



Security Council

Fifty-eighth year

4741st meeting

Wednesday, 16 April 2003, 10.30 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Aguilar Zinser	(Mexico)
<i>Members:</i>	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Bulgaria	Mr. Tafrov
	Cameroon	Mr. Tidjani
	Chile	Mr. Valdés
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Germany	Mr. Schumacher
	Guinea	Mr. Boubacar Diallo
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Spain	Ms. Menéndez
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Wehbe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Negroponte

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Türk to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I welcome the Assistant Secretary-General, and I now give him the floor.

Mr. Türk: In the period since the last briefing on the situation in the Middle East on 19 March, the attention of the international community has been focused on the crisis and war in Iraq. At the same time, there is also a growing realization of the urgent need to address the Middle East conflict. In this regard, I welcome the recent reiteration by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair of their commitment to achieve progress through the implementation of the road map.

At the March briefing to the Council, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, spoke of a window of opportunity that had opened following the establishment of the post of Palestinian Prime Minister and the nomination of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas — Abu Mazen — to that post. We hope that Abu Mazen and his Government will soon be confirmed by the Palestinian Legislative Council. As soon as possible after that confirmation, the Quartet will present the road map to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority and will ask for their contributions as to how to move forward with the

implementation. It is then that the crucial period of implementation will start, with the Quartet playing an active and impartial role. The parties, with the full support of the Quartet and the international community, will have to take the painful steps necessary to end the current cycle of violence and suffering.

The parties and the international community must be prepared to stay the course charted by the road map, however tortuous or strewn with obstacles that course may be. In all likelihood, the road map implementation process will not be easy, but its goal — a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region — is too important for the parties to be deterred by early difficulties.

Some of those obstacles are apparent. Since the most recent briefing to the Security Council, 69 people — 64 Palestinians and 5 Israelis — have lost their lives in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. That raises the total death toll since September 2000 to 2,566 Palestinians and 766 Israelis.

On 30 March, a suicide bomber struck a cafe in the city of Netanya, injuring dozens. The Secretary-General has consistently condemned such terrorist acts. The Palestinian Authority must bring to justice those involved in planning and carrying out these attacks. The groups responsible for such acts should immediately cease all forms of violence.

In the month of March, 103 Palestinians were killed — the highest monthly death toll among Palestinians in the past 12 months. On three occasions this month, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have carried out extrajudicial killings of alleged terrorists in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These operations have resulted in the killing and wounding of dozens of Palestinians. In addition, on 11 April, a British peace activist, Tom Hurndall, was shot in the head by IDF gunfire, and he remains in a coma. This is the third incident in the past four weeks in which a foreign peace activist has been injured or killed by IDF operations.

We again call on the Israeli authorities to abandon the use of excessive force in densely populated areas and to protect the safety of civilians, in keeping with Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law. We also restate our opposition to extrajudicial killings, and we call on the Government of Israel to immediately desist from such provocative acts. Israel, of course, has a right to self-defence, but it must

exercise that right within the boundaries of international law.

We have regularly informed the Council about the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It should now be clear to all that no amount of donor assistance will alleviate the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory. The only solution is to allow the Palestinian economy to operate in a normal fashion. That can happen only with a change in the Israeli security approach that entails the removal of internal roadblocks and the lifting of curfews. This would enable the resumption of a predictable business environment, free from the restrictions that have such a negative impact on investor confidence.

I should add that the recommendations made last August by the Secretary-General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy, Mrs. Catherine Bertini, still remain to be implemented; there is still a way to go.

We should note that the damage done to Palestinian society would likely be more difficult to reverse. The latest research reports indicate that over half of the children of the Gaza Strip are suffering from acute post-traumatic stress disorder, due to exposure to violence and destruction. While it is difficult to predict the effects of this trend on Palestinian society as these children become adults, it is not difficult to imagine traumatized children becoming traumatized adults if the situation is not changed. There is also a reported increase in domestic violence — a phenomenon that tends to rise in societies under severe stress.

It is not difficult to imagine that similar pain and trauma have been inflicted on Israelis, especially Israeli children, who have been living with the fear of terrorism. Both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis, need to be relieved of the terrible burden of violence that they have borne for far too long.

Additional concern is raised by the continued construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. The all-donor Local Aid Coordination Committee recently commissioned a report on the socio-economic impact of the wall. This report will be released soon, but some preliminary findings are available.

The projected path of the wall's first phase in some places cuts as far as 6 kilometres into the northern West Bank. It cuts across roads and water networks and will form a barrier between Palestinians

on each side of the wall and their agricultural lands, wells, markets and public services. It may constrain the delivery of basic social services to Palestinian populations on the western side of the wall and inhibit their commercial exchanges if it does not feature a sufficient number of access points for the movement of persons and goods. Some Palestinian landowners have already been denied access to their property. Others are allowed to cross only by foot or donkey cart, making it difficult to transport machinery and produce.

The unilateral nature of the Government of Israel's planning of the wall, and its placement inside the West Bank, encircling such towns as Qalqilya and Tulkarm, could have a negative impact on the Quartet's efforts, through the road map, to establish a viable Palestinian State.

