Lebanon, he said Guatemala applauded the recent visit of the Secretary-General and commended the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for organizing the high-level meeting on “reform and transition to democracy”. It urged the Government of Lebanon to continue meeting all of its international obligations, especially those related to the Special Tribunal and those derived from resolution 1701 (2006). Turning to Syria, which he said was perhaps the most urgent topic in the region, Guatemala favoured demanding that all parties cease immediately the use of force, and adopt concrete measures which would lead to reconciliation. Popular demands made in a pacific manner could not be met by a Government using force, a situation which the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States had described in his report of 22 January. He supported agreements of the Arab League made during its recent meeting and trusted that the presence of monitors would help to bring Syria “back from the brink”.

Turning finally to the dispute between Israel and Palestine, Guatemala favoured the creation of a viable, sovereign and independent State of Palestine, living in peace and harmony behind secure and defensible borders next to the State of Israel. It welcomed the direct meetings between the parties that had taken place in Amman, Jordan, in the past weeks, and believed that the Council must continue supporting the actions of the Quartet, at the same time guaranteeing that the peace process moved forward and that a definitive solution was reached. However, there was an increasing divergence between the orientations of the Quartet and the realities on the ground, he said. The Council must address those obstacles, which included, among others, the illicit activities of expanding the settlements in the occupied territories, he said, acknowledging nonetheless the need to address the legitimate security concerns expressed by Israel.

AGSHIN MEHDIYEV (Azerbaijan) welcomed the ongoing talks and expressed hope that they would help bring about a just and lasting solution. He commented that, “in contrast to some other well-known situations involving groundless and illegitimate territorial claims, including those under the farfetched pretext of care for ethnic minority groups, the people of Palestine had been recognized as having the right to self-determination and statehood”. He, therefore, supported Palestinian membership in the United Nations. He also supported Palestinian reconciliation, and called on all parties to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.

In that context, he called for the application of all relevant legal norms in all situations of military occupation around the world, and the initiation of urgent measures to remove the adverse effects of any activities aimed at the consolidation of such occupation. The Security Council must play its role in putting an end to such illegal practices. On Syria, expressing deep concern over the destabilization, violence and widespread human rights violations, he fully supported the efforts of the League of Arab States, and stressed that the only solution to the crisis was through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process. The sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Syria and all other States in the region must be respected.

GÉRARD ARAUD ([France](#)) said his country had limited expectations for the resumption of the peace process, despite the holding of preparatory talks. He stressed that the will of parties was essential, but it was not enough. He maintained that only an international follow-up mechanism could create the necessary dynamics for progress towards the two-State solution. He also reiterated his deep concern over what he called illegal Israel practices that threatened the viability of a future Palestinian State and said that there was also an urgent need for the lifting of the blockade of Gaza. He expressed continuing support for President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, and stressed that Palestinian reconciliation must be shaped so that the peaceful settlement of conflicts prevailed.

Turning to Syria, he said that the mounting death toll from violence could be characterized as war crimes and called for the imposition of an arms embargo. He added that Member States should, in any case, not supply weapons to worsen the situation. It was clear that the obligations of the Syrian authorities, under agreements made with the League of Arab States, had not been met. He supported the decisions and initiatives of the League, and said that the United Nations should support its initiatives, through Council action. On Lebanon, he called on authorities to work with all civil society players and to meet their international obligations, including for the support of the Special Tribunal. He appealed for consistent action on the part of the Council in the context of the Arab Spring. There was a moral obligation, in particular, to address the aspirations of the Palestinian people and the continued violence in Syria.

Council President EBRAHIM EBRAHIM, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of [South Africa](#), speaking in his national capacity and associating himself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Benin on behalf of the African Group and Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, recalled that his country had emerged in 1994 from the scourge of apartheid. Taking lessons from their own experience, South Africa was certain that the Palestinians, with the support of the international community, would prevail in their quest for a viable State of their own. Everyone should play a part in fulfilling the aspirations of the Palestinian people, who had long yearned for freedom and continued to endure the harshness of the Israeli occupation. South Africa remained convinced that Palestine met the criteria for United Nations membership. Additionally, he said, a solution must be found which maintained the right of Israel to exist and which ensured long-term peace and stability for its people.

South Africa remained disappointed that tangible progress was yet to be registered in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It appreciated the recent efforts of the Quartet, he said, adding that Palestine's submission of proposals on borders and security was "emblematic" of its commitment to the prompt and peaceful resolution of the conflict. Conversely, Israel's failure to comply in submitting such proposals, as required by the Quartet, on the same issues was disappointing. It was time for the international community to ask itself if it was necessary to assess the effectiveness of the Quartet model, and whether the Security Council could do more to help the parties resume negotiations.

