



DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Secretary-General addresses the American Jewish Committee.	1
II. International Labour Office issues report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.	1
III. Secretary-General congratulates new Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah on his appointment.	3
IV. UN Special Rapporteur presents report on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.	3
V. Secretary-General urges Israel to heed international calls for settlement freeze.	4

VI.	UN Special Rapporteur Falk calls on Israel to end its blockade on the Gaza Strip.	5
VII.	United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine convenes in Beijing.	6
VIII.	Quartet Representative addresses the Fifth Israeli Presidential Conference in Jerusalem	7
IX.	Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs briefs Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.	8

*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System
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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSES THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE GLOBAL FORUM

On 3 June 2013 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon delivered a video message to the American Jewish Committee (AJC) Global Forum in Washington. Excerpts of the video message are reproduced below (SG/SM/15074):

....

We are also approaching a point of no return in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The occupation, now nearing half a century, is not acceptable morally, politically, strategically - humanly. I know many of you fully recognize that no interests are truly served by maintaining the status quo.

I have been, and will remain, outspoken in my insistence that Israel has a right to live in peace and security. But Israel needs to stop settlement activity and take concrete action to end the occupation. We all need to support Secretary of State [John] Kerry's courageous initiative. This may well be the last chance for the two-State solution. The United Nations will do all it can to help resume a meaningful peace process.

II. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE ISSUES REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF WORKERS OF THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES

During the 102nd session of the International Labour Conference, on 5 June 2013, the Director-General of the International Labour Office (ILO) presented the organization's annual report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. The concluding observations of the report are reproduced below (ILC.102/DG/APP):

Concluding observations

136. The Report of the mission this year is based on certain parameters which are essential for understanding the situation of workers and enterprises in the occupied Arab territories.

137. The status quo is not an option in Palestine. The situation is untenable and a status quo as such does not actually exist. In different ways, some dramatic and visible and others more subtle, the environment continues to change constantly. Any effort to maintain a perceived status quo in effect promotes or at least permits a further dangerous deterioration of the situation.

138. Efforts for state building, for the development of a viable and vibrant Palestinian economy, and for a state with a

strong social dimension are being increasingly thwarted. In the social and labour sphere, the conclusion of the mission is that, compared with earlier years, the process has to all practical purposes come to a halt.

139. While direct negotiations should be the primary way to prevent a downward slide, the Palestinians and the Israelis need to be backed by clear and demonstrated international support, in terms of both assistance and appropriate political engagement. It is not too late and it is perfectly possible to start taking the steps which can restore confidence in the peace process. The key issue is that there are tens of thousands of discouraged workers and actual or would-be entrepreneurs who urgently need to know that their interests,

prospects and – importantly – their dignity can and will be restored and reinforced.

140. Given the reality on the ground, this has to lead into measures that directly affect the lives of these workers and entrepreneurs. High-level moves to end the conflict must be accompanied by concrete evidence that the everyday hardships and harassment arising out of the occupation are being alleviated, and will be removed. Otherwise, leaders on all sides will be facing a sceptical and disillusioned population, which will not fail to demand accountability and its share of the fruits of the process.

141. Israel needs to lift excessive restrictions, which are economically and socially unproductive, as called for even by Israeli employers. The arbitrariness of such measures impedes economic activity and makes the Palestinian economy and labour market dependent on the structures of the occupation and the settlement economy. They also further fragment the territory, perpetuating a damaging separation between Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

142. Restrictions on movement, employment and economic activity should be relaxed in a transparent and permanent manner in order to increase opportunities for decent employment in conditions of equality. This is also essential for tackling the alarming levels of poverty, particularly in Gaza. Special care should be taken to abstain from all measures that can uphold and deepen discrimination, separation and segregation, or are perceived to do so.

143. The humane treatment of Palestinian workers in all situations of employment must be ensured, including in the case of those who have resorted to work in the settlements. The grievances of Palestinians who either formally or informally participate in the Israeli labour market need to be handled urgently and transparently, including through effective access to legal redress. Curtailing the current level of abuse is necessary also for the longer term perspective of coexistence and interaction between the markets, including the labour market, of two independent and adjacent states.

144. In the light of marked expectations that the Palestinian private sector would become the engine of growth, it must be empowered to play this role with the independence it needs – while fully respecting the fundamental rights of its workers – and not be subjected to administrative, political or economic decisions by Israeli authorities, enterprises or other entities. Transparent and equitable business relations, avoiding the use of improper intermediaries, have to be part of any sound private sector development policy.