This description of conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip highlights the challenges facing the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Abu Mazen. He will need to build on the impressive progress already achieved in reforming the Palestinian Authority. Abu Mazen has firm ground on which to construct his administration because of his considerable success in establishing financial accountability and economic reform. He will need to work hard to bring the judicial sector's performance up to that of the financial sector.

The new Prime Minister will have two main tasks in the area of security. He will need to restore law and order in Palestinian areas and reverse the breakdown in internal security. Simultaneously, he must take immediate steps to curb terrorism and to bring to justice those involved in carrying out terrorist attacks. He must ensure that Palestinian areas are not launching pads for attacks on Israelis.

We hope that Abu Mazen will be empowered to continue and extend the Palestinian reform process. He must prove to be a leader who will provide the Palestinian people with the transparent and effective Government they deserve. He must also provide the Israelis with the partner in peace that they need.

In his work, Abu Mazen should receive the active cooperation and support of the international community, in particular the Quartet. The Governments of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, all of which have endorsed the road map, have played particularly constructive roles since Abu Mazen's appointment, as well as before, and the Quartet will remain in close touch with them in the coming months. President

Arafat, who decided to appoint a Prime Minister, and the Palestinian Legislative Council, which concurred, deserve once again to be commended for their actions.

The Government of Israel has an important part to play in ensuring the success of the new Palestinian Government. Crucial first steps would include helping to facilitate the reform process and acting to minimize the effects of security measures on the people of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The removal of internal closures and the lifting of curfews would be welcome developments. Of course, the terrorism that has beset Israel, to which Israeli men, women and children have fallen victim, presents the Government of Israel with enormous challenges. But such steps could help empower the Palestinian Authority and Abu Mazen to take action against terrorists.

Recent statements by Prime Minister Sharon in support of a peace process in which he acknowledges that Israel might need to make what he called “painful concessions”, including the removal of some settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, are to be welcomed. Israel’s early embrace of the road map and active implementation of the process would seem to be an essential manifestation of the support expressed by Mr. Sharon.

I will now turn briefly to the regional situation. Since our last briefing to the Security Council, the situation along the Blue Line has remained calm. The level of tension, however, remains high. In recent days, this tension has been amplified by dozens of Israeli air incursions into Lebanon and the ensuing Hezbollah anti-aircraft fire.

Both sides have assured their United Nations and other interlocutors that they intend to maintain a calm environment during this time of regional instability. The Lebanese authorities have maintained a visible security presence in south Lebanon, conducting patrols and setting up mobile checkpoints throughout much of the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Lebanese army has further fortified earthworks and other obstacles along the Blue Line. We are very concerned, however, by the number and location of new Hezbollah anti-aircraft guns near the Blue Line.

Several days this month saw a pronounced increase in Israeli air violations of the Blue Line, with Israeli aircraft seen over Lebanon in the greatest numbers since the Israeli withdrawal from south

Lebanon in May 2000. This disturbing development stands in contrast to Israel’s stated intention. Hezbollah has reacted with anti-aircraft fire, some of it aimed across the line — an action which threatens the current calm. These hostile acts from both sides could lead quickly to deterioration on the ground. It is incumbent upon both Lebanon and Israel to prevent any escalation along the Blue Line, and important for the international community to use its influence to this end.

We appear to be on the verge of restarting a Middle East peace process through the Quartet’s road map, which is to be presented to the parties once the Palestinian Cabinet has been confirmed. At this point, in the face of the grim reality on the ground, with terrorist attacks on Israelis continuing and the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip deepening, the process is at this point only a promise. The path ahead charted by the Quartet represents the only realistic hope for ending the current cycle of violence and counter-violence. The road map, which provides parallel responses to security, political and economic or humanitarian issues, entrusts responsibilities to each of the actors involved in its implementation.

Each of those actors must embrace the road map — as drafted on 20 December 2002 — and work for its implementation, and each should take particular early steps. The Palestinian Authority must take immediate and effective action against terrorism. The Government of Israel must ease the humanitarian plight of Palestinians by lifting the internal closure and curfew regime. The international community should give this initiative its full, consistent and impartial support in order to help the parties successfully navigate the challenges ahead.

A number of observers have suggested that the road map is far from a perfect document, and that it does not meet all of the needs of the parties. Of course, no plan is ideal. In the heated environment of the Middle East conflict, with trust between the parties virtually non-existent, it is easy to argue that any steps on the path to peace carry with them potential hazards. That may be true. It is also true that the absence of a negotiated settlement has led neither to peace nor to security for the peoples of the Middle East. The path to peace along the road map will be difficult and strewn with obstacles. The alternative is a continued cycle of violence and of economic and social dislocation.

The road map remains the best prospect for achieving the vision of two States — a secure and prosperous Israel and an independent, viable, sovereign and democratic Palestine — living side by side in peace and security. The United Nations has participated very actively within the Quartet to draft the road map and looks forward to its imminent presentation to the parties. The Quartet has placed before the leaders and the peoples of the region the possibility of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the next few

years. We hope that they will grasp this opportunity and that they will make peace a reality.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Türk for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.