The settlement activities of the Israeli Government — which had continued to expand in the midst of attempts to reinvigorate the peace process — were "acts of aggression", he said; those antagonistic acts made the reality of a two-State solution "a distant, if not a pipe dream". It was the Security Council's responsibility to act against those actions, as they violated international law, including Council resolutions. Another disturbing development was the escalation of settler violence in the occupied territories, he continued. Those acts should be unequivocally condemned, he said, adding that it was vital for the Israeli Government to take action against their perpetrators. South Africa welcomed the implementation of the second stage of the prisoner release agreement, which it hoped would act as a confidence-building measure.

"The Arab Spring augurs well for the Palestinian struggle," he said, encouraging the Palestinians to take advantage of that new regional context and to strive for greater intra-Palestinian unity. South Africa remained concerned about the situation in Gaza, and concurred with the call made last year by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, for an end to the blockade. Violence and rocket attacks against Israel emanating from Gaza were also of concern and should be condemned. With regard to Syria, South Africa welcomed the Arab League's decision to extend its observer mission and emphasized that the primary aim was to end all violence in Syria. It reiterated, nonetheless, that any solution to the Syrian crisis should be "Syrian-led" and based on genuine national dialogue, devoid of any form of intimidation or interference from the outside.

MAGED ABDELAZIZ ([Egypt](#)), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said his delegation remained firmly convinced that the international community must renew its resolve to act collectively in upholding its longstanding commitment to the realization of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Serious and timely international action was required to reach consensus on the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, he said, expressing regret that all efforts undertaken to date by regional and international parties had been rendered moot by Israel's refusal to adhere to well-known parameters and its continued illegal and aggressive acts aimed at changing the facts on the ground. Indeed, Israel's actions totally contravened the two-State solution that Israel claimed to accept, chiefly evident in its "massive illegal settlement campaign", which entrenched the occupation and prolonged the conflict. The Movement condemned Israel's continued settlement construction, as well as its many other illegal practices and policies being carried out in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. "We call on the Security Council to act", and to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law.

He went on to call for the immediate implementation of the recommendations recently outlined by Under-Secretary-General Amos regarding the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to specifically address the "grave impact" of Israel's settlement policy on the Palestinian people and their lands. More broadly, he said that a strong message must be sent rejecting Israel's continued annexation and occupation of Palestinian lands, as well as its continued settlement construction and flouting of international humanitarian law. "The future of both peoples, and the region as a whole, is dependent on this message," he said, reiterating the Non-Aligned Movement's call on the Council to demand Israel abide by its international obligations.

Turning to the "critical humanitarian situation" in the Gaza Strip, he said the Movement emphasized the need to compel Israel to fully lift its "illegal" blockade. At the same time, the wider membership must remain firm in its demand for an end to the unacceptable and unsustainable situation in Gaza. The Non-Aligned Movement also expressed its support for the ongoing Palestinian reconciliation process, in the hopes that unity among all Palestinian factions would soon be restored in the interest of the aspirations of the Palestinian people. Finally, while calling on the international community to "do all we can collectively to prevent further destabilization and the continuation of this tragic conflict", he also called on stakeholders to ensure positive steps were taken regarding the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the process, especially through implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions.

NAWAF SALAM ([Lebanon](#)), associating himself with the statements on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab Group, described settlement activities, demolition of Palestinian residences and farms, destruction of olive groves, requisition of land, isolation of Palestinian communities, settler violence and other Israeli practices that he said were in complete violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. He stressed that a lasting peace in the Middle East needed to be comprehensive and just, adding that it would also require that Israel withdraw fully from the Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, and from remaining occupied areas in southern Lebanon.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VIOTTI ([Brazil](#)) said that the "glimpse of hope" offered by the Amman negotiations must be nurtured. She praised the efforts on the part of the Palestinians to participate in those talks, as well as to present concrete proposals, and urged Israel to also engage in a constructive way. Israeli settlements, which were contrary to international law, were the single most important obstacle to peace, she said. "Settlers' violence against Palestinian citizens and their property is a loud expression of the silent but undeniable violence contained in settlement construction itself," she said, adding that the creation of a culture of peace could not be expected "where settlements, demolitions, attacks and evictions are the rule". The Council should go beyond briefings and resort to other diplomatic tools that would truly allow it to fulfil its Charter responsibilities in what was perhaps the single most demanding challenge on the international peace and security agenda. Its greater involvement in search of a solution was an urgent imperative. As a first step, Brazil proposed that the Quartet regularly and fully report to the Council on its progress or lack thereof. Brazil also welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to visit Palestine in the beginning of February, she said, adding that, with regard to the situation in Gaza, her country had donated \$7.5 million to UNRWA activities related to reconstruction.

