



Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7243rd meeting

Monday, 18 August 2014, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Sir Mark Lyall Grant	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Ms. King
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Jordan	Ms. Kawar
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mr. Sarki
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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14-50905 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 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 rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: We meet today against the backdrop of a restive region with heightened political tensions and a severe security threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front, as well as the recent attacks by violent extremist groups from Syria against the Lebanese Armed Forces and the internal security forces in the Lebanese town of Aarsal. Given that the Security Council has already been seized of those very worrisome situations, with its adoption on 15 August of resolution 2170 (2014), on countering the threat of ISIL and the Nusra Front, and with its press statement of 4 August on Lebanon (SC/11507), I would like to focus my briefing today on the situation in Israel and Palestine, with an emphasis on Gaza.

As we meet, the temporary ceasefire between Israel and Gaza, now on the fifth and last day of its current extension, is holding, with Israeli and Palestinian delegations in Cairo meeting separately with the Egyptian authorities in a crucial effort to break the deadlock of violence and retaliation. I recently travelled to Cairo in support of those important talks, and the Secretary-General has continued to engage with the parties and the stakeholders to end the violence and to reach a durable ceasefire. The hopes of the people in Gaza for a better future and of the people in Israel for sustainable security rest on those talks, and we call on the delegations to live up to that responsibility. By the deadline later today — midnight Cairo time, or 5 p.m. here in New York — we urge the parties to reach an understanding on a durable ceasefire that also addresses the underlying issues afflicting Gaza, or to make substantive progress towards it. At the very least,

we hope that the ceasefire will be extended and that the situation remains quiet.

I think we all share the relief that no blood is being shed at the moment, but we also all regret that it has taken too much time and too many lives to achieve this pause. The toll of this third major escalation in Gaza in six years is appalling. A total of almost 2,000 Palestinians have been killed, of whom 459 are children and 239 are women. Civilians represent more than two thirds of that total. Some 10,000 — again, roughly a third of them children — have been injured. Sixty-four Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, two Israeli civilians and one foreign national have reportedly been killed. A few dozen Israelis have been directly injured by rockets or shrapnel.

In the face of that devastation and loss of life, the United Nations has mobilized its every effort, including through the personal engagement of the Secretary-General, and is working closely with regional and international stakeholders to end the violence. We did not relent, despite setbacks, because the loss of civilian life was so unbearable. On two occasions, we were successful. On 17 July and 26 July, humanitarian pauses provided civilians with a much-needed respite from the violence. The temporary ceasefire that currently prevails has granted civilians another such reprieve for the past eight days, and I would like to commend the Government of Egypt for brokering it. It is essential that the guns remain silent to allow civilians to resume the necessities of their daily lives and to allow for increased humanitarian and early recovery efforts to address the manifold needs of the people in Gaza, such as urgent repairs to water and electricity networks and efforts to find more viable shelter for those displaced who are not able to return to their destroyed homes.

It remains my conviction that we must not leave Gaza in the condition it was in before this latest escalation. Otherwise, the restrictions on the Strip on the exit and entry of goods and people will continue to fuel instability, underdevelopment and conflict, and I am afraid the next escalation will be just a matter of time.

As I told the General Assembly recently from Cairo, the basic equation must consist of ending the blockade on Gaza and addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. That has become even more urgent given the unprecedented amount of destruction wrought on the Strip during this latest escalation and

the corresponding unprecedented level of humanitarian needs. The assessment of Gaza's reconstruction needs has not yet been completed, but there are indications that the volume of reconstruction will be approximately three times that needed after operation Cast Lead in 2009. Approximately 16,800 housing units have been destroyed or severely damaged, affecting some 100,000 Palestinians.

Reconstruction is the main priority, while exports and transfers are crucial to help Gaza's economy get back on its feet. Construction materials — aggregate, bar and cement — must be allowed into Gaza to that effect, and their access to Gaza must be facilitated in such a way that it fulfils Israel's security concerns.

The United Nations stands ready to lend its support in that regard. For years, the United Nations has been importing construction materials for United Nations projects under a mechanism agreed with the Government of Israel, which comprises robust measures to monitor the exclusively civilian use of all materials entering under that mechanism. That system has demonstrably worked, prevented the diversion of materials, allowed the successful implementation of crucial projects and built trust. Reconstruction of the magnitude now needed can be addressed only with the involvement at scale of the Palestinian Authority and the private sector in Gaza, which means that larger quantities of materials entering Gaza are required. We stand ready to explore with the relevant stakeholders how the proven United Nations mechanism can be expanded to monitoring a Palestinian Authority-led, private-sector-driven reconstruction programme in Gaza.

The engagement of the donor community will also be indispensable to help Gaza back get back on its feet. We support today's announcement by Norway and Egypt that they will co-host a donor's conference once a durable ceasefire is in place and adequate access conditions have been established.

