



Security Council

Sixtieth year

Provisional

5128th meeting

Tuesday, 22 February 2005, 3 p.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Adechi	(Benin)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Benmehidi
	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	Brazil	Mr. Tarrisse da Fontoura
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Motoc
	Russian Federation	Mr. Denisov
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Mahiga
	United States of America	Mrs. Patterson

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): 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. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security 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. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Prendergast: Since I briefed the Council last month on the Middle East, people across the region have had their hopes rekindled for progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians. They have, at the same time, been angered and outraged by the cold-blooded terror attack in Lebanon that took the life of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and others.

The hope flows from the summit meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon that took place in Sharm el-Sheikh on 8 February, hosted by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, in the presence of Jordan's King Abdullah. At Sharm el-Sheikh, President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon reaffirmed their commitment to the road map. Signalling their desire to break away from bloodshed and despair, the two leaders agreed that "all Palestinians [would] stop all acts of violence against Israelis everywhere" and that "Israel [would] cease all its military activity against all Palestinians everywhere".

Both parties have since taken actions to keep up the momentum generated by the summit. Indeed, it is our hope and expectation that the understandings reached at the summit will be implemented fully and on time. The Government of Israel announced that it would release 900 prisoners and withdraw from five

West Bank cities and the surrounding areas. On 21 February, 500 Palestinian prisoners were released. Negotiations to resolve impediments to the Israeli withdrawal are continuing, and we hope that Jericho, as well as Tulkarem, Qalqiliya, Bethlehem and Ramallah, will soon be handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

We commend Israel's decision to halt punitive house demolitions. Israel also reopened the three crossing points into Gaza — Erez, Rafah and Karni — after temporarily closing them in the wake of Palestinian attacks. Israel announced, moreover, that it was issuing more work permits, bringing the total number of workers authorized to enter Israel via Erez to 1,600. New permits were issued to 300 merchants and 600 labourers for the Erez industrial zone.

On the Palestinian side, President Abbas has acted courageously to end violence. In the past month, the Palestinian Authority deployed 1,000 security officers along the Gaza Strip's northern border with Israel and hundreds more in the central and southern districts of Gaza. President Abbas also relieved three top security commanders in Gaza of their duties following a raid by militants against a Palestinian Authority prison in Gaza, during which three inmates were killed, and the firing of dozens of mortar shells against Israeli settlements on 10 February. Fulfilling an important obligation under the road map, Abu Mazen also restructured the security services into three main branches — the national forces, the intelligence forces and the police — all of which will report to the Palestinian Prime Minister.

Together, those steps demonstrate President Abbas's determination to prevent future attacks. An important result of his efforts came on 12 February, when Hamas and Islamic Jihad agreed to a temporary ceasefire. We call on those groups to eschew terror and armed confrontation with Israel and to choose the peaceful, democratic road of negotiations and political activism. The path taken by President Abbas will not be easy. If he is to prevail against those who favour violence over peace, he will need strong support from both Israel and the international community.

In addition to the positive steps taken by each party, we are most encouraged by the resumption of direct engagement between them. Most significantly, Prime Minister Sharon has reiterated his readiness to coordinate with the Palestinians the disengagement

plan from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank, and the first meetings to that effect have taken place. Vice-Premier Peres has met with a number of senior Palestinian officials to begin coordinating the civilian and economic aspects of Israel's withdrawal. We commend Prime Minister Sharon's steady commitment to disengagement in the face of a serious escalation in threats and protests from his domestic opponents. In an important decision, on 20 February the Israeli Cabinet approved in principle the evacuation of settlements under the disengagement plan. The Knesset also demonstrated support for the Prime Minister by passing, on 16 February, the Compensation and Evacuation Law. That law is an essential step in carrying out the withdrawal plan.

As members of the Council will have noted, there are many positive developments to be welcomed and encouraged. At the same time, we need to be aware that the conflict continues and that it continues to bring an unacceptable toll of death and suffering.

Over this past month, 54 Palestinians and 8 Israelis were killed, and 150 Palestinians and 46 Israelis were injured. On 13 January, Hamas, the Popular Resistance Committees and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade attacked the Karni crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip, killing six Israeli civilians. In response, Israel announced that it would temporarily cut all ties with the Palestinian Authority, and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) renewed military incursions into Palestinian areas, which had been suspended since the Palestinian presidential elections. On 15 and 16 January, eight Palestinians were killed in Israeli military operations throughout the Gaza Strip. Palestinian militants fired large numbers of Qassam rockets and mortar shells, which critically wounded a 17-year-old Israeli girl in Sderot on 15 January. I am very sorry to report that she died six days later.

On 31 January, a 10-year-old Palestinian girl was killed in the yard of a school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the southern Gaza Strip. This is the fourth tragic incident in the past year in which a Palestinian child has been killed by Israeli fire into an UNRWA school. As we have stated here before, all United Nations buildings and installations — but especially schools — must be kept safe and protected at all times. Our concern has been conveyed to the Government of Israel, and we are now awaiting the outcome of an IDF investigation into the incident.

