



Security Council

Fifty-eighth year

Provisional

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Wednesday, 19 November 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
<i>Members:</i>	Bulgaria	Mr. Raytchev
	Cameroon	Mr. Tidjani
	Chile	Mr. Donoso
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	France	Mrs. D'Achon
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Guinea	Mr Sow
	Mexico	Mr. Pujalte
	Pakistan	Mr. Siddiqui
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Spain	Mr. Fernández Trigo
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Mekdad
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	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 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I now give him the floor.

Mr. Prendergast: When I last briefed the Council on the Middle East, I described a bleak situation in which peace efforts were stalled on every front, tensions were rising in the region and the parties seemed to lurch from crisis to crisis. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I called on the Israelis and Palestinians to return to the negotiating table and recommit to the road-map process, and I urged the international community to reassert its role.

Sadly, very little of the sort has occurred since the last briefing. It is true that it has been a month of relative quiet. But that quiet has been met not with positive steps, but with inaction. Everyone has waited for others to act. The Government of Israel has waited for the Palestinian Authority to form an empowered Government and for terrorism to end. The Palestinian Authority has waited for Israel to halt military operations and take steps to ease the closures that have so deeply damaged Palestinian life, for the international community to lead the parties toward peace, and for its own political wrangling to end. And we, the international community, have waited for the parties to make progress on their own, despite the

accumulation over the years of compelling evidence that they are incapable of making peace without international intervention.

Particularly now, when there is a new Palestinian Prime Minister, we cannot afford just to keep waiting. Progress towards Middle East peace cannot just be contingent on the actions expected of others. Even if the Israelis and Palestinians are not engaged face to face across the negotiating table, there is much they can do, and should do, to meet their road-map obligations. Those obligations, based on the core principle of parallelism, cannot just be bargaining chips dependent on actions by the other side.

The Palestinian Authority — whoever has control over security services — must confront and rein in militant groups that carry out terrorist attacks on Israelis. Performance, not lines of authority, should be the basis on which the Palestinian Authority is judged. The reform process is crucial, both to addressing pressing security needs and to promoting a democratic and prosperous future Palestinian State.

Israel, whose Prime Minister recently declared his readiness for his Government to carry out its road-map obligations, can and should take immediate steps to build confidence and prevent further backward progress. Such steps might include easing closures, removing settlement outposts, freezing settlement activity and halting construction of the separation barrier. Bolder steps — such as evacuating settlements in the Gaza Strip — might be necessary, if there is to be a renewal of hope and confidence and if the process is to be put back on track. Israel, like the Palestinian Authority, should be judged on its performance.

The international community must be actively engaged in assisting the parties to fulfil their road-map obligations, through the Quartet and through our own obligation to monitor and report. We, too, will be judged on the effectiveness of our efforts.

We hear talk here and there of a possible meeting between the two Prime Ministers and of another ceasefire. These tender shoots need nourishing. The peace process cannot be allowed to remain stalled. In such a dangerous environment, continued inertia could be deadly. While the past month has been relatively quiet, the dangers set out in my last briefing to the Council remain. Nothing has been done to mitigate the underlying instability.

The threat of terrorism still hangs over the head of each Israeli. As we have repeatedly stated, the Palestinian Authority — despite its obligations under the road map and under international humanitarian law — has done little to address that core issue.

For their part, Palestinians continue to suffer from closures and from Israeli military operations that kill and injure civilians. In addition, settlement activity, the construction of the separation barrier and the destruction and appropriation of Palestinian property continue to cut deep into the landscape of the West Bank, creating unwelcome facts on the ground. Israel, despite its obligations under the road map and international law, has done little to remedy the situation.

In the region, violations of the Blue Line by both sides continue, adding to an already tense situation. It remains essential to address seriously the regional track of the peace process.

Since my previous briefing to the Security Council, 44 people have lost their lives to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — five Israelis and 39 Palestinians. This raises the death toll since September 2000 to 2,947 Palestinians and 862 Israelis.

After the carnage of the past few months, one might conclude that the absence of large-scale successful terrorist attacks by one side and extrajudicial killings by the other during the current reporting period is an improvement. However, the deaths of more than one Palestinian each day since the previous briefing, including five children aged 16 or under, and the killing of five Israeli soldiers, highlight the need for increased seriousness of purpose on the part of the parties and the international community towards achieving peace.

Last week, the Palestinian Legislative Council confirmed the appointment of Ahmed Qurei — Abu Ala — as Palestinian Prime Minister. We welcome Mr. Qurei's appointment and expect him to take immediate steps to establish law and order, control violence and start operations to confront those who engage in terror. Such steps would begin to address Israel's security concerns and build the confidence necessary to develop a partnership for peace. The United Nations will do all it can to assist Mr. Qurei and his Government to implement the road map and pursue the path to peace.

As we have stated in each of the monthly briefings to the Security Council, the humanitarian situation, largely caused by Israeli security measures in the occupied Palestinian territory, continues to worsen. Movement restrictions on Palestinians continue to hamper everyday life and strangle the Palestinian economy. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as of 1 November there were 757 barriers of various types blocking roads in the West Bank, affecting the movement of 2.3 million people. In the Gaza Strip, movement on the north-south roads and around Gaza City has also been severely limited owing to the continued presence of barriers. The number of Palestinians with permits to leave Gaza and enter Israel remains minimal.

