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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL  
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST  
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Madame President,

I intend to dedicate today's briefing to the Middle East Peace Process as this Council will be briefed on Syria tomorrow and on Lebanon next week.

Madame President,

1. We meet today nine months to date since the launch of US-brokered negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians with the previously agreed objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement on all core issues by this time. In these nine months we have seen an unprecedented effort by Secretary of State Kerry, assisted by Martin Indyk as his Envoy, to see this process through at long last. Quartet, regional and international stakeholders, recognizing this as perhaps one of the last chances to achieve a two-state solution, have also been actively engaged in support of the effort.
2. Yet efforts have faltered given the inability of the parties to bridge the gaps on their substantive positions or even accept, with reservations, a US framework that would attempt to do just that. As of today, we know talks have been suspended. It behooves the parties and all stakeholders to recognize this is another moment of truth. Inaction could see this turn into a crisis. That is why joint reflection is in order on how the current impasse came about and ways to overcome it.
3. On 28 March, the Israeli Cabinet postponed its decision to follow through with the release of the fourth and last tranche of 30 pre-Oslo prisoners. On 1 April, interpreting this as a breach of the quiet understanding of a diplomatic truce in return for the release of 104 pre-Oslo prisoners, the Palestinians, by unanimous PLO vote proceeded with submitting accession instruments to 15 international treaties and conventions. The announcement of 708 reissued tenders for settlement units in Gilo on the same day added to the Palestinian conviction that they had no other choice. Nevertheless, President Abbas reiterated his commitment to negotiations.
4. This Palestinian decision was met with surprise by the Israeli side, which has since indicated its understanding that they were nearing a deal to extend negotiations, which comprised more than the said prisoners. In their interpretation, the original understanding was valid so long as there was progress within the talks.
5. Despite these events, the negotiators continued to meet in an effort to find a way out of the impasse. We understand that among the issues discussed as part of Palestinian demands has been the release of the fourth tranche of prisoners and a freeze of settlement construction combined with an offer of continued talks if the issue of borders is frontloaded. The international

community also remained active, urging both parties to remain constructively engaged in talks and not miss the opening presented by the United States. The Secretary-General was in contact with both leaders on 13 and 14 April, and High Representative Ashton issued a statement to this effect on 18 April. In an emergency session on 9 April, Arab Foreign Ministers remained appreciative of US efforts and declared their support for President Abbas, including by renewed pledges of a safety net in the event of a loss of revenue as a result of Israeli potential reprisals. Such support is timely and welcome, while we urge Israel to adhere to the punctual and transparent transfer of revenues it collects on behalf of the PA—essential for the stability of the PA.

6. In a subsequent development, Palestinians reached a unity agreement on 23 April stipulating, among other things, that a National Consensus Government would be formed within five weeks and elections held no later than six months after the formation of this Government. Following the announcement of this accord, Israel cancelled a meeting scheduled between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and after an emergency cabinet meeting on 24 April, took the decision to suspend the talks. Quartet Envoys remained in frequent contact throughout, holding several phone calls to discuss these developments.

Madame President,

7. The political stalemate that I have been describing poses great risks to the prospects of a two-state solution, which I will elaborate on later. It will also not be without impact on the situation on the ground, which I will briefly address as it is already volatile with negative trends in the West Bank and a fragile calm in Gaza. 2013 saw the highest number of Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank since 2009. I was appalled by incidents of violence against both Palestinians and Israelis, which we condemn. Two particularly disturbing instances were the killing of an Israeli man and the injury of two others, including a child, in an attack near Hebron on 14 April, during Passover, and the shooting by the IDF of a 14-year old Palestinian boy crossing the Barrier on 19 March, which resulted in his death.

8. The rise in violence in the West Bank was reflected by the following trends, among others: Increased clashes between Israeli Security Forces and Palestinians, particularly in and around refugee camps; Palestinian stone and Molotov cocktail throwing resulting in some injuries and material damage; and settler attacks against Palestinians and their property in spite of some Israeli efforts to crack down on so-called “Price Tag” attacks which have also targeted Israeli Security Forces. We should be under no illusion that the level of violence would be higher still, were it not for the work of the Palestinian Security Forces to maintain law and order, and continued security coordination.

9. Settlement activity also continued. In two worrisome developments on 13 April, the Government of Israel retroactively approved legalizing a West Bank outpost in Gush Etzion, appropriating private Palestinian land, and granted settler access to a disputed Hebron building, which Palestinians have over the years argued in court was purchased illegally. The UN position on the illegality of settlements is well known. The reporting period saw 88 demolitions of Palestinian structures, including five residences and a mosque today, and the dismantling of five settlement outposts by the IDF.