Brazil also remained deeply concerned with the situation in Syria, and unequivocally condemned the continuation of violence in that country. "Resorting to armed struggle will not

bring Syria and the region closer to the realization of legitimate aspirations for democracy, freedom and equal socioeconomic opportunity”, she stressed. At the same time, the complete cessation of political repression and the full respect for fundamental freedoms were necessary conditions for reforms to be truly credible and effective. In that respect, the Security Council could best help if it sent a clear, unified message against violence and in support of a nationally owned political process.

HUSSEIN HANIFF ([Malaysia](#)) expressed his delegation’s deep concern and growing frustration at having to endlessly debate the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the situation in the Middle East. Yet, developments on the ground were cause for pessimism and Malaysia did not anticipate that the international community would take a step closer to its goal of achieving a solution. Israel continued to expand illegal settlements in the West bank and East Jerusalem, contravening all legal norms and disregarding wide international condemnation. He said that the settlement expansion had been continuing on “an unprecedented scale” for the past decade, and had been accompanied by corresponding increase in settler violence against Palestinians and the destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure in those same areas.

As the suffering of the Palestinian people had increased, calls on Israel to stop all its illegal activities had fallen on deaf ears, “as Israel stayed on its hastened path down the wrong side of history”. He said Israel must halt such activities, which had stalled peace talks time and again. All sides must acknowledge that, to realize the two-State solution, negotiations would need to begin in a spirit of sincerity, goodwill and trust. While reaching that point would obviously be challenging, as a first step, the parties should refrain from taking provocative actions on the ground. As the deadline set by the Quartet rapidly approached for the parties to come up with proposals, Malaysia believed the Council must do its part to ensure that conditions were ripe for all parties to resume peace negotiations. Both parties must take part in the effort; the onus to compromise should not fall on the Palestinians alone, he said.

PHILIPPA KING ([Australia](#)), pledging her country’s continuing active support for the historic democratic transition under way in North Africa and the Middle East, declared: “During this period of profound political change [...] it is imperative for the future stability of the region that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is solved.” The rapidly changing geopolitics in the Middle East presented a new opportunity to reach an enduring peace agreement, yet unless that opportunity were seized, the prospects for a lasting settlement would become increasingly remote, she said. Australia had consistently supported a negotiated two-State solution, recognizing both Israel’s need for security and the Palestinian people’s need to exercise their right to self-determination.

As for the situation in the wider region, she said, Australia would continue to support the Arab League’s efforts to help bring about a positive transformation in the Middle East, including its efforts to end the bloodshed and “appalling violence” in Syria. Urging an end to the regime’s brutality and the implementation of credible political reforms that would include genuine dialogue with opposition groups, she called upon members of the Council to discharge their responsibility to deal “promptly and expeditiously” with the violence. She went on to express her Government’s “deep concern” about Iran’s nuclear activities and its failure to abide by successive Security Council resolutions. Australia was also concerned about Iran’s threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, and urged that country to respect the freedom of navigation in international waters.

TSUNEO NISHIDA ([Japan](#)) said his country supported the vision that the borders of Israel and Palestine, under a two-State solution, should be defined through negotiations and based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps and in a way that would achieve the peaceful coexistence of a viable Palestinian State alongside an Israel with secure and recognized borders. Such a solution could only be achieved through sincere negotiations, he said, calling on both sides to make the utmost effort to conduct direct negotiations, in line with the time frame set out by the Quartet.

Emphasizing that his country did not recognize any measures that risked prejudging the outcome of final-status negotiations, he called upon both sides to refrain from any provocative actions in order to build mutual trust. Japan reiterated its strong call for Israel immediately to freeze its settlement activities, while also calling on the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to fulfil its commitment to cease violence and oppose incitement. Japan also supported Palestine’s efforts to establish a State, he added.

He went on to deplore the continuing wide-scale use of force by the Syrian authorities against civilians, in spite of the presence of an Arab League monitoring mission, and emphasized the importance of the United Nations providing that mission with technical assistance. Turning finally to Egypt, he said Japan was proud of the assistance it had provided for the holding of elections through funding and shared expertise. As Egypt's stability was the "linchpin" to maintaining that of the entire region, it was to be hoped that the political process would develop in a peaceful manner, and that economic and social reforms would lead to early tangible results.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of the European Union Delegation, welcomed and supported recent efforts by the Jordanian Government to facilitate direct Israeli-Palestinian talks as part of the Quartet process. A "bold and decisive" demonstration of political leadership was needed to maintain the momentum of those talks, he said, calling on the parties to come forward with comprehensive proposals on borders and security. Stressing the Quartet's central role, he highlighted its recent efforts to ensure substantial progress within six months and to secure an agreement by the end of 2012, including a 9 October meeting in Brussels, and subsequent separate meetings with the parties in Jerusalem on 26 October, 14 November and 14 December.