145. As highlighted in Chapter 4 of this Report, the strengthening of social dialogue and building of the social dimension of a state of Palestine have to be an integral part of the peace process. The ILO must continue to give its full support to this task.

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III. SECRETARY-GENERAL CONGRATULATES NEW PALESTINIAN PRIME MINISTER HAMDALLAH ON HIS APPOINTMENT

The following statement was issued on 6 June 2013 by the Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (SG/SM/1508, PAL/2160):

The Secretary-General congratulates Rami Hamdallah on his appointment as Prime Minister of Palestine, and wishes him success in his critical work ahead. He welcomes the formation of the new Cabinet that was sworn in today. The United Nations looks forward to continuing to work with the Government of Palestine and President [Mahmoud] Abbas in support of the State-building agenda and ongoing efforts aimed

at a resumption of crucial and meaningful peace negotiations to achieve the two-State solution.

The Secretary-General reiterates his appreciation for the many contributions of the outgoing Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, especially his commitment to readying Palestinian institutions for statehood.

IV. UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR PRESENTS REPORT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

At a meeting of the Human Rights Council on 10 June 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, Richard Falk, presented a report on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories to the Human Rights Council. The following is an excerpt of the report (A/HRC/23/21):

I. Recommendations

55. The Special Rapporteur recommends that:

(a) The International Committee of the Red Cross or a commission of inquiry composed of relevant international law experts should convene to examine issues particular to prolonged occupation and move toward a convention to address such occupations;

(b) Israel must allow Palestinians to make use of their maritime area, up to 20 nautical miles in line with its commitments under the Oslo Agreements;

(c) Israel should lift its illegal blockade of Gaza and clearly demarcate ARAs. ARAs can only be established in line with applicable international legal standards

and commitments undertaken by the State of Israel;

(d) The international community, with Israel's full cooperation, should finance the construction of a major desalination facility in Gaza; install solar networks for heat and electricity; and urgently improve sewage treatment to avoid further polluting of the Mediterranean Sea;

(e) The international community, with Israel's full cooperation and in direct consultation with farmers in Gaza, should support a shift in agricultural production in Gaza to less water-intensive crops, including by facilitating improved access to seeds; should support the improvement of irrigation networks; and should ensure that farmers can utilise their farmland;

(f) The international community, with Israel's full cooperation, should create a private patients' fund that could be drawn upon to support medical treatment outside of Gaza as needed;

(g) The international community should establish a commission of enquiry into the situation of Palestinians detained or imprisoned by Israel. This enquiry should have a broad mandate, to examine Israel's track record of impunity for prison officials and others who interrogate Palestinians;

(h) The international community should investigate the activities of businesses

that profit from Israel's settlements, and take appropriate action to end any activities in occupied Palestine and ensure appropriate reparation for affected Palestinians;

(i) The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the support of the Human Rights Council, should establish a mechanism to support Special Rapporteurs who are subject to defamatory attacks, especially those that divert attention from the substantive human rights concerns relevant to their respective mandates.

...

V. SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES ISRAEL TO HEED INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR SETTLEMENT FREEZE

The following statement was issued on 14 June 2013 by the Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (SG/SM/15108):

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned by the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank in violation of international law. He is particularly troubled by reports that planning for hundreds of housing units in the settlement of Itamar, deep into the West Bank, has advanced to the next stage, as is also the case in the outpost of Bruchin. These reports follow other recent announcements in Beit El, near Ramallah.

The Secretary-General also remains concerned about reports of plans for around

1,000 settlement units in East Jerusalem and steps to authorize four illegal settlement outposts deep in the West Bank.

These are unhelpful decisions that undermine progress towards the two-state solution. They constitute a deeply worrisome trend at a moment of ongoing efforts to re-launch peace negotiations. The Secretary-General calls on Israel to heed the calls of the international community to freeze settlement activity and abide by its commitments under international law and the Road Map.

VI. UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR FALK CALLS ON ISRAEL TO END ITS BLOCKADE ON THE GAZA STRIP

On 14 June 2013 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, Richard Falk, called on Israel to end the “collective punishment in Gaza”. The following is a summary that was produced by the UN Office at Geneva of the meeting and Mr. Falk’s report (HC 13/170):

...