10. The situation in East Jerusalem remains worrisome. Tensions and clashes in the Old City have continued, including during the holiday period. The Secretary-General has reiterated the importance of respect for the religious freedom of all, for worshippers of all faiths to have access to their holy sites and for all sides to refrain from provocations. He has restated the UN longstanding position that the status of the Old City and the religious sites within it are extremely sensitive final status issues that can only be resolved through negotiations, and parties should refrain from attempts to establish facts on the ground and alter the character of the Old City.

11. All of this points to the fact that the situation on the ground is serious and likely to further deteriorate if not addressed. And we must not forget Gaza, where practical steps are urgently needed to improve the humanitarian and security situation. In Gaza too there are troubling signs with more rockets fired at Israel, border incidents and Israeli operations which have also caused death or injury to civilians in recent months. Ongoing political and security developments in Egypt have also led to the continued closure of tunnels, tackling illegal smuggling, and the frequent closure of Rafah.

12. The UN remains actively engaged, together with the Palestinian Authority and donors, in addressing some of the most pressing issues in Gaza, including by ensuring a safety net is in place to allow the most critical water, sanitation and health-related facilities to continue operating. In that regard, I am pleased to report that the Government of Turkey has recently pledged \$1.5 million to WHO to address the shortages in a number of key drugs, which we hope will help decrease expensive referrals of patients outside Gaza. We are still waiting for Israel to deliver on its commitment to the full resumption of a previously agreed package of UN construction works, where some \$26 million worth of projects are still stalled and another \$120 million worth of new work is pending Israeli approval.

Madame President,

13. Political progress is crucial to address Gaza's structural problems. In this context, I had an opportunity on 24 April to discuss with President Abbas the very important development towards Palestinian unity. I was assured by the President that this agreement will be implemented under his leadership and on the basis of the PLO commitments. President Abbas emphasized that these commitments would hold the future Government of National Consensus to recognition of Israel, non-violence, and adherence to previous agreements. President Abbas also reiterated his continued commitment to peace negotiations and to keeping protests non-violent, a message he also delivered to the PLO Central Council on 26 April.

14. On the basis of those commitments, the Secretary-General is of the view that this development can constitute an opening that offers, at long last, the prospect of reuniting the West Bank and Gaza under one legitimate Palestinian Authority, including by holding long-overdue elections. For this to have a chance of success, it needs to be managed the right way. The Secretary-General calls on all parties to cooperate to this end. We now expect all factions to support this process as described by President Abbas, meaning they must commit in deeds, not only words, to this path, first and foremost by adhering to non-violence in the West Bank and in Gaza. We are also aware that Israel, facing a continued rocket threat from Gaza, has reacted

with acute skepticism to this development, manifest in its decision to suspend talks and threats of reprisals. We urge all parties to refrain from measures that could turn a delicate situation into a full-blown crisis. We will be following developments closely in the period ahead, and continue to believe that if unity is implemented on the terms described by President Abbas, it is not contradictory with continued peaceful negotiations, as the President himself has reiterated. As such it should be viewed as an opportunity, not a threat.

Madame President,

15. Difficult choices are now required of the parties. They should realize that not making a choice is the most detrimental choice of all – namely to accept that we are going down the path of a one-state reality on the ground. This is a time for the parties to reflect whether they wish to live up to their stated commitment to the two-state solution, or whether they will by default let it slip further away.

16. First and foremost, they must refrain from steps which will render futile any efforts to find a way back to negotiations and salvage the two-state solution. Both sides have to convince each other anew they are partners for peace. If Israel is serious about the two-state solution, it must recognize the negative impact of continued illegal settlement activity. Palestinians in turn should be reflective of their actions in international fora.

17. The international community and the region should also reassess its role if we remain convinced – as I do – of the importance of the two-state solution, and ask what we can do to persuade the parties to make the right choice. It is important to avoid escalation diplomatically and on the ground. Yet it is equally important we work in concert to define a long overdue political horizon on the basis of principles already laid out, lest the Oslo paradigm is put in real jeopardy. This can no longer be “business as usual.” Unrealistic and prescriptive timelines may be counterproductive, as can rushing the parties back to the table without having the necessary framework in place. I believe we must use the current moment of reflection for a discussion on a substantive basis for an early resumption of talks, building on the US effort of the past nine months and relying on continued US engagement.

18. The Secretary-General firmly believes there is still a window for us –the international community and parties—to act, if we wish to realize the vision of two states for two peoples, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition of each other’s legitimate rights and those of their respective citizens, including self-determination. The United Nations remains as fundamentally committed as ever in helping parties bring this conflict to an end, with an end to the occupation that began in 1967, an end to the conflict and an end of claims, in pursuit of lasting peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Thank you.