Reaffirming the European Union's position on the two-State solution, he underlined the urgent need for a negotiated settlement and called on the parties to refrain from actions that undermined the prospects for peace. He also called on them to demonstrate their commitment to a peaceful solution and to the Quartet process by taking actions that could build confidence and create the necessary environment of trust to ensure meaningful negotiations that would result in a comprehensive and lasting peace. He reiterated that settlements and the separation wall were being built on occupied land, while the demolition of homes and the eviction of Palestinian citizens were illegal under international law.

Turning to the wider Middle East, he said the European Union remained deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria, including "widespread and systematic violations of human rights perpetrated by the Syrian authorities against their people". Calling for an immediate end to the violence and reiterating its strongest condemnation of the Syrian Government's "brutal crackdown," he said the European Union was deeply concerned by the Syrian authorities' lack of cooperation with the Arab League' observer missions, and urged them to comply with their commitments under the League's Action Plan. He urged all Council members to uphold their responsibilities and end the violence against the Syrian population, and to support the Syrian people in their legitimate desire for freedom and political rights.

HÜSEYİN MÜFTÜOĞLU (Turkey) said it was time the countries of the world assumed their responsibility to address the Arab-Israeli conflict. Noting with sadness the increase in settlement activities and settler violence, which remained a major obstacle to the peace process and seriously endangered the vision of a two-State solution, he called on Israel to end its settlements activities. The cornerstone of peace in the region was a just and lasting solution, he said, stressing that an independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, should be recognized. Turkey also supported Palestine's application for United Nations membership. Welcoming the recent talks in Amman, Jordan, he called for good faith on the part of both parties with an eye to a just and lasting resolution of the conflict. The Palestinian people would prove that they were capable of performing as a viable entity, he said, calling on the international community to pay attention to their funding needs. "Times ahead necessitate us to be even more vigilant," he said, emphasizing that the prolonged dispute should not be allowed to impact the rights of the Palestinian people.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO (Senegal), Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, reiterated that body's concern at what it saw as the Israeli Government's "headlong pursuit" of settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which undermined the vision of a two-State solution to the conflict. Indeed, the settlements, shielded for too long by a culture of impunity, violated the laws of occupation, resolutions of the Security Council and the Quartet Road Map. To date, the Council as a whole, unlike the majority of its members and the regional groups, had failed to fully assume its responsibilities and take the necessary decisions regarding the settlement policy.

"Our Committee shares their feelings of exasperation and urged the Security Council to take strong measures to safeguard the two-State solution before it is too late," he continued, appealing to Council members that their credibility was at stake and that they must act to limit or

avert the consequences “of a terrible tragedy”. Yet, he cautiously noted — “nether with displeasure nor wide-eyed optimism” — that, with recent preliminary meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Amman, tentative steps were being taken towards peace.

“We cherish the hope that they will pave the way for credible negotiations focusing on the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders,” he said, encouraging the Quartet and its regional partners to remain firmly committed in that regard. The Committee invited the stakeholders, particularly Israel, to return to the negotiating table on the basis of the clear criteria guaranteed by the Quartet. The resumption of negotiations must be backed by confidence measures on the ground, including an end to acts of violence, removal of checkpoints and lifting the Gaza blockade. Finally, he said the Committee remained concerned by the current impasse in the Council concerning the Palestinian application for full United Nations membership and invited both the Council and the General Assembly to fulfil their responsibilities in that regard.

DESRA PERCAYA (Indonesia), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said Israel’s continued settlement activity and wall-building endangered the two-State vision, since it caused fragmentation in the West Bank, in addition to the damaging Gaza blockade. Expressing hope that the current talks would nevertheless lead to a long-term, comprehensive and regional solution, he called on the Quartet to continue to work for a just settlement, and on Israel to help create a suitable atmosphere. The challenges were great but not insurmountable, he said, expressing support for Palestinian membership in the United Nations.

ZEID RA’AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan) reiterated his country’s position on the occupied status of the entire West Bank, according to international law, and that the Israeli settlements there were therefore illegal. The Council’s inactivity in that regard was lamentable, he said, emphasizing that Palestinian suffering must end immediately. While it was possible that more understanding could have been exercised in respect of the Israelis’ reluctance to place their trust in anyone — let alone that of the Arabs following their historical traumas — and that the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative could have been better explained to the Israeli public, he conceded, the actions of States must be guided by customary international law, which the Council must uphold. It was clear that Israel’s settlement policy violated international law, he said, adding that the early formulation of an agreement on border rectifications, based in international legality, was key to resolving the settlement issue politically, thereby opening the way for the much-needed final-status negotiations, which would ultimately lead to freedom, security and peace.

ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, reiterated his delegation’s concern about the impact of Israel’s continued settlement activities, especially their adverse effects on economic development and Palestinian access to basic services, as well as the impact of the ongoing blockade of Gaza. Bangladesh was also concerned about the occupying Power’s destruction of properties, homes and economic institutions, as well as its construction of the separation wall. It was also concerned about the inhuman treatment of Palestinian prisoners languishing in Israeli jails, he added.

