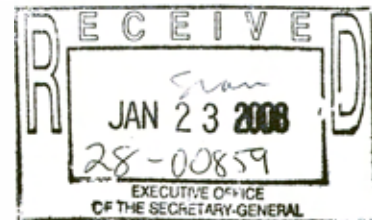


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Note to Mr. Pascoe

SECURITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION ON THE MIDDLE EAST

The Security Council continued consultations this afternoon on the revised text of a draft PRST on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which had been worked out at an expert-level meeting this morning (text attached).

Most delegations expressed support for the revised text, praising it as more balanced than the initial draft. The Russian Federation and Burkina Faso welcomed the inclusion of the call to cease the firing of rockets into Israeli territory. Italy suggested that the last paragraph (on all acts of violence including rocket attacks) should be moved between the second and third paragraphs. South Africa proposed to delete the word "recent" in the first sentence of the last paragraph.

Panama and Belgium, supported by others, reiterated the need to adopt a statement as soon as possible in light of the fragile and fluid situation. The case in point, the Russian Federation and Libya noted, were the ominous developments at the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, which might well worsen the already "extremely volatile situation". At this juncture, many delegations expressed their readiness to continue consultations with a view to accomplishing a consensus text. While open for further amendments, China and the United Kingdom underlined the need to keep the text as simple as possible.

However, Ambassador Wolff of the United States repeated his deep skepticism over, if not outright rejection of, the possibility that the Council could attain a consensus text any time soon. He clearly stated that his delegation would not agree on a text today, as he needed instructions from a "very high level" in Washington. He added that the US Secretary of State was in a "different time zone" now. At the same time, he stressed that this did not mean that the US was not interested in any statement or any undertaking by the Council on the matter. Rather, he explained that his delegation had a "slightly different perspective" than other members, due to the "unique role" the US was playing, i.e., the Middle East Conference in Annapolis, the recent visit of President Bush to the region and the ongoing US contacts with all parties. He recalled in this context the skepticism he had expressed after yesterday's debate over the merits of adopting a statement. He reiterated that the situation in Gaza should not be looked at in isolation, and that the Council must know how to articulate its voice on the "broader issues". The current attempt to issue a statement, he noted, seemed to obscure, if not diminish, "what are the real problems here". Those problems included the "coup d'état" by Hamas against the legitimate Palestinian government, which the Council had never addressed, and the firing of rockets against Israel, which had continued ever since the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

In view of the above, the President suggested that the Council convene another round of informal consultations at 11 am tomorrow to continue its discussion of the draft PRST.


Horst Heitmann
23 January 2008

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cc: Mr. Nambiar/Mr. Kim
Mr. Menkerios/Ms. Kane
Ms. Bутtenheim