“Six years of Israel’s calculated strangulation of the Gaza Strip has stunted the economy and has kept most Gazans in a state of perpetual poverty and aid dependency,” said the UN expert. “Whether it is fishermen unable to go beyond six nautical miles from the shore, farmers unable to access their land near the Israeli fence, businessmen suffering from severe restrictions on the export of goods, students denied access to education in the West Bank, or patients in need of urgent medical attention refused access to Palestinian hospitals in the West Bank, the destructive designs of blockade have been felt by every single household in Gaza. It is especially felt by Palestinian families separated by the blockade...”

“The people of Gaza have endured the unendurable and suffered what is insufferable for six years. Israel’s collective punishment of the civilian population in Gaza must end today...”

“Israel has the responsibility as the Occupying Power to protect the civilian population. But instead of allowing a healthy people and economy to flourish, Israeli authorities have sealed off the Gaza Strip. According to statistics released by the Israeli Ministry of Defense, last month’s exports out of Gaza consisted of 49 truckloads of empty boxes, three truckloads of spices, one truckload of cut flowers, and one truckload of furniture...”

“It does not take an economist to figure out that such a trickle of goods out of Gaza is not the basis of a viable economy...The easing of the blockade announced by Israel in June 2010 after its deadly assault on the flotilla of ships carrying aid to the besieged population resulted only in an increase in consumer goods entering Gaza, and has not improved living conditions for most Gazans. Since 2007, the productive capacity of Gaza has dwindled with 80 per cent of factories in Gaza now closed or operating at half capacity or less due to the loss of export markets and prohibitively high operating costs as a result of the blockade. 34 per cent of Gaza’s workforce is unemployed including up to half the youth population, 44 per cent of Gazans are food insecure, 80 per cent of Gazans are aid recipients...”

“To make matters worse, 90 per cent of the water from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption without treatment, and severe fuel and electricity shortage results in outages of up to 12 hours a day. Only a small proportion of Gazans who can afford to obtain supplies through the tunnel economy are buffered from the full blow of the blockade, but tunnels alone cannot meet the daily needs of the population in Gaza.”

“Last year, the United Nations forecast that under existing conditions, Gaza would be uninhabitable by 2020. Less optimistic forecasts presented to me were that the Gaza Strip may no longer be viable only three years from now,...It’s clear that the Israeli authorities set out six years ago to devitalize the Gazan population and economy.”

VII. UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE CONVENES IN BEIJING

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace in Beijing on 18 and 19 June 2013 under the theme “Reviving the collective international engagement towards a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”. Meeting participants included Palestinian, Israeli and other experts, representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies and civil society organizations. At the opening session on 18 June 2013, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent a message that was delivered by Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The following text is a reproduction of the message (SG/SM/15116, GA/PAL/1272):

It is my pleasure to send greetings to the participants in the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace. I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this timely event. I also express appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China for serving as host.

As regional tensions rise due to the escalating conflict in Syria, we must not lose sight of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A resolution of this conflict is not a matter of less urgency.

The fragile hope created by the renewed efforts of the United States must be sustained and translated into action by the parties. I am also encouraged by the recent commitment by Arab leaders to revive the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, with its promise for regional stability that can certainly become an important part of current peace efforts. I hope the Israeli Government will respond positively to this offer.

The coming weeks will be critical. The parties must avoid actions that undermine prospects for a resumption of meaningful negotiations.

In this regard, I remain deeply troubled by Israel's continuing settlement activity in the West Bank, which is illegal under

international law. Settlement activity is deepening the Palestinian people's mistrust in the seriousness of the Israeli side about achieving peace; it also risks rendering a two-State solution impossible. Israel must abide by its commitments under the Road Map to freeze all settlement activity and dismantle outposts erected after 2001.

The situation in East Jerusalem is of particular concern as settlement activity continues, accompanied by home demolitions, forced evictions, land expropriation and displacement of the Palestinian population. The international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory subject to the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Progress towards peace requires tangible confidence-building measures and a clear political horizon. It also requires ensuring the viability of Palestinian state-building efforts and improved living conditions for all Palestinians. I appeal to the international community to ensure continued and predictable financial support for the Palestinian Government. Special attention is also needed to sustain UNRWA's [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] efforts,

including contributions beyond the scope of traditional donors.

The condition of Gaza's civilian population remains a source of deep concern. The seven-year-old closure continues to cause serious humanitarian and economic consequences, including but far from limited to a lack of sufficient safe drinking water. I call for a complete opening of crossings into Gaza to allow legitimate trade and movements of people, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns must be addressed by continuing to thwart militant attacks and preventing the smuggling of weapons.