Despite the vastly improved political climate and the initial measures that Israel has instituted, most movement restrictions for Palestinians remain in place, in the form of checkpoints, curfews and the permit system. The lack of improvement in the daily lives of ordinary Palestinians poses a serious threat to the viability of a renewed peace process.

Closure continues to impact on humanitarian operations, as well. Frequent and prolonged closure of the Karni crossing into Gaza has created a backlog at Ashdod port of more than 900 containers destined for UNRWA, costing the Agency storage and demurrage charges of more than \$30,000 a day. With an additional 390 empty containers remaining inside the Gaza Strip at a daily cost of \$7,000, UNRWA has incurred total storage and demurrage charges of more than \$4.5 million since March 2004. We hope that current Israeli efforts to alleviate this situation will lead to a satisfactory and lasting solution.

On 20 February, the Israeli Cabinet approved the revised route of Israel's barrier in the West Bank, which, although it has been moved closer to the Green Line, still incorporates a large amount of Palestinian land. To the south of Jerusalem, the new route places the Gush Etzion settlement block on the Israeli side of the barrier and surrounds four Palestinian villages with some 18,000 residents, plus a sizeable amount of Palestinian agricultural land. The Government restarted barrier construction in the Salfit area of the northern West Bank around the settlement of Ariel, raising concerns that large amounts of Palestinian territory might end up being incorporated on the Israeli side. Barrier activity also intensified in the Jerusalem area, where a large number of confiscation orders have recently been served to landowners.

We recognize Israel's right and duty to protect its people against terrorist attacks. But, now more than ever, we urge the Government of Israel to address its legitimate security needs in ways that do not increase suffering among Palestinians, prejudice final status issues or threaten the longer-term prospects for peace by making the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State more difficult. We reiterate our call on Israel to abide by its legal obligations as set out in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15.

The international community has come together in support of the new momentum to assure the parties

that they are not alone and that we will accompany them along the road to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The Quartet principals will meet on the margins of the London conference on 1 March, following contacts at the envoy level during the past month. They will review the progress that the parties have made to date and decide on further action over the coming months.

The London conference, hosted by the Government of the United Kingdom, will bring together the members of the Quartet, the Group of Eight, a range of key donors and the Palestinian Authority. Prime Minister Qurei will present the Palestinian Authority's reform agenda and, together with the other participants, will assess suitable mechanisms to help the Palestinians lay the groundwork for an independent, sovereign, viable, contiguous and democratic state. The Secretary-General will attend this important and constructive meeting.

The London conference, while not a donor event, offers an opportunity for the international community to be updated on the Palestinian Authority's precarious fiscal situation and to provide urgently needed funds for short-term assistance. At the end of January, the Palestinian Authority had received only \$20 million from the United States and \$5 million from Norway, out of a total of \$660 million pledged for the year. The United States and others have since announced plans for additional support. Consolidated action is needed from the international community to ensure the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority at this pivotal time.

At the outset, I mentioned the outrage caused by the atrocious terrorist attack in Beirut on 14 February that killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 14 others. The funeral for Mr. Hariri and his colleagues took place on 16 February. Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi represented the Secretary-General.

Pursuant to the Council's request that the Secretary-General urgently report on the circumstances, causes and consequences of the killing of Mr. Hariri, the Secretary-General acted promptly to select a team, headed by Mr. Peter Fitzgerald of Ireland, who is a senior law enforcement official. The team, which includes other staff with relevant

expertise, will make contact with Lebanese officials and others in order to gather such information as is necessary for the Secretary-General to report to the Council in a timely manner.

Turning to southern Lebanon, during the reporting period there have been several disturbing incidents along the Blue Line, but no serious escalation. On 14 January and again on 17 January, Hizbullah detonated explosive devices along the Blue Line, fortunately without causing any casualties. We reiterate our call on the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority throughout its territory.

In response to those attacks, Israel carried out immediate air strikes against Hizbullah targets in southern Lebanon, reportedly injuring two Lebanese civilians. Israel's security Cabinet approved in principle a military operation along the Blue Line on 19 January. The operation did not take place, thus averting a further escalation of the situation. Regrettably, however, a total of 30 Israeli overflights were recorded during the past month, some of which were reported to have been deep in Lebanese territory. We reiterate our position that these air violations must cease.

By their meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh and the measures taken subsequently, Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas have stirred widespread hope that Israelis and Palestinians may finally be on the path to peace. They have effectively restarted the process to implement the provisions of the road map, as endorsed by the Council in its resolution 1515 (2003). The end goal remains settling their conflict, ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian State living side by side with a secure Israel. We are convinced that 2005 is a year of opportunity. We fervently hope that, as the Secretary of State of the United States, Condoleezza Rice, put it, the international community will help the parties to transform opportunity into achievement.

The President (*spoke in French*): 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 discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.