

United Nations



Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR



DATE: 26 February 2008

TO: Mr. Vijay Nambiar

A: Chef de Cabinet

Executive Office of the Secretary-General

REFERENCE:

THROUGH:

S/C DE:

FROM: Horst Heitmann

DE: Director *H. Heitmann*
Security Council Affairs Division
Department of Political Affairs

SUBJECT: Security Council: Report on Activities

OBJET:

Attached please find, for the attention of the Secretary-General, a note on the proceedings of the Security Council on Tuesday, 26 February 2008.

cc: Mr. Pascoe O/R
Mr. Menkerios

FEB 27 2008

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Tuesday, 26 February 2008 (a.m.)

FORMAL MEETING

**The situation in the Middle East, including
the Palestinian question**

At its 5846th meeting, the Council heard a briefing by Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. John Holmes, USG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (see S/PV.5846).

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

**The situation in the Middle East, including
the Palestinian question**

At the outset of the consultations immediately after the 5846th meeting, Mr. Serry stated that a lot was at stake for both the parties and the international community in 2008 and stressed that it was important to bring forward the process started at Annapolis. He also said that it was his duty to inform Council members that he would have liked to have seen more positive steps with regard to the realities on the ground. Referring to his briefing earlier that day in which he had called for a "different and more positive strategy for Gaza", he said that the Quartet had agreed on some elements of that strategy, but that the challenge was for the Israelis, Palestinians and Egyptians to design a strategy which would produce a positive outcome.

Most Council members expressed profound shock at the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. They shared the growing concern that, if left unattended, the deteriorating situation would dampen the trust of the affected population in a negotiated settlement and even undermine the process launched at Annapolis. South Africa characterized the briefings by Messrs. Serry and Holmes as "devastating", as they had "pulled the rug from under our feet" and had exposed the Council to the world. Ambassador Kumalo warned that the Annapolis process could only be sustained by what was actually accomplished on the ground. Indonesia stated that the briefings confirmed "our worst fear", while Belgium called them "critical and depressing". Costa Rica stated that the briefings dealt a "harsh blow" to the vast majority of members.

France and Belgium pointed to a widening gap between the political process and the realities on the ground which could

undermine the Annapolis process. Libya noted that the Annapolis Conference had given rise to hope among the Palestinians, both in the occupied territory and in refugee camps. However, Ambassador Ettalhi regretted that the subsequent events, particularly the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the "international silence" on it - namely, the Council's failure to address the humanitarian crisis - had dashed such hope.

While condemning the rocket/mortar attacks on southern Israel, many delegations called on Israel to lift the de facto blockade of Gaza. They also reiterated the need for Israel to put an end to the construction of settlements, roadblocks and military incursions into the West Bank and Gaza. While acknowledging Israel's right to self-defense, France maintained once again that such a right should be exercised proportionately. Belgium and Italy, echoed by others, worried that the deteriorating living conditions in Gaza would undermine President Abbas and eventually damage the prospects for a two-state solution. Likewise, the United Kingdom noted that the humanitarian situation in Gaza was particularly dire and emphasized that the restriction of goods would not lead to security in Israel. Along with France, Italy, China, Belgium and Costa Rica, Ambassador Sawers stressed the need to reopen crossings between Israel and Gaza, with the Palestinian side being controlled by the PA. The Russian Federation called for a "mutual ceasefire" by the two sides, and urged Hamas to stop the rocket attacks and Israel to refrain from "disproportionate responses" to such attacks.

However, some delegations refused to equate the rocket attacks with the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. South Africa considered that it was not right to consider those attacks and the "starving 1.5 million people (in Gaza)" on an equal basis and criticized some delegations for treating the security of Israel as paramount to the suffering of the Palestinians. Costa Rica rejected the causal link between "illicit actions" and the problems in the Middle East. Libya reiterated that collective punishment by Israel was a clear violation of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, and asserted that the Palestinian Authority had fulfilled all its obligations under Phase 1 of the Road Map.

