



Security Council

Seventy-third year

8265th meeting
 Wednesday, 23 May 2018, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

President: Ms. Wronecka (Poland)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
China	Mr. Shen Bo
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
France	Mr. Melki
Kazakhstan	Mr. Koishybayev
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
Sweden	Mr. Skoog
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 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. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us via video tele-conference from Jerusalem.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: On 15 May, I briefed the Council on the deadly protests that took place in Gaza the day before (see S/PV.8256). At least 60 people were killed and the number continues to climb. It was a tragic day in the long history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, another reminder of the need to bring peace to this troubled land. It was also a reminder of how easily violence in Gaza flares up. It was a reminder that Gaza is on the verge of collapse, that its people — who have lived for more than a decade under the control of Hamas, with crippling Israeli closures and with diminishing hopes for an end to the occupation and a political solution, and who have survived three devastating conflicts — are increasingly desperate. We must act urgently to avoid another war, to alleviate the suffering of people and to empower the Palestinian Government to take up its responsibilities in Gaza.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in the past month 76 Palestinians, including 11 children, have been killed by Israel Defence Forces and over 3,000 injured by live fire and other means. This period has seen by far the worst levels of violence since 2014. There have been no Israeli fatalities. Following the 14 May violence, the Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States held an emergency meeting in Cairo and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held an emergency summit in Istanbul. I also take note of the adoption of the resolution of the Human Rights Council on 18 May,

which calls for the establishment of a commission of inquiry into the events in Gaza.

Let me reiterate what I said last week in this Chamber by calling on all to join me in condemning in the strongest possible terms the actions that have led to the loss of so many lives in Gaza. Israel has the responsibility to calibrate its use of force, to not use lethal force except as a last resort under imminent threat of death or serious injury. It must protect its citizens, but it must do so proportionally and investigate every incident that has led to a loss of human life.

Hamas, which controls Gaza, must not use the protests as cover to attempt to place bombs at the fence or create provocations; its operatives must not hide among the demonstrators and risk the lives of civilians. Palestinians have a right to protest peacefully. As demonstrations are likely to continue into the month of June, I again reiterate our call for all sides to exercise maximum restraint.

Council members have often spoken here in the Chamber of the need to prevent war; and the Secretary-General has put preventive diplomacy at the heart of his agenda. It is time for our words to be tested in Gaza. I have taken note of the request last week by several members of the Security Council to bring forward proposals to address the situation in Gaza, in line with our commitment to advance urgent infrastructure and economic development projects, improve access and movement, and support the Egyptian-led reconciliation process.

Gaza's infrastructure teeters on the verge of total collapse, particularly its electricity and water networks, as well as its health system. In the past, the implementation of key infrastructure projects faced significant delays and obstacles. Failure to implement immediately, over the next 6 to 12 months, a set of modest, achievable projects — already endorsed by relevant stakeholders and some already funded — will create an amplified humanitarian crisis with fewer means to address it effectively.

We have all the instruments in place to address this challenge. We just need to organize ourselves better. As such, I plan to take the following actions: first, to prioritize projects identified and agreed over the past two years by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC); secondly, to adopt a task force modality with an enhanced United Nations project-management capacity to speed up implementation of the projects on the

ground in Gaza; and, thirdly, to strengthen our close coordination with the Palestinian Authority, Israel and Egypt to overcome any political, administrative and logistical blockages that may emerge.

Let me be very clear: the condition for success is that the ceasefire achieved in 2014 be observed by all factions in Gaza and that all factions refrain from illicit arms build-up and militant activity on the ground.

If we are able to move quickly, we will reduce the chances of military confrontation and another devastating conflict. We will create the conditions for relaxing movement and access restrictions and preserve the fraying links between Gaza and the West Bank. We will also support Egyptian reconciliation efforts, and, most importantly perhaps, we will provide much needed breathing space for ordinary Gazans.

Ultimately, these efforts are meant to strengthen — not replace — overarching political objectives: the unification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Authority in line with the Quartet principles, and an end to the occupation and a resolution of the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We are currently discussing with key stakeholders how to move forward on this strategy. I am encouraged by the positive engagement by all. I particularly welcome Egyptian President Al Sisi's decision to maintain the opening of Rafah crossing throughout the holy month of Ramadan. That is an important step, and I hope that the security situation will allow for more regular movement through the crossing.

