

Security Council Condemns Acts Resulting in Civilian Deaths During Israeli Operation Against Gaza Bound Aid Convoy

Calls for Investigation in Presidential Statement

By [Global Research](#)

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Security Council

6325th & 6326th Meetings (PM & Night)

Also Briefed by United Nations Political Official, Who Says Bloodshed Would Have Been Avoided if Israel Had Lifted Unacceptable, Counterproductive Blockade

In the early morning hours of Tuesday, the Security Council expressed deep regret at the loss of life and injuries resulting from the use of force during the Israeli military operation early on Monday in international waters against the convoy sailing to Gaza, and condemned those acts which had killed at least 10 civilians and wounded many more.

Twelve hours after convening an emergency session on Monday in response to the Israeli “operation” on the Gaza-bound maritime convoy, the Council issued the statement, read out by Claude Heller of Mexico, whose delegation leads the Council in June (Lebanon was the Council President until midnight, 31 May), requesting the immediate release of the ships, as well as the civilians held by Israel.

The Council urged Israel to permit full consular access, to allow the countries concerned to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately, and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance from the convoy to its destination.

It took note of the statement of United Nations Secretary-General on the need to have a full investigation into the matter and it called for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards.

Stressing that the situation in Gaza was not sustainable, the Council re-emphasized the importance of the full implementation of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). In that context, it reiterated its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and stressed the need for the sustained and regular flow of goods and people to Gaza, as well as unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout the enclave. The Council also expressed support for the proximity talks.

At an earlier meeting Monday afternoon, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, briefed the Council on the incident, reporting that Israeli naval forces had boarded a six-ship convoy, which had been heading towards Gaza. The stated purpose of the convoy was to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza and to break the Israeli blockade on Gaza, he said, making clear the United Nations has “no independent information on what transpired”.

He said that in the lead-up to today’s events, the Israeli authorities had conveyed their intention, both publicly and through diplomatic channels, not to allow the convoy to reach Gaza. The Israeli authorities had stated that if the convoy proceeded, contrary to those warnings, they would divert it to an Israeli port, inspect the cargo, facilitate the entry of only those goods that were allowed into Gaza in accordance with Israel’s blockade, and deport those on-board.

The organizers of the convoy had indicated their intention to proceed with their convoy and to attempt to deliver their full consignment of cargo to Gaza and to break the blockade, he said. And a committee of persons organized by the de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza had been formed to receive the convoy.

According to the Israeli authorities, Israel naval forces had conveyed directly to the convoy in the early hours of Monday that they would not be allowed to reach port in Gaza, he said. However, the convoy had proceeded towards Gaza. At approximately 0400 hours local time, the Israeli navy had acted to intercept the convoy. That had reportedly taken place some 40 nautical miles off the coast, in international waters, and had reportedly involved Israeli military personnel boarding the vessels, supported by naval ships and helicopters.

Given the circumstances, he said, “it is not possible to state definitively the sequence or details of what happened”. The Israeli Government had stated that the demonstrators on-board had used knives and clubs against Israel Defense Forces naval personnel, and possibly live fire, and that a weapon had been grabbed from one of its soldiers. Given that those who had been on-board were now in Israeli custody and had had their transmission equipment confiscated, further information from the convoy’s organizers had been minimal since the incident.

He said that the Secretary-General had stated earlier on Monday in Kampala that he was “shocked” by the killings and injuries of people on the boats and had condemned the violence. He had called for a full investigation to determine exactly how the bloodshed had taken place and stressed that Israel must urgently provide a full explanation. In Mr. Fernandez Taranco’s view, today’s bloodshed would have been avoided if repeated calls on Israel to end the counterproductive and unacceptable blockade of Gaza had been heeded.

Turkey’s Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, said he was distraught by the incident, which was a grave breach of international law and constituted banditry and piracy — it was “murder” conducted by a State, without justification. A nation that followed that path lost its legitimacy as a respectable member of the international community. The children of Gaza, meanwhile, did not know where their next meal was coming from; they had received no education and had no future. Today, many humanitarian workers returned home in body bags. Israel had “blood on its hands”.

High-seas freedom, he said, freedom of navigation, was one of the oldest forms of international law; no vessel could be stopped or boarded without the consent of the captain

or flag State. Any suspected violation of the law did not absolve the intervening State under international law. To treat humanitarian delivery as a hostile act and to treat aid workers as combatants could not be deemed legal or legitimate. Any attempt to legitimize the attack was futile.