The ceasefire understanding reached last November remains the best opportunity to change the negative dynamics in Gaza. All must exert maximum effort to preserve the ceasefire and its basic tenets: adhering to a

full calm and lifting the closure. I continue to support Egyptian efforts in this regard.

I also continue to support efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of the PLO commitments and under the leadership of President Abbas, which is an indispensable part of a permanent settlement.

Achieving a negotiated two-State solution that ends the occupation started in 1967 in line with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and resolves the core issues is long overdue. I cannot stress enough the risks of missing the current window of opportunity. It is imperative that everyone in the international community work collectively to make 2013 a positive year for Israeli-Palestinian peace and peace in the whole region.

In that spirit, please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.

VIII. QUARTET REPRESENTATIVE ADDRESSES THE FIFTH ISRAELI PRESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM

On 19 June 2013, Quartet Representative Tony Blair addressed the fifth Israeli Presidential Conference, under the auspices of President Shimon Peres. A summary of the Representative's remarks is reproduced below:

...

Finally leaders have to be visionaries. Shimon Peres in one of his inimitable quotes once put it to me brilliantly: "A leader in office has to decide: does he want to be in the history book or the guest book?" Right now in this region, we need such leadership for peace for the history book between Israelis and Palestinians. Resolution of this conflict is essential: for the security of Israel; to the dignity of Palestinians. Some people say a two-state solution is now a fantasy. I say the fantasy is in thinking a one-state solution would ever be remotely

sustainable or consistent with the values Israel represents. Let us hope that over the coming weeks, a plan for progress can be put in place in which politics, economics and security are aligned. With Secretary John Kerry's fantastic energy and commitment, we're all working hard to accomplish this. But we should understand: the window of opportunity will be open for only a short space of time. We must go through it together. If not the window will close again and could even close forever. Time is not our friend. This is urgent. This is now. And it is a time for statesmen not politicians.

Peace will not depend simply on negotiations. Peace is a state of mind as well as states with borders.

There is a shift in the psyche of each side that also has to happen. Israel must see a viable sovereign Palestinian State not as a reward to the Palestinians for good behaviour; but as a strategic necessity for Israel's future security and as a right for the Palestinian People. The Palestinians must see that for Israel to feel confident enough to make peace, they need to know that such a Palestinian State will be properly governed with a Palestinian politics, unified in pursuit of an agreement that recognizes clearly Israel's right to exist and ends the conflict once and for all.

Peace here is most important for Israelis and Palestinians. But it is important for all of us. Why? Because peace would symbolize reconciliation and respect between not only two nations but two

peoples. The great political divide of our time is less between traditional left and right and more between the open minded and the closed minded. The open minded see a world in which different faiths, races and cultures mix and mingle, as an opportunity; the closed mind sees it as a menace. Yet globalization, an unstoppable force driven by technology and people not Governments and laws, pushes us together. We live interconnected and interdependent. Such a world only works through respect for difference. You may have your faith and I mine but my faith does not make me superior to you or you to me. Those who use religion as a badge of identity in opposition to those of a different faith put our world at risk. My Faith Foundation is about to launch a programme that links up schools of different faiths across the world so that children can learn from an early age how to live with each other and from each other.

...

IX. ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 25 June 2013, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Excerpts of the briefing are reproduced below (S/PV.6986):

...

[I]n his message to the international meeting in Beijing in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace, the Secretary-General stressed that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and safeguarding the two-State solution was no less urgent. The current regional turmoil makes it all the more imperative to build upon the opening created by the diplomatic push by the United States and create a positive momentum towards an Israeli-Palestinian peace that can provide a

stabilizing horizon and give hope for the whole region. However, so far there are too few encouraging signs on the prospects for breaking the deadlock. The United Nations has consistently pointed out the risks of prolonged impasse and the consequences of inaction.

The United Nations has welcomed the determined re-engagement of the United States. In March, the United States President underlined that peace was necessary, just and possible. As the international

community, we bear a great responsibility in transforming that possibility into reality. Secretary Kerry's several rounds of visits — he announced that he would visit Jerusalem and the region for the fifth time this week — provides the first real opportunity since October 2010 for a serious effort to reach a final status agreement. While United States engagement is central, we are convinced of the need for broader regional and international engagement in support of any peace effort. We also welcome the reaffirmed willingness by Arab States to revive the Arab Peace Initiative. We hope that the Israeli Government will respond positively.