It was heartening to note that at least 131 countries had recognized the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, and it was therefore morally befitting that the Council unanimously respect the will of the majority of Member States and endorse the Palestinian application. As for the situation in Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan, he called on the concerned parties to respect Lebanon’s sovereignty fully and stop their recurrent breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). Bangladesh urged the occupying Power immediately to halt its actions aimed at altering the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan.

ESHAGH AL HABIB (Iran) said one of the main thrusts of his country’s foreign policy was strengthening trust between itself and its neighbours as well as other countries in the region through active engagement and partnership. A stable and economically flourishing Middle East would create an ideal situation for all countries in that region, he said. But while Iran’s Government took seriously its continued commitment to brotherly relations with its neighbours and regional partners in the areas of security and economic development, there were mischievous attempts to sow discord and create divisions among countries in the region, he cautioned. Efforts were under way to foment sectarian and ethnic strife among them even though they had lived together in harmony for centuries.

He went on to condemn Israel’s ongoing land, sea and air blockade of Gaza as an

“aggressive and savage” action in breach of all international laws and constituting a crime against humanity. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict would only be settled when the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were fully recognized, restored and maintained. “The only solution to the Palestinian issue is the restoration of sovereignty to the Palestinian people and putting an end to the occupation.” He noted that the Israeli regime also continued its violation of Lebanon’s land, sea and air space while refusing to withdraw from occupied Lebanese villages. Its occupations and acts of aggression must end immediately, he stressed.

Responding to earlier statements, he recalled that Israel’s representative had repeatedly raised irrelevant issues in a clear attempt to deflect attention from the “long list” of crimes and atrocities that the Israeli regime had committed, including occupation, State terrorism and masterminding the assassination of innocent Iranian nuclear scientists. Iran was among the leaders in rejecting and opposing all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, he emphasized, noting that, as a State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), his country had declared on many occasions that nuclear weapons were inhuman and had no place in its defence systems. Iran’s peaceful nuclear activities were under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) supervision and many inspection teams had visited its installation, he pointed out.

However, the Council should take urgent action against the Israeli regime’s unlawful possession of nuclear weapons, he said, describing that as “the most dangerous threat to the world”. Given its history of aggression and war crimes, the Israeli regime must be condemned by the Council, he said, stressing that it must also be urged to abandon those weapons and accede to the NPT. Regarding comments about the situation in Syria, he said his delegation had been surprised to hear the “false and baseless” accusations by France’s representative that Iran had sent weapons to Syria. That accusation was another attempt by France to “whitewash” verified reports of its “hegemonic policies of the past in arming illegal armed groups in Syria”, and of its responsibility for fuelling the violence that had caused the deaths of many civilians in Syria.

PALITHA KOHONA (Sri Lanka), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, expressed hope that 2012 would bring a renewal of “constructive thinking among the parties that will lead to much-needed progress”. However, settlement activity and the blockade of Gaza would not help in building the confidence needed to reach the two-State solution, he said, emphasizing that both sides had an obligation to desist from actions that generated uncertainty, suspicion and intolerance. Member States also had a critical role in ensuring that international law was upheld, he said, calling for implementation of the General Assembly resolution on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People. Expressing hope that Palestinian membership in the United Nations would receive sympathetic consideration, he welcomed the planned legislative and presidential elections in the context of the Palestinian people’s need for unity and economic advancement.

GRÉTA GUNNARSDÓTTIR (Iceland) condemned the widespread human rights violations and recent terror attacks in Syria, saying the authorities must put an immediate end to the violence. Urging the Syrian Government to heed the Secretary-General’s call for a credible, inclusive, legitimate and Syrian-led process of comprehensive political change that would address the people’s democratic aspirations, she also urged the Council to do its utmost to prevent the situation from escalating.

On the question of Palestine, she reiterated her country’s firm support for a two-State solution, and said that developments on the ground, such as ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remained the key obstacle to peace. They continued to create conditions on the ground that were rapidly making a two-State solution unattainable, she said, emphasizing that the Council must take into account the fact that time was running out.

Expressing concern over settler violence, including the settlers’ so-called “price tag policy”, she said that, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), settler attacks causing Palestinian casualties and property damage had increased 40 per cent in 2011 and 165 per cent since 2009. More than 90 per cent of monitored complaints filed by Palestinians with the Israeli police in recent years had been closed without indictment, she said, calling on Israel to shoulder its responsibility, under international law and human rights law, to prevent such attacks while investigating those that occurred in an impartial and independent manner. She welcomed the 2011 reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, urging them to implement it as soon as possible.