This was an attack on the United Nations and its values, he said, adding that the international system had suffered a sharp blow, and now “it is our responsibility to rectify this and prove that common sense and respect to international law prevails”. Israel must be prepared to face the consequences of its crimes. The processes in place had been suffocated by that one single act. Israel had become an advocate of aggression and the use of force. He called on the people of Israel to express dismay. Steps must be taken to reinstate Israel’s status as a credible partner and responsible member of the international community.

The Security Council should react strongly and adopt a presidential statement today strongly condemning Israel and demanding an urgent inquiry and punishment for the perpetrators, he urged. He called on the body to step up and do what was expected of it.

The Palestinian Authority had declared a state of mourning for three days, said the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, adding that everyone was a victim, to be mourned as martyrs of Palestine. It was high time for the Security Council to take decisive measures against Israel, which always acted beyond the law, he stressed. The continuation of the Gaza blockade and the starvation of the people who lived there was what had led to today’s crime and had allowed hundreds around the world “to be on our side”.

He promised that the fleets would continue to come until the blockade was ended and the suffering ameliorated for the Palestinian people. The attack of those unarmed civilians aboard foreign ships in international waters was more proof that Israel acted as a country beyond the law. Hence, the international community must take “urgent and suitable” measures. It was time for the Council to put an end to the unjustifiable blockade imposed on 1.5 million Palestinians and to implement its resolution 1860 (2009).

Israel’s representative told the Council that, although the flotilla was portrayed in the media as a humanitarian mission, it was anything but. If that were truly the case, the organizers of the mission would have accepted weeks ago Israel’s offer to transfer the aid brought on the flotilla through the Israeli port of Ashdod and through the established Israeli procedures. Much material and merchandise was entering Gaza daily through those mechanisms. “I would like to stress there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza,” he said. The flotilla’s organizers had not only rejected Israel’s offer, but they had stated that their mission was not about delivering humanitarian supplies, but about breaking the Israeli siege on Gaza.

“What kind of humanitarian activists demand to bypass the United Nations, the Red Cross and other internationally recognized agencies?” he asked. “What kind of peace activists use knives, clubs and other weapons to attack soldiers who board a ship in accordance with international law?” he said. He asked what kind of activists embraced Hamas and terrorist organizations that openly shunned a two-State solution and called for Israel’s destruction. “The answer is clear. They are not peace activists; they are not messengers of goodwill. They cynically use the guise of humanitarian aid to send a message of hate and to implement violence.”

Council members around the table were generally united in strongly condemning the incident, deploring the loss of life and calling for a release by the Israeli authorities of the detainees. They agreed on the unambiguous need for an independent and in-depth investigation, with most suggesting that Israel bore the responsibility to provide a full account of what had occurred and to describe the efforts it had made to minimize the loss of life and injuries.

Context for today's tragedy, many said, were the Israeli restrictions on Gaza, which they insisted must be lifted, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The current closure was deemed unacceptable and counterproductive, and ending it was among the highest priorities of many of their Governments and of the international community as a whole. There were calls for continued humanitarian reconstruction aid and economic development assistance for Gaza, with some speakers saying Monday morning's events had also highlighted the need, once again, for a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Additional statements were made by the representatives of the United Kingdom, Mexico, Brazil, Austria, Japan, Nigeria, United States, Russian Federation, Uganda, China, France, Gabon, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Lebanon.

The first meeting, on Monday, was called to order at 1:55 p.m. and adjourned at 3:19 p.m. The second meeting began at 1:43 a.m. on Tuesday and ended at 1:51 a.m.

Presidential Statement

The full text of the presidential statement, to be issued as document S/PRST/2010/9, reads as follows:

"The Security Council deeply regrets the loss of life and injuries resulting from the use of force during the Israeli military operation in international waters against the convoy sailing to Gaza. The Council, in this context, condemns those acts which resulted in the loss of at least 10 civilians and many wounded, and expresses its condolences to their families.

"The Security Council requests the immediate release of the ships as well as the civilians held by Israel. The Council urges Israel to permit full consular access, to allow the countries concerned to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately, and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance from the convoy to its destination.

"The Security Council takes note of the statement of the United Nations Secretary-General on the need to have a full investigation into the matter and it calls for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards.

"The Security Council stresses that the situation in Gaza is not sustainable. The Council re-emphasizes the importance of the full implementation of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). In that context, it reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and stresses the need for sustained and regular flow of goods and people to Gaza as well as unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza.