However much the parties need to re-engage in negotiations as the only way to achieve the two-State solution, there must be a substantive and well-prepared framework, as well as a credible timeline, in order for talks to have a chance of success. There is also a need for a conducive environment on the ground, including confidence-building steps. However, while substantive progress is urgently needed, rushing the parties back to the table without having in place the necessary framework and buy-in from both sides would be counter-productive. What is also not needed are unhelpful statements with regard to the prospects for the two-State solution. Rather, progress necessitates serious political commitments by both leaders — Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas — who should show statesmanship, recognize a partner in each other and finally negotiate and achieve a two-State solution, which is a vision that they have both agreed on. However narrow, the current window of opportunity should not be lost.

The de facto settlement restraint observed earlier this spring has seen signs of unraveling. The Secretary-General has been particularly troubled by reports that planning

for hundreds of housing units in the settlement of Itamar, deep in the West Bank, has advanced to the next stage, as is also the case in the outpost of Bruchin. We also note with disappointment that, according to data released by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, during the first quarter of 2013 there were 865 starts in construction of housing units in settlements, representing a 176 per cent increase compared to the equivalent period in 2012 — a seven-year record. Those are unhelpful decisions that undermine progress towards the two-State solution. The Secretary-General reiterates that settlement activity is illegal, and calls on Israel to abide by its commitments under international law and the road map.

A new Palestinian Cabinet was sworn in on 6 June under the leadership of Rami Hamdallah to carry on the administration of the affairs of State until a national consensus Government is formed. However, in an apparent sign of disagreement about certain competencies, Prime Minister Hamdallah tendered his resignation on 20 June, but stayed on as caretaker until a successor was named. That creates renewed uncertainty for a Government still relying considerably on international support and facing a critical period ahead. The United Nations looks forward to continuing to work with the Government of Palestine and President Abbas in support of their state-building agenda and ongoing efforts aimed at a resumption of meaningful peace negotiations. The continued viability of the Palestinian Authority remains a core interest of the United Nations.

One fiscal factor fuelling concern in that regard is the Palestinian Authority's total Government debt of reportedly \$4.2 billion and its deficit, which had reached \$612 million by the end of May. Donor support has decreased over the past years, and the United Nations is concerned about possible

further cuts. Continued donor funding is essential to allow the Palestinian Government to tighten fiscal policy in a manner that does not harm the private sector or essential social spending.

Important meetings took place during and on the margins of the meeting of the World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea in Jordan last month. The “Breaking the impasse” initiative was unveiled, which we welcome as a serious expression by influential business leaders and public opinion from both sides of their wish for a two-State solution and an urgent appeal to their leaders to realize it now. At the same event, Secretary Kerry announced a large-scale initiative intended to spur economic growth through private investment in the West Bank and Gaza. Those are hopeful signs. However, it is absolutely crucial that progress be made on the political track, absent which sustained growth and private investment will remain elusive and Palestinian accomplishments on the state-building agenda will be difficult to sustain.

The United Nations continues to help to address the humanitarian and development needs of Palestinians in Area C, where lifting Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement, access to land and water, planning and construction would unleash the growth potential. We continue to engage the Israeli Government on a series infrastructure projects in Area C, and we are in the process of securing funding for works supporting the agricultural sector. To more effectively address development needs in Area C, it is imperative that Israeli authorities authorize the 32 plans that have been submitted for approval, some of which have been pending since June 2010.

Tensions on the ground are also mounting. Violence between Palestinians and settlers continued in the West Bank. A

total of five Palestinians, including one woman, were injured by settlers, while six settlers, including four women, were injured by Palestinian stone-throwing. An Israeli bus was shot at yesterday near Nablus, without resulting in injuries. Settler violence against Palestinian property under the so called price-tag attacks also increased sharply, resulting in extensive material damage. Such attacks also targeted Christian sites, including the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem and the Jaffa Orthodox cemetery.

Between 14 and 16 June, Israeli right-wing activists reportedly beat and injured three Palestinian women in West Jerusalem, including a 75-year-old. On 17 June, the tires of 28 cars were punctured in Abu Gosh, a village inside Israel that is also populated by Arab citizens of Israel, and racist slogans were painted on walls. Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly protested such acts as running counter to Jewish commandments and the values of the people of Israel. The day before, the Israeli Government strengthened the State's law-enforcement ability to combat price-tag attacks by declaring their perpetrators an “illegal association”. It is hoped that this measure will contribute to preventing such attacks, which must not go unpunished.