She went on to point out that since she had last addressed the Council, her country had formally recognized Palestine as an independent, sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, and had established full diplomatic relations. Recalling that Iceland had supported Israel's statehood bid before the United Nations in 1947, she said Palestinian demands for self-determination were equally legitimate and long overdue. Amidst the democratic revolution brought on by the Arab Spring, Palestine could not be denied the right to statehood, she stressed, appealing to Council members to recommend that the General Assembly accept Palestine as the 194th Member State. "There is no contradiction between Palestine seeking membership of the United Nations and the Quartet-led peace process, which we fully support," she said. United Nations membership for Palestine would affirm that Member States were serious about a two-State solution, she added.

OTHMAN JERANDI ([Tunisia](#)) said that, at a time when the Middle East was undergoing great changes, and even as its people worked to regain their dignity and determine their own fates, the Palestinian people were still struggling for those very rights. There was a serious paralysis in the situation of the Occupied Territory, where Israel's repressive polices continued to deny Palestinians their most basic rights. While admiring the region's transition to democracy, the international community was "startlingly silent" in the face of Israel's defiance of all international instruments, in particular those relating to the obligations of an occupying Power towards the occupied people, he said.

For example, he continued, although Israel was obligated to respect the three major religions represented in Jerusalem and to preserve the city's character — which made any plans to change its demographic make-up unacceptable — Israel was in fact seeking to change the city's character and image in a "colonial and expansionist way". A recent OCHA report stated that such activities could not help but have an effect on attempts to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, he said, pointing out that the historical Palestinian territory was shrinking on a daily basis due to Israel's settlement activities. Ending that policy should not be considered a sacrifice, but a way to ensure compliance with international law, he said.

Recalling that Tunisia had been among the first countries to support the legitimate Palestinian request for United Nations membership, he said their demand was legitimate, as had been recognized by the vast majority of Member States, and their application should therefore not be considered a unilateral action. He praised the attempt by the Palestinian authorities to transcend their differences and close the gaps between different Palestinian groups. Hopefully they would close ranks to deal with their internal disagreements. He also recalled that the Arab States had presented a peace initiative that reflected their sincere desire for a lasting and comprehensive peace while allowing the region's people to deal with questions of reconstruction and development. Israel did not have the right to "trample on democracy or other people's rights", he said.

BASHAR JA'AFARI ([Syria](#)), comparing the Israeli-Palestinian situation to apartheid in South Africa, said that some delegations were trying to turn the Middle East agenda item towards other areas instead of dealing with the illegal Israeli occupation and practices. Calling on the Council to help the Palestinian people regain their rights, in accordance with Council resolutions, he said that was the crux of the discussion. It was not related to Syria or Iran, as some speakers seemed to think, he said, adding that they seemed to think that Israel was in compliance with international law, even though it had not ceased its practices of oppression, occupation and assassination.

He went on to point out that the Council had not risen to its responsibility to stop those practices and the situation was worsening, with the acceleration of Israeli settlement construction, the eviction of Palestinian residents and the cutting of olive trees. Arab League solutions on that grave situation went unheeded, but there was now support for the League's intervention in Syria, he said, adding that there was also support for calls urging many sorts of aggression against his country. At the same time, Israel continued its illegal occupation of the Syrian Golan, its apartheid practices, its diversion of water and other grave violations. This morning's briefing had egregiously ignored that situation, he said, calling on the Secretariat to change its policies to ensure equitable treatment.

PEDRO NUÑEZ MOSQUERA ([Cuba](#)), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, reiterated his country's support for recognition of Palestine as a full-fledged member of the United Nations, noting, however, that powerful interests opposed its application. There had been no progress in such areas as borders or security mechanisms, even through the

parties had expressed their willingness to do so. The negotiating process must resume, he said, pointing out that it had been interrupted by Israel's intransigence as it continued its settlement activities. Israel was now identifying areas of East Jerusalem for the establishment of national parks, with the aim of hampering Palestinian development. Meanwhile, there had been a 40 per cent increase in episodes of violence carried out by settlers against Palestinians, he noted.

Reiterating his concern about the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza, he said that situation must be resolved without further delay. "The Security Council cannot stand by and merely engage in meetings and general debates" on that matter, he stressed. It must play its assigned role of defending international peace and security, and should adopt concrete measures by which Israel must end its policies that flouted international law. Veto-holding Powers could not continue to manipulate the Council, as they had done with their interpretation of resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011), he said. Such actions as the illegal construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan were in breach of international law. It was not by chance that there were now attempts to lay down the same "recipe for pressure" on Syria that had been imposed in the cases of resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011), he said. Those were, in fact, attempts to bring Syria into conflict with its "brothers" in the Arab League.