"The Security Council underscores that the only viable solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an agreement negotiated between the parties and re-emphasizes that only a two-State solution, with an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours, could bring peace to the region.

“The Security Council expresses support for the proximity talks and voices concern that this incident took place while the proximity talks are under way and urges the parties to act with restraint, avoiding any unilateral and provocative actions, and all international partners to promote an atmosphere of cooperation between the parties and throughout the region.”

Background

The Security Council met today in an emergency meeting to discuss the unfolding situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Briefing

OSCAR FERNANDEZ-TARANCO, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, reported that, in the early morning hours, Israeli naval forces had boarded a six-ship convoy, which was heading towards Gaza. The stated purpose of the convoy was to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza and to break the Israeli blockade on Gaza. The convoy was reportedly carrying a range of educational, medical and construction materials and approximately 700 activists, citizens of several countries. Among their numbers were reportedly members of parliament from several countries.

He said that in the lead-up to today’s events, the Israeli authorities had conveyed their intention, both publicly and through diplomatic channels, not to allow the convoy to reach Gaza. The Israeli authorities had stated that should the convoy proceed contrary to those warnings they would divert it to an Israeli port, inspect the cargo, facilitate the entry of only those goods that were allowed into Gaza, in accordance with Israel’s blockade, and deport those on-board.

The organizers of the convoy had indicated their intention to proceed with their convoy and to attempt to deliver their full consignment of cargo to Gaza and to break the blockade, he said. A committee of persons organized by the de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza had been formed to receive the convoy.

He said that several Governments with nationals on-board the vessels had urged restraint from all sides and had indicated to the Israeli authorities their utmost concern that their nationals be protected. The Secretary-General’s Spokesperson last Friday had urged that all involved act with a sense of care and responsibility and work for a satisfactory resolution.

The convoy had been due to reach Gaza today, he said. According to the Israeli authorities, Israel naval forces had conveyed directly to the convoy during the early hours of this morning that they would not be allowed to reach port in Gaza. However, the convoy had proceeded towards Gaza. At approximately 0400 hours local time, the Israeli navy had acted to intercept the convoy. That had reportedly taken place some 40 nautical miles off the coast, in international waters. That reportedly had involved Israeli military personnel boarding the vessels, supported by naval ships and helicopters.

He said that Israeli forces had taken control of all six vessels. There had been serious violence on the main passenger vessel, a Turkish-registered ship named Mavi Marmara. He had also seen media reports of violence related to a Greek-registered ship, the Sfendonii. As a result of that violence, according to the latest information, at least 10 people had been killed and at least 30 injured, while at least six Israeli military personnel had been injured. There were no finally confirmed casualty figures at the current stage.

Given the circumstances, he said, “it is not possible to state definitively the sequence or details of what happened”. The Israeli Government had stated that the demonstrators on-board had used knives and clubs against Israel Defense Forces naval personnel, and possibly live fire, and that a weapon had been grabbed from an Israel Defense Forces soldier. Given that those who had been on-board the ships were now in Israeli custody, including reporters who were travelling with the convoy, and had had their transmission equipment confiscated by the boarding Israeli forces, further information from the organizers of the convoy had been minimal since this morning. “We have no independent information on what transpired.”

According to Israeli statements, the seriously injured had subsequently been evacuated by helicopter to hospitals in Israel, he continued. Five of the ships had arrived under escort at the Israeli port of Ashdod, but the Mavi Marmara had not yet been brought into port. An Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson had stated that all international persons from the vessels would be deported.

Israeli authorities had expressed regret about the casualties, but blamed the activists for the violence, he said. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had condemned Israel’s actions and the killing of the activists and declared three days of mourning in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. There had been widespread regional and international expressions of alarm and concern at the bloodshed, as well as diplomatic demarches seeking a full explanation from the Israeli authorities. There had also been protests in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel and several regional capitals.

He said that the Secretary-General had stated earlier today in Kampala that he is “shocked” by the killings and injuries of people on the boats and condemned the violence. He called for a full investigation to determine exactly how the bloodshed had taken place and stressed that Israel must urgently provide a full explanation. At the Secretary-General’s direction, Special Coordinator Robert Serry, along with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General, Filippo Grandi, had been actively engaged on the ground since the crisis had broken to urge restraint and an end to violence, and coordinate with all relevant parties in the tragedy’s aftermath.