The security situation remained comparable to the previous reporting period, and security coordination between Palestinian and Israeli security forces continued despite some clashes. Israeli security forces conducted a total of 457 search-and-arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, resulting in 162 Palestinians injured, including 58 children and eight women. Two members of the Israeli security forces were also injured. Four-hundred and fifty-five Palestinians were arrested by Israeli security forces, including a Hamas Palestinian Legislative Council member on 6 June in Ramallah. On 11 June, Prime

Minister Netanyahu said that Israel has foiled five suicide attacks since the start of the year.

The majority of injuries resulted from clashes during Palestinian protests in the occupied West Bank, including against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (A/ES-10/273). Demolitions of Palestinian property in Area C and in East Jerusalem continued, albeit at a slower pace, with a total of 24 structures demolished, leading to the displacement of 55 Palestinians, including 23 children.

Relative calm returned to Gaza this month, until it was shattered during the night of 23 June when six rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, reportedly by Islamic Jihad. Two were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defence system, and four landed in southern Israel without causing injuries or damage. In response, Israel conducted three airstrikes into Gaza yesterday, targeting sites allegedly linked to weapons-storage and rocket launching, causing no casualties. Israel also closed the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings for Palestinians. We condemn rocket fire into civilian areas and urge Israeli restraint. All must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

We remain concerned about the state of human rights and freedoms in Gaza. That includes our deep concern about four death sentences passed by military courts in Gaza, between 9 May and 20 June, and two executions carried out on 22 June, outside of the Palestinian legal framework. We call on de facto authorities in Gaza to refrain from carrying out further executions.

Despite our ongoing efforts, we unfortunately must report further

encroachment on freedoms in Gaza, namely, increasing impediments on humanitarian operations. Along with inappropriate taxation requests, exit restrictions have recently been imposed by the de facto authorities on Palestinian staff of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other organizations, to the point where some staff have not been able to leave Gaza. We call on the de facto authorities to rescind these restrictions, and hope that a solution can be found quickly.

Such measures impair the delivery of much-needed assistance to Palestinians, as does continuing violence. The only possible way forward is the full implementation of the ceasefire understanding reached on 21 November under Egyptian auspices, which calls for calm and the full lifting of the closure. We urge the parties to adhere to its terms to preserve advances and prospects to implement resolution 1860 (2009) in full. Our immediate goals continued to include extending the fishing limit to at least eight nautical miles, allowing the entry of construction material and permitting exports to Israel and transfers from Gaza to the West Bank, while we continue to carry out sizable programmes that address pressing needs.

In that regard, I would note that preliminary results of a joint United Nations survey indicate that food insecurity affects some 1.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and has increased to include 34 per cent of households in 2012.

Against such a concerning backdrop, I would nevertheless like to highlight a moment of joy that lifted the spirits of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza alike, when on 22 June a young Gazan refugee, Mohammad Assaf, won the “Arab Idol” televised song contest, watched by millions throughout the region and beyond. Following his victory, Mr. Assaf was named

as goodwill ambassador to the Palestinian diaspora by President Abbas and as the first Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

...

The Middle East is living in dangerous and tragic days, as the scourge of war is once again destroying lives and burying hopes. It is a trying period for the United Nations, and our collective ability to live up to the values and principles of the Charter is being put to a hard test. But however difficult the task, the Security Council and the United Nations at large cannot give up or let a sense of collective impotence erode our sense of responsibility. Resolving conflict and finding a way towards peaceful coexistence and mutual respect for all is possible. But it requires courageous and mutual compromises at the national,

regional and international levels, and a commitment to settling conflicts through peaceful means, not war or violence. That is true in Syria as it is elsewhere. It is crucial that all act responsibly and contribute to reversing the negative dynamics at play in the region. The current situation of unresolved conflict and prolonged occupation in the West Bank and Gaza is the cause of much suffering on the Palestinian side, but it is no good for Israel either. We at the United Nations are deeply convinced that achieving a two-State solution, ending the occupation begun in 1967 and ending the conflict, as envisaged in the relevant resolutions of the Council, are in the best interests of both Israelis and Palestinians. Leaders have a choice to make, and a responsibility to their people and future generations. The United Nations will continue to do all it can to help in the search for peace and the realization of the universal and legitimate rights of all people in the region.