BYRGANYM AITIMOVA (Kazakhstan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), urged States that had not yet done so to recognize Palestine and support its membership in the United Nations. Describing Israeli practices — including settlement expansion, construction of the separation wall, land annexation, military operations, restrictions on movement and excavations under the Al-Aqsa Mosque — as "a circle of oppression and fear", she said the Council and the Quartet should compel Israel to end its aggression and respect international law. Deliberations towards declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel and the Jewish people were of particular concern, she said, reiterating the centrality of the Palestinian cause for the entire Islamic world. She also stressed the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic character of occupied East Jerusalem, strongly reaffirming the need fully to respect the sanctity of the Islamic and Christian cultures. OIC also considered all Israeli actions to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan to be null and void, she said, demanding that Israel withdraw from that territory as well.

SIN SON HO (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the Arab-Israeli stalemate was due to Israel's stance and the "prejudicial" policies of some forces. Settlement of the Palestinian question was the core element of the Middle East conflict, and it was therefore imperative to end Israel's military occupation, discrimination and human rights abuses in Palestine as soon as possible, while enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to national self-determination in full. Pointing out that his country had officially recognized the State of Palestine in 1988, he said it had since extended unreserved support and solidarity to that sovereign State, and strongly urged the Security Council to take speedy action towards accepting its United Nations membership.

Calling attention to the "invasion" of Iranian airspace by an unmanned United States spy plane on 4 December 2011 — a clear violation of the independence and territorial integrity of a sovereign State — he strongly denounced that action and demanded that the Council take appropriate measures to prevent them. Turning to Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan, he described Israel's continued violations of Lebanese sovereignty as a serious breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The Democratic People's Republic of Korea also strongly condemned Israel's attempts to alter the legal, physical and demographic character of the occupied Syrian Golan and demanded that it unconditionally return the territory to the borders of 4 June 1967.

MORTEN WETLAND (Norway) said that the unprecedented progress in the quality and functioning of Palestinian institutions, the high levels of growth, the improved living conditions and security in the West Bank and the revival of hope for the people had been halted in 2011 and was now being reversed. In particular, reduced international financial support and shrinking private investments were creating an acute liquidity crisis for the Palestinians, while the Israeli occupation continued to hamper economic growth. Norway was also concerned about illegal Israeli settlement activity, which posed a lethal threat to a two-State solution. By continuing such activities, Israel was failing to prove its commitment, he said, stressing that it must stop all settlement construction.

He said the Donor Support Group would reconvene in Brussels on 21 March and focus on several key issues. First, it would tackle the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, which must be improved by a widening of the tax base and enhanced tax collection. Second, it would discuss the necessity of a further easing of Israel's restrictions on access and movement on development, trade and exports in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as restrictions on Palestinians using their own natural resources. Third, the donors must continue to provide assistance for the recurrent costs of the Palestinian transition, without which it would be difficult to ensure the long-term viability of the Authority and the readiness of Palestinian institutions for statehood. At their next meeting, he said, donors must take further steps to find a solution, within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), that would lift the closure and ensure movement and access through the legitimate crossing points, while also taking security challenges into account.

MOHAMMAD ALMUTAIRI (Kuwait), endorsing the statements made on behalf of the Arab Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, said that countries in the Middle East had placed in the Security Council their hopes for ending Israeli violations of international law, including the Gaza blockade, demolition of properties, forced deportations and impunity for attacks against Palestinians, all of which undermined efforts to resume the peace process on the basis of a two-State solution. It was essential that the Council send Israel a strong, unconditional message to end its illegal practices, he said, adding that the international community had an obligation to protect Palestinians under international law and to implement previous agreements. Israel must also withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and from all Lebanese territory, he said, emphasizing, however, that priority must be given to ending the expansion of settlements.

MESHAL BIN HAMAD AL-THANI (Qatar) said the meetings in Amman had not been enough to break "the vicious circle of the Palestinian cause" as long as there had been no real intention on the Israeli Government's part to make peace, as seen in its determination to continue its illegal settlement activity with increasing brazenness. States that sponsored the Quartet proposal must bring political pressure to bear, he emphasized, adding that he was "astonished" that some blamed the impasse on the Palestinian bid for recognition and their legitimate rights, which did not undermine a two-State solution at all. The solution to the Middle East crisis depended on Israel's withdrawal from all occupied territory, he reiterated.

He urged the international community to express its rejection of illegal Israeli efforts to "judaize" Jerusalem and otherwise alter the situation on the ground as well as the city's character. Turning to Syria, he said that issue was no less urgent, and recalled his country's demand for an end to the violence and violations of fundamental freedoms, there. Qatar had urged the Syrian Government to discharge its responsibility to protect its citizens, he said, stressing at the same time the need to protect the unity of the Syrian people as well as the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Recounting the efforts of the Arab League, he expressed support for its request that the Council adopt its plan, since it was realistic and met the different orientations of the Syrian people.