As we have described in previous briefings to the Security Council, the Israeli policy of restrictions on movement affects the ability of donors to carry out their work, as well as the ability of Palestinians to move freely through the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The donor Task Force on Project Implementation has prepared a paper that sets out the situation and concludes that measures taken by the Government of Israel on security grounds have greatly increased the difficulty and cost of providing social, economic and humanitarian support to the Palestinian civilian population. The operational environment has now deteriorated to a degree that many donors consider both unmanageable and unacceptable. Such measures compromise our work and have dramatically negative and indiscriminate effects on the living conditions of the civilian population.

The Government of Israel has given multiple assurances from the highest levels that donor activity and humanitarian aid will be fully facilitated. However, those assurances contrast starkly with the facts on the ground. As we have repeatedly stated, the international community lacks an empowered interlocutor on the Israeli side with whom donor representatives can discuss policy issues and solutions. In the absence of significant improvement of the conditions under which the international community operates, many donors are now reviewing the basis on which their operations in the West Bank and Gaza can continue.

We call upon the Government of Israel to take immediate and practical steps to live up to its assurances that it will do all it can to facilitate humanitarian and emergency aid efforts. We recognize

Israel's right and duty to defend its people from terrorism, but that should not be at the expense of the Palestinian people as a whole.

The humanitarian crisis among Palestinians is exacerbated by the funding shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is the pre-eminent agency for support to Palestinian refugees. The high natural growth rate of the registered refugee population, combined with the overall economic deterioration, means that the reduction in donor support to the Agency is potentially disastrous. Some 60 per cent of Palestinian refugees are living below the poverty line and dependent on UNRWA for basic services. We urge donors to provide UNRWA with the level of funding necessary to effectively carry out its important work.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting of donors planned for November in Rome and described in the previous briefing to the Council has been postponed. That decision was made in part to allow more time for the new Palestinian Government to prepare for the meeting.

We have regularly reported on Israel's construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank and called for the Government of Israel to halt its construction. We have expressed grave concerns about its route, its likely humanitarian effects on Palestinians, its possible impact on the peace process and its implications for the future of the two-State solution. On 21 October, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly adopted resolution A/ES-10/13, calling on both parties to fulfil their obligations under the road map and demanding that Israel stop and reverse the construction of the separation barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Assembly requested that the Secretary-General report periodically on compliance with the resolution, with the first report focusing on the separation barrier. Later this month, the Secretary-General will present his report to the General Assembly, drawn from United Nations sources, as well as from consultations with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Nevertheless, planning and construction of the barrier on Palestinian land has continued unabated. Such unilateral acts by the Government of Israel are not only inconsistent with its obligations under the road map, but also in complete contravention of the

spirit of that document. Continued construction of the barrier, on another people's land, raises the level of suffering, diminishes trust and makes the realization of the vision of two States — a viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel — much more difficult.

I regret to inform the Council that the situation along the Blue Line has continued to remain tense. The current reporting period has been marked by events that raise serious concerns. Each side has continued to violate the Blue Line, and we have again called on all parties to refrain from such violations.

On 27 October, Hizbullah fired rockets and mortars at Israeli military positions in the Shaba'a Farms area. The Israeli Defence Forces responded with mortar rounds, artillery and aerial bombs. Minor injuries to a civilian on the Lebanese side were reported. There were no reports of any injuries on the Israeli side. At that time, Mr. Roed-Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, publicly reiterated our call on the Government of Lebanon to exert control over the use of force from its territory and urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint.

Israeli air violations of the Blue Line have continued. On 22 October, Israeli jets crossed the Blue Line into Lebanese airspace on nine separate occasions. Shortly after the first of those violations, there was anti-aircraft fire from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line. Further Israeli overflights took place daily from 2 to 6 November, eliciting further anti-aircraft fire on one occasion. Continued and intrusive Israeli overflights over the past few days have not contributed to the defusion of tension.

On 5 November, the Israel Defence Forces informed the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) that they had identified on the Blue Line, in the vicinity of the village of Ghajar, a number of booby-trapped explosive devices that allegedly had been placed there by armed elements from the Lebanese side. Shortly thereafter, the IDF began to destroy those devices.

I do not think I need remind the Council of the current bleak situation in the region or of the further dangers that escalation along the Blue Line could bring.

Nevertheless, I wish to emphasize to all parties the importance of exercising restraint and of refraining from further violations that might lead to destructive consequences.

The period of inertia, excuses and conditionality in Middle East peacemaking must end. Efforts for peace cannot be held hostage to actions by extremists. Instead, we must take advantage of the current opportunity to make progress. There is now a Palestinian Government. The Israeli Government has reiterated its commitment to the road map. Track two initiatives — namely the Geneva Accord and the Ayalon-Nusseibeh statement of principles — underline the existence of a glaring vacuum in peacemaking. As such, they are very welcome. They have caught the imagination of both peoples — Israeli and Palestinian. They have revealed a strong underlying desire for a peaceful settlement. They have revived the hope of each side that in the other there is a partner for peace.

It is neither worthwhile nor constructive to spend time on analyzing who has what authority in the Palestinian Government or on speculating as to the seriousness of the Israeli Government's commitment to the process. Let us rather take this opportunity to judge the parties by their actions. Those actions and the readiness of the international community to play its part will speak louder than any words. We must fervently hope that future generations will judge that our actions prepared the way for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, so long-awaited and longed-for, so long delayed.

The President: I thank Mr. Prendergast for his comprehensive 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 discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.