I also want to acknowledge Israel's efforts to ensure the delivery of goods to Gaza, despite the serious damage done to the Kerem Shalom crossing by protesters during recent weeks. I look forward to further measures that will enable an increase in the entry of goods and stimulate economic activity.

I also welcome the decision by the Palestinian Government to provide critical medical supplies and doctors to Gaza after the tragic events of 14 May, as well as their engagement with the United Nations on facilitating much needed deliveries to Gaza.

The AHLC has identified several critical projects aimed at ensuring a long-term future for Gaza, and I am encouraged by ongoing work with our partners to prioritize a short list of key projects based on

the conclusions of our recent meetings in Cairo, Washington, D.C., and Brussels.

We are engaged constructively with Israel, the Palestinian Government and Egypt to discuss how to improve coordination and move forward.

I also urge the international community to generously support those goals, both financially and politically. Progress is dependant on the coordinated action and sustained commitment of all stakeholders.

Taking a step back from the immediate situation in Gaza, the confluence of conflicts in the Middle East is raising tensions on multiple fronts — in Syria, in Yemen and, clearly, on the Israeli-Palestinian track. Amid the political stagnation, frustration and disillusionment in the Palestinian diaspora is also mounting. People are watching events there very closely. Confined to often squalid refugee camps, devastated by war, most notably and tragically in the Yarmouk camp in Syria, and with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East experiencing a severe funding crisis, Palestinian refugees are increasingly facing an untenable situation, risking an expanded humanitarian crisis and further instability.

Developments in Jerusalem and in Gaza reverberated with some protests across Lebanon, mostly in refugee camps. Thankfully, no violent incidents were reported.

In a important development on 30 April, the Palestinian National Council convened in Ramallah for the first time in 22 years, where President Abbas was re-elected as its Chairman. While reiterating the commitment to a peaceful solution based on long-standing parameters and United Nations resolutions, inter alia, the final statement urged the suspension of the recognition of Israel, security coordination and the Paris Protocol. It also outlined international moves that the Palestinians are planning to take to advance the goal of an independent Palestinian State and to seek protection for the Palestinian people.

Regrettably, the announcement that the salaries of Palestinian Authority employees in Gaza will be paid has not been implemented, which further contributes to the explosive situation in the Strip.

On 15 May, Palestine acceded to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Convention on the Prohibition, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons.

Meanwhile, in other developments I must note that no settlement plans were approved and no tenders were issued in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem, during the reporting period. Settlement construction in Area C in East Jerusalem, however, has continued, and the Israeli Government has approved major plans focused on solidifying its control of East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities have also demolished or seized some 30 Palestinian-owned structures across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As a result, 43 Palestinians have been displaced and the livelihoods of more than 140 have been affected. On 2 May, Israel demolished or seized some 14 structures in the Masafer Yatta area of south Hebron, located in an Israeli-declared military firing zone. At least nine households have been impacted, with some 35 people displaced.

I am also concerned by developments regarding Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu, a vulnerable Palestinian Bedouin community east of Jerusalem, home to some 180 people — over half of whom are children — who also faced an increased risk of demolition and relocation.

In separate security incidents, Israeli Defence Forces targeted Hamas facilities in Gaza on at least 10 occasions, with no injuries having been reported.

During the reporting period, the Israeli Defence Forces also destroyed two tunnels it attributed to Hamas, bringing the total number of tunnels destroyed since October to 10. Amid Israeli reports of violence directed at Israeli forces, on 16 May Palestinian militants reportedly fired machine-gun rounds towards Israeli troops, hitting several houses in the Israeli town of Sderot, which caused damage but no injuries.

I also note the move of the Embassies of the United States of America, Guatemala and Paraguay from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. I reiterate the position of the United Nations that Jerusalem is a final-status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties based on relevant resolutions. Given the importance to Jews, Christians and Muslims, Jerusalem is a highly sensitive and charged issue for millions of believers around the world. Therefore, upholding the status quo at the holy sites remains critical for peace and stability.