The United States stated that it remained committed to the Annapolis process which was the only option to achieve Palestinian statehood and Israeli security. Ambassador Khalilzad reaffirmed that his government also remained committed to the implementation of the Road Map and, together with the United Kingdom and others, urged Israel to end the construction of settlements and to dismantle outposts, and called on the Palestinians to prevent terrorism and dismantle terrorist infrastructure. He expressed concern at the humanitarian plight in Gaza but stressed that the firing of rockets into Israel remained unacceptable and must end. In that regard,

Ambassador Khalilzad regretted the Council's recent inability to issue a "balanced statement" on the situation in Gaza. While concerned about the blockade of Gaza, Croatia argued that the issue should not be addressed in isolation from the overall situation, including rocket attacks on Israel. The United Kingdom stated that the Palestinians also needed to abide by the Road Map and reform the Palestinian security force.

The Russian Federation, China, Belgium, Viet Nam and Indonesia welcomed regular contacts between Israel and the PA at the top level. Indonesia believed that confidence-building between the parties was the key to a settlement of the issue. The Russian Federation urged the Palestinians to maintain their unity, while Indonesia urged them to promote intra-Palestine talks. While supporting such contacts, Italy and the United Kingdom stressed the need for the parties to do more and come up with tangible results.

France, Italy and the Russian Federation expressed concern about the situation in Lebanon. The Russian Federation stated that the international community should help Lebanon to avoid the resumption of civil war. France hoped that Lebanese politicians would finally be able to choose a President and, together with Italy and China, expressed appreciation for the mediation efforts by the LAS in that regard. Those delegations looked forward to receiving the Secretary-General's progress report on the implementation of resolution 1701. Libya reminded the Council that although the situation remained quiet, the Golan Heights continued to be under Israeli occupation.

A number of delegations expressed deep frustration with the UN's role in addressing the Middle East question. South Africa lamented that despite 60 years of engagement, the Council had "not done anything to solve the problem". Indonesia asserted that the Council must be seen to be actively taking concrete measures to mitigate the humanitarian crisis. Panama regretted the lack of progress in the peace process and, supported by Costa Rica, stated that the Council had become a "forum for mutual recriminations", while the situation had deteriorated on the ground. Without naming names, Ambassador Arias criticized "some members" for "supporting one party or another unconditionally".

South Africa suggested that the Council's next mission should include a visit to Israel/Palestine to see the barriers and roadblocks built by Israel, in order to show the world that it did care about the long-standing issue. Ambassador Kumalo, supported by Costa Rica, also suggested that the Council should find a better way to receive regular information from the Quartet.

Responding to members' remarks welcoming him to the Council, Mr. Serry said that he realized that he had been asked to undertake a difficult job but he hoped that the Council would provide the necessary support and guidance. He remained convinced that a two-state solution was both "possible and necessary" and that all must assist in making that happen. However, he saw a growing disconnect between that scenario and the realities on the ground.

Referring to a question from South Africa regarding the UN's role in the Quartet, Mr. Serry stated that the Secretary-General was part of the Quartet to ensure the UN's role in the peace process, but "without prejudice to the Security Council's responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security". He assured Council members that he would brief them fully on his activities which would be undertaken based on UN principles and relevant Security Council resolutions. He believed that the Quartet could assist with the main issues facing Gaza, which he had been asked to prioritize as a result of the UN's ongoing operations there. However, Gaza, he cautioned, was a pressure cooker spilling over into Egypt and, given the unsustainability of the situation, there was a need for a different strategy and a more positive outcome. However, what was essential, he said, was an end to the violence by both Israelis and Palestinians, security for the Israelis, the re-opening of border crossings, the resumption of economic life in Gaza, and the continuation of UN operations. This could only happen if the major parties developed positive strategies for Gaza and, in that regard, the Quartet members were now talking to the parties to reach such a situation.

USG Holmes made "no apology" for what members had perceived to have been a depressing briefing and he agreed that the realities on the ground had a "cold-shower" effect. In that respect, he warned members not to "sleepwalk to disaster". He however noted that members appeared to be in agreement in condemning the violence by both sides and in supporting the reopening of the border crossings in order to improve the humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. He hoped that those concerned would hear members' appeals, and pledged that the UN would work to promote the reopening of the crossings and increase the flow of goods into Gaza. On that note, USG Holmes stated that agreement had been reached to allow the supply of materials for the repair of a sewage and water treatment plant into Gaza.