I am heartened that the Government of national consensus has resolved to spearhead the reconstruction agenda for Gaza as part of assuming its rightful responsibilities as the legitimate Government of Palestine, in cooperation with the United Nations and other international partners. Last week, I met with Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Abu Amr in Gaza. I appreciate that he was able to enter Gaza via the Erez crossing. After seeing with my own eyes the massive destruction, in which entire residential neighbourhoods

were flattened, I discussed the way forward with the Deputy Prime Minister and his Cabinet ministers. Mr. Abu Amr assured me that the Government of national consensus was committed to addressing the urgent and daunting challenges of governance, reconstruction and security as part of bringing Gaza back under one legitimate Palestinian Government that adheres to the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments. I reiterate the appeal that I made last week in Gaza. I call on all in Gaza to rally behind the Government of national consensus and empower it to take charge and effect the positive, transformative change that Gaza so badly needs. Right now, Gaza urgently needs houses, hospitals and schools, not rockets, tunnels and conflict. We expect Hamas and all other factions to act responsibly in that regard and refrain from any actions that run counter to that agenda.

We have been extremely troubled during this escalation by breaches of the inviolability of United Nations premises. On three occasions, there were direct hits on United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools that were being used at the time, with full knowledge of the parties to the hostilities, as shelters for Gazans who had fled their homes to seek safety from the fighting. A total of 38 people were killed in those three incidents, and 317 were injured. Eleven UNRWA colleagues were killed in the line of duty. They, as many others, have paid the ultimate price for their heroic efforts aimed at protecting the most vulnerable and to alleviate suffering, for which we honour their memory. An estimated 108 UNRWA installations have been damaged. On 29 July, the Gaza branch of my own office, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, was hit by a number of projectiles, which caused damage to the main building and to United Nations vehicles. On three occasions, rockets were found in UNRWA schools that were vacant at the time. Those incidents are intolerable, and they are examples of the parties' disrespect for the vital provisions of international law that safeguard United Nations installations and staff and protect civilians. The Secretary-General has called for a thorough investigation into those incidents to ensure full accountability.

It is not yet clear what kind of ceasefire understanding will emerge from the talks or whether it will be reached by the fast-approaching deadline. In any case, we believe that a sustainable solution must

address the issues of governance, reconstruction and security — all in the context of the return to Gaza of one legitimate Palestinian Authority that will undertake institutional restructuring, including of the security sector, and that should also gradually assume the effective and exclusive control of the use of force through the deployment of Palestinian security forces to border crossings and throughout Gaza. None of that will be easy, but we see no other way to change the dynamics in Gaza. As needed, in cooperation with other partners such as the European Union, the United Nations will support the Government of national consensus in those tasks, while taking advantage of our presence on the ground. We are ready to take on that role provided that we are given the relevant resources and mandate. We also underline the importance of an international monitoring arrangement in support of the ceasefire understandings. Given the implications for peace and security in the region, I trust that the Council will consider taking whatever action is needed in support of a durable ceasefire at the appropriate time.

The flare-up in Gaza has also been accompanied by increased tensions and violence in the West Bank. Since 23 July, demonstrations against the Israeli military operation in Gaza have taken place across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, on an almost daily basis, especially around checkpoints and refugee camps, often resulting in clashes with Israeli security forces. The most significant took place on 24 July during the holiest night of Ramadan, when approximately 4,000 to 5,000 Palestinians, including some Palestinian Authority officials, marched on the Qalandiya checkpoint. Demonstrations and clashes have spread as well in East Jerusalem. A total of 17 Palestinians were killed, including two children,

and some 1,400 injured during this reporting period. Israeli security forces conducted almost 300 search-and-arrest operations, arresting 623 Palestinians. Seventeen Israeli security forces personnel were also injured. Settler attacks resulted in 1 Palestinian killed and 19 others injured. Twelve settlers were injured by Palestinians.

On 4 August, on a street near the Green Line in Jerusalem, an excavator driven by a Palestinian ran over and killed an Israeli pedestrian and then turned over a bus, injuring five Israelis. The Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli police on the scene. On the same day, an unknown motorcyclist shot and injured an IDF soldier in the Mount Scopus area in Jerusalem.

Last but not least, we must not lose sight of the bigger picture. The increasingly restive situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, together with the Gaza crisis, should be a bleak warning to all concerned of what the future will bring if we do not reverse the current negative trend towards a one-State reality, which is now on the parties' doorstep. The slide towards a state of permanent conflict and hopelessness must be halted at once. The conflict and the occupation that began in 1967 must be ended. The two-State solution is the only viable scenario in that regard. We must urgently call upon and support both parties to return to meaningful negotiations towards a final status agreement in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.