“We underscore the importance of a full investigation into this incident, as called for by the Secretary-General,” the Assistant Secretary-General said, adding that it was also imperative that Israel provide access to detainees, in accordance with relevant international legal standards. And more broadly, “we stress the importance of all parties strictly adhering to the framework of international law, including international humanitarian law and the law of the sea”.

“We also stress that these developments come at a time when all efforts should be focused on the need to build trust and advance Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and nurture regional cooperation in support of peace. It is vital that the proximity talks continue,” he said.

He pointed out that, in his view, today’s bloodshed would have been avoided if repeated calls on Israel to end the counterproductive and unacceptable blockade of Gaza had been heeded. He stressed the scale of unmet needs of Gaza’s civilian population and reiterated that the blockade of Gaza must end. Special Coordinator Serry had briefed the Council in detail on 18 May on the serious humanitarian, human rights and socio-economic conditions facing the civilian population in Gaza, and had made clear the range of interventions, from

water and sanitation to education, to health, to the commercial sector, which were urgent to meet the needs. (See Press Release [SC/9929](#))

“The only way forward for Gaza is a different and more positive strategy that implements Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). It is now more vital than ever that this be put into effect,” he urged.

Statements

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, said the meeting was the result of a very sad and tragic occasion in which a Member State had committed a serious crime in total disregard of all the United Nations values. He said he was distraught that the Israeli Defense Forces had stormed a multinational, civilian endeavour, killing and wounding many civilians. “This action was uncalled for,” he said, and a “grave breach of international law”. “In simplest terms, this is tantamount to banditry and piracy. It is murder conducted by a State. It has no excuses, no justification whatsoever,” he said.

The multinational civilian flotilla, comprised of a few ships and 600 people from 32 countries carrying humanitarian aid to impoverished Gaza, had been unlawfully ambushed today, he said. Its sole aim had been to provide much-needed relief to children of occupied Gaza that had been living under an illegal, inhumane Israeli blockade for years. The ships had hardly been a threat to the State of Israel. Rather, humanitarian aid had been on its way to children who had been stripped of their opportunity to live as children and enjoy all the basic amenities that all other children enjoyed.

The ships carried amenities and facilities such as playgrounds that would remind the children of their childhoods, as well as basic supplies such as cancer medication and milk powder to enhance child growth and health in absence of regular milk. The international community had been a witness to that humanitarian tragedy for years, failing to act. “Today, we observed, through live coverage, an act of barbarism, where provision of humanitarian aid has been punished through aggression on the high seas,” he said. Today, many humanitarian aid workers went back in body bags. “Israel has blood on its hands. This is not off the coast of Somalia or in the archipelagos of the Far East where piracy is still a phenomenon. This is the Mediterranean, where such acts are not the norm. This is where we need common sense,” he said.

The use of force was not only inappropriate, but disproportionate, he said. International law dictated that, even in wartime, civilians were not to be attacked or harmed. The doctrine of self-defence did not in any way justify the actions taken by the Israeli forces. High-seas freedom was one of the most basic rights under international maritime law, including international customary law. No vessel could be stopped or boarded without the consent of the captain or the flag State. The law permitting such action in exceptional cases was clearly stated. Any suspected violation of the law on the part of the vessel and its crew did not absolve the intervening State of its duties and responsibilities under applicable international law.

“To treat humanitarian aid delivery as a hostile act and to treat aid workers as combatants is a reflection of a dangerous state of mind, with detrimental effects to regional and global peace,” he said. Israel’s actions could not be deemed legal or legitimate. He pointed to official statements made claiming that the civilians on the ships were members of a radical Islamist group, saying he was saddened to see a State stoop so low as to lie and struggle to

create pretexts that would legitimize their illegal actions. The flotilla was made up of civilians of many faiths and countries, representing the conscience of the international community. Therefore, the attack was an attack on the United Nations and its values.

The international community had suffered a sharp blow and it had the responsibility to rectify it. "We must be able to show that use of force is not an option, unless clearly stated in law," he said, adding that Israel must be prepared to face the consequences and be held accountable for its crimes. Under the current conditions, any slim chance for peace and stability in the region had suffered a serious setback. It was as if Israel had gone the extra mile to negate any positive developments and hopes for the future.

He called on the Israelis to express their dismay over this wrongdoing, and take steps to reinstate their status as a credible partner and responsible member of the international community. The Security Council should adopt a presidential statement strongly condemning that Israeli act of aggression, demanding an urgent inquiry into the incident and calling for the punishment of all responsible authorities and persons. "I call on this Council to step up and do what is expected of it," he said.