The Secretary-General voiced his utmost concern following reports of heightened tensions, missile launches from Syria targeting Israeli positions, and retaliatory strikes by the Israeli Defence Forces. In the context of the 10 May events, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) personnel

have observed a high level of kinetic activity in the areas of separation and limitation and across the ceasefire line. Some of that activity impacted locations in the northern and central parts of the area of separation. Throughout those events, UNDOF maintained liaison with both sides to ensure that the parties respected the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words on the challenges and opportunities ahead. We need a unified approach to change the current reality on the ground in Gaza. While the international community has a central role to play, leaders on all sides of the conflict must show the political will and determination to achieve genuine progress. Every day that the intra-Palestinian political paralysis continues and every day that the closures persist, more lives are put at risk in Gaza. Turning the Gaza tap on and off is not a sustainable strategy for anyone. We must break the cycle or risk more lethal consequences. Gaza is an integral part of the larger puzzle. Ultimately, the success of any initiative in Gaza is linked to a credible political horizon that unites all Palestinians.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where settlement construction continues and the situation remains fragile. Nor can we lose sight of the broader political picture and the need to bring the sides back to the negotiating table. In that regard, as discussed on my recent visits to the Russian Federation and Jordan, the Middle East Quartet remains a key forum to discuss perspectives for resolving the conflict, including within the broader regional context. We must continue to work together to end the occupation and bring about a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two-States and in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and prior agreements. There is no alternative to achieving a peaceful future for all the people of this troubled land.

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

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements

Mr. Koishybayev (Kazakhstan): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his detailed and objective update on the situation in the Middle East. We are closely following his efforts and negotiations held with the key countries on this issue. We appreciate the positive outcome of

his meeting in Moscow with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Sergey Lavrov.

We echo the warnings of the United Nations that there is a cycle of conflagration of conflicts currently in the Middle East. There are rising tensions at all levels and in various contexts, including the situations in Syria and in Yemen, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We are particularly concerned about the move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem on 14 May, and the clashes in Gaza, which resulted in casualties among Palestinians.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process is clear and remains unchanged. We support the two-State solution and call for the early resumption of negotiations, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions. That should be done in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant Security Council resolutions, and other mechanisms and initiatives, such as the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles and the land-in-exchange-for-peace formula.

We support the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of a free, sovereign and independent State within the international borders of 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital. Jerusalem is the common homeland of different ethnicities and religions. Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to existence and avoid taking actions that might further escalate the situation. We look forward to implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), and we would like to stress that the construction of new Israeli settlements is causing hardships for the Palestinians, who are incurring huge economic losses.

Turning to Gaza, we are alarmed by the situation there. We support the Egyptian and the international efforts to ease the situation in that sector. With regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Kazakhstan

reiterates the need to support this important mechanism. We will therefore make another voluntary financial contribution to the organization this year.

My country underscores the importance of achieving intra-Palestinian unity. Investments in building strong Palestinian institutions and promoting reforms in the security sector — the military, law enforcement and judicial and correctional systems — will, together with new legislation, ensure the rule of law and good governance. Our colleagues from United Nations humanitarian agencies informed us that the Central Emergency Response Fund had recently allocated \$1.26 million for Gaza. Those funds are meant to strengthen and reinforce the rapid procurement of essential medical supplies and their distribution to critical hospitals providing trauma care — all of which is critical to relieving the suffering of the population.

The immediate start of direct negotiations and, as a result, the speedy implementation of agreements, in the first place, will allow us to solve the confidence-deficit problem and enable us to move to a more open dialogue between the two sides. It is necessary to identify mutually acceptable principles for the advancement of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

Lastly, we once again reiterate our call to ensure Israel's right to security as well as Palestine's right to statehood, using appropriate instruments of preventive diplomacy, including political, economic and environmental confidence-building measures, as well as addressing new challenges and threats. We are ready to work towards finding common ground and look forward to effectively cooperating with a view to bringing peace and security both to Palestinians and Israelis.

The President: There are no more names on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.