ABDALLAH YAHYA A. AL-MOUALLIMI (Saudi Arabia), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, stressed that Israel still practised a policy of expanding settlements. It turned a blind eye to the situation in the Middle East, while viewing with disrespect and arrogance the aspirations of the Palestinian people for freedom, self-determination and their own independent State. Saudi Arabia also viewed with considerable concern the Israeli practices aimed at changing the character of East Jerusalem, he said, calling on the international community to take action against such activities. It should take a "courageous and decisive position" in full recognition of a Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, and respond positively to the Palestinian request for United Nations membership, he said, adding that it should also call on Israel to release detainees and stop building settlements, among other things.

Saudi Arabia had presented a comprehensive peace initiative to end all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including termination of the occupation of the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory, he recalled. It was a source of pain that Israel continued to disregard that initiative, which was supported by many Member States. Saudi Arabia was also deeply pained by the suffering of the Syrian people, and called upon the authorities there to stop rebuffing the legitimate aspirations of its people through violence. Hopefully, they would find a "balanced political solution" that would preserve Syria's integrity and unity while granting the demands of its people, adding that Saudi

Arabia had decided to withdraw its observers from the Arab League mission in that country as it did not feel the mission was serious in its work. Saudi Arabia was also concerned about Iran's threats to the safety of the Gulf and its waterways, he said, calling upon that country to refrain from any actions that could threaten that safety, and not to "transcend" the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. He called for the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East, without any exceptions.

ABDURRAHMAN MOHAMED SHALGHAM (Libya), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said the sufferings of the Palestinian people required no further explanation, as they were well documented in the international media. The facts and figures recently provided by Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos were indisputable evidence that Israel did not want peace, but instead hoped to expel the Palestinians from the West Bank and take over their territory. The Council did not see those actions and restrictions on the ground, he noted, asking whether it truly approved of Israel's practices. Its "suspicious silence" in that respect could be considered approval of its actions, he said, emphasizing that, instead, the Council must take up its responsibilities in defence of the Palestinian people.

Libya had grabbed its freedom and liberty, he said, adding that, in the context of the great changes across the Middle East, Israel must realize that free Arabs who had overturned despots would never accept that their brothers continued to suffer under the yoke of Israeli occupation. Israel must therefore adopt a policy of peace, he said, adding that humankind was seeking greater peace and prosperity. Great strides were being made in science and communications, and humans were now awake to the threat of war. Able to solve problems through negotiations, people wanted peace, liberty and progress, he said, adding that they believed in cooperation on the basis of justice. Libya hoped to work with the Council to bring all those things about, he said.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) said the Council must end its double standards and reject Israel's repeated failure to comply with its resolutions, in order to ensure decisive progress, stop the suffering of the Palestinian people and prevent the ethnic cleansing that was intended to "erase" them from their lands. Venezuela supported the call by the Non-Aligned Movement to convene, without further delay, a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, he said, condemning the Israeli Government's actions aimed at obstructing the establishment of a Palestinian Unity Government and its detention of the leader of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

On Syria, he reiterated great concern and welcomed the efforts of President Bashar al-Assad to preserve the country's unity, integrity and stability while seeking a political, peaceful and inclusive settlement. He condemned the "terrorist and anti-democratic acts" hampering the reform programme that was moving forward in Syria, and deplored the manipulation of the situation that were aimed at imposing a regime that would serve the interests of imperialism and Zionism. He strongly condemned those who promoted interventionist sanctions and sought to repeat the aberration committed against Libya. On the other hand, he welcomed calls for a peaceful, constitutional and inclusive solution through dialogue and within the principles of international law, and called for Israel's withdrawal from Syrian territory and respect for Lebanon's sovereignty.

JEAN-FRANCIS RÉGIS ZINSOU (Benin), speaking on behalf of the African Group, called for an end to Israel's settlement activity and the Gaza blockade, which were illegal and helped exacerbate the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The international community should act in unison to compel Israel immediately to cease its settlement expansion, a step that was imperative in salvaging prospects for a two-State solution.

He also called for the resumption of peace talks and reiterated his country's support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. It was high time the international community acted decisively, guided by international law, to finally bring an end to the Israeli occupation, he said.

Speaking in his national capacity, he stressed Benin's support for a negotiated two-State solution, calling on the Quartet to intensify its efforts to re-establish dialogue between the parties to that end. A resolution of the Palestinian question should be accompanied by regional progress, such as the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone and universal respect for human rights, he added.

JAMAL FARES ALROWAIEI (Bahrain) said it was clear that Israel's continuing settlement activities was the major hurdle to peace, adding that its actions, by which it refused to comply with international law, frustrated the Palestinians. The Gulf Cooperation Council, during its session in 2011, had taken up developments with regard to the question of Palestine, concluding that peace could only be achieved through the creation of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and within the 1967 borders. The current session of the Council was yet another opportunity to resolve the question of Palestine through a two-State solution, he said, reiterating his country's call for the international community to accept the State of Palestine and bring about an end to the conflict. Israel must withdraw from all occupied lands, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and international law.

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