The statement must include several things, he said. Israel must apologize to the international community and the families of those killed and wounded. An inquiry must be undertaken. Appropriate international action must immediately be taken against the perpetrators and authorities responsible for the aggression. The United Nations must issue a severe sense of disappointment and warning. Israel must be urged to abide by international law and basic human rights. The countries concerned must be allowed to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately.

Moreover, the ships must be expressly released and allowed to deliver humanitarian aid to their destination, he said. Families of the deceased, the wounded, as well as the non-governmental organizations and shipping companies concerned must be fully compensated. The blockade of Gaza must end immediately and all humanitarian assistance allowed in. Gaza must be made an example by swiftly developing it, to make it a region of peace.

"This is a black day in the history of humanity, where the distance between terrorists and States has been blurred," he said. "It is incumbent upon us to show that all States are bound by international law and human values."

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) said his country deeply deplored the loss of life today and was gravely concerned that Israeli actions should conclude in such a tragic loss. His Government had been in contact with the Israeli Government throughout the day and had advised it against such action, because of the risks involved. But, at the same time, there had been an unambiguous need for Israel to act with restraint and in accordance with its international obligations. Given the number of casualties, Israel bore the responsibility to provide a full account of what had occurred, what efforts it had made to minimize the loss of life, and why the death toll had been so high. It was important to establish whether enough had been done to prevent the deaths and unnecessary injuries.

However, he said, the events could not be viewed in isolation; clearly, Israeli restrictions on access to Gaza must be lifted, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The current closure was unacceptable and counterproductive, and a durable resolution to the Gaza crisis must be ensured. That was among the highest international priorities of the new British

Government. The international community must meet its responsibility in that regard, as well. He called on all concerned to continue to assist with humanitarian and reconstruction aid and economic development. The events had also highlighted the need for a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Proximity talks must progress and direct talks must be entered into as soon as possible.

He warned that another period of anger and frustration might erupt in the region, leading to further violence and deterioration in Gaza. Israel must provide a full, timely and transparent account of the weekend's events, including what measures were at hand to ensure an impartial and comprehensive investigation and to ensure no further loss of life. It must also provide full information and immediate access for all embassies to all nationals involved in the incident. It must also open the crossings to allow unfettered access to Gaza and the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from the enclave. He urged Hamas and all parties to comply with resolution 1860 (2009) and with efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution.

CLAUDE HELLER (Mexico) said he was dismayed and shocked by the events. He condemned in the strongest terms the armed attack by Israeli forces in international waters against the civilian flotilla. He was dismayed at the loss of human life and injuries. He expressed solidarity with and condolences for the victims' families. These were direct attacks against civilians and humanitarian personnel. The restrictions on humanitarian aid were violations of international principles of human rights, including those set forth in the 1949 Geneva Conventions. That type of action violated international law. He called for a comprehensive investigation into the events.

The blockade against Gaza was detrimental to the Palestinians, as well as counterproductive for Israel, he said. The situation today could have been avoided. He urged Israel to lift the blockade against Gaza and to allow access for humanitarian aid. He reaffirmed the importance of complying fully with Council resolution 1860 (2009) and he stressed the relevance of creating an international monitoring mechanism to allow humanitarian supplies to reach Gaza. He called on the parties involved to refrain from any action that might fuel violence. He called for dialogue between Israel and Palestine, saying it was the only way to have lasting peace in the region. The events that occurred should not interrupt the peace process under way. Otherwise, the most extreme sectors would be favoured.

MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VIOTTI (Brazil) said her country had been shocked upon learning of the attacks by Israel today on the vessel carrying humanitarian supplies to Gaza. Brazil vehemently condemned those attacks. There was no justification for a military operation against a humanitarian convoy, she said, adding that it had reportedly taken place in international waters. She expressed her country's deep condolences to the families of those who had been killed, noting that a Brazilian national might have been killed or was on-board one of the ships. The incident must be fully clarified in light of international law and international humanitarian law through an independent investigation.

She said the deplorable incident showed the need to immediately lift the Gaza blockade. Resolution 1860 (2009) called for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza, including food, fuel and medical treatment, but despite universal and repeated calls, Israel had systematically refused to lift the blockade. The closures also violated the basic human rights of approximately 1.5 million people, and nearly 18 months after "Operation Cast Lead", Palestinians were still forced to live in entirely unacceptable conditions. She joined the international community in strongly urging

Israel to immediately suspend the unlawful blockade.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING (Austria) said he was deeply shocked by the events. He expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and condemned the use of violence. Austria's Foreign Minister had called for a rapid, full and independent investigation of the events that had occurred in international waters, and he had conveyed that message to Israel's Ambassador to Austria. The lack of full compliance with Council resolution 1860 (2009) was at the core of last night's deplorable events. He acknowledged Israel's right to protect its citizens against indiscriminate attacks, but those concerns could not justify what had happened today

The blockade was counterproductive, he said. He reiterated the call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of Gaza. He urged Israel to take all immediate and credible steps and to act in full accordance with its obligations under international law. All sides must restrain from any action that could prolong or worsen the plight of the civilian population of Gaza.

YUKIO TAKASU (Japan) said he was shocked at what had taken place on-board the ships. On several occasions, including through resolution 1860 (2009), the Security Council had called for humanitarian support of Gaza and had repeatedly called to allow humanitarian access to the enclave. Japan condemned the day's violent, hostile acts against the backdrop of a situation that had not improved for 18 months. Japan deplored the deaths and injuries of so many innocents and believed that a full investigation should be carried out, on an urgent basis. The parties should act with restraint and refrain from any further action that might lead to a cycle of violence.

U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria) expressed dismay at this morning's assault on the Gaza-bound convoy and extended her country's sympathies to the families of the dead and wounded. The incident was not only unfortunate, but regrettable, as it had come after two rounds of proximity talks between Israelis and Palestinians, and at a time when all were hopeful about the possibility of direct talks. The maximum use of force to intercept the international humanitarian convoy was not only unnecessary, but it had created a new situation that could unleash fresh unrest, with grave consequences for peace in the Middle East.

She called for maximum restraint and urged the parties to recommit to their Road Map obligations. They must not relent in the efforts to tread the path of dialogue and long-term reconciliation. At the same time, she called for an urgent inquiry into the weekend's events. Those responsible for the violence must be compelled to account for their actions. Nigeria remained concerned about the deplorable humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The blockade must be lifted. Security must be guaranteed to all nations and all peoples in the Middle East. The Security Council should be united in its message, whenever there was a breach to peace and security, and she supported the draft presidential statement.

ALEJANDRO WOLFF (United States) regretted the tragic loss of life and injury. He expected a credible and transparent investigation and urged the Council to conduct one fully. Today's events were a reminder of a similar situation in 2008, during which time the United States had stressed that non-provocative and non-confrontational mechanisms existed for humanitarian aid delivery into Gaza. The direct delivery by sea was not appropriate, or responsible. He expressed deep concern over the suffering of Gaza civilians. The situation was unsustainable and not in the interest of anyone concerned. It was necessary to address the full range of the population's humanitarian and recovery needs. Hamas' interference

had complicated humanitarian efforts in Gaza, and it had undermined security and prosperity for all Palestinians.

He stressed the need for allowing humanitarian goods, including construction materials, into Gaza, while recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns. The only viable solution was an agreement negotiated between the parties and a two-State solution, with Israel and an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security. Council members and other States must work to promote an environment of cooperation.

ALEXANDER PANKIN (Russian Federation) expressed regret for all those that had died, and said that there must be a clarification of all the facts. The act was a gross violation of the norms of international law. It illustrated the need for a prompt cessation of the blockade against Gaza. He expressed concern that the event had happened at a time when the preconditions existed for the peace process to move forward. Tensions had risen, and he expressed hope that they would not have a long-term negative impact on the peace process.

PATRICK S. MUGOYA (Uganda) said his country had received with shock reports of the attack on the flotilla. Uganda condemned the attacks and expressed its condolences to the bereaved families. While it did not have the full facts, it supported the call by the Secretary-General for a full investigation. It was concerned about the grave humanitarian situation caused by the ongoing Gaza blockade, which only served to protract the political stalemate. The incident was also a reminder and a call on Israel to end the blockade. He called on Israel to release the ships and civilians, and to permit the delivery of humanitarian assistance. He emphasized the importance of resolution 1860 (2009).

YANG TAO (China) said his country had also been shocked by the Israeli attack on a multinational convoy carrying humanitarian aid. He condemned Israeli actions targeting humanitarian workers and civilians, and expressed his country's condolences to the families of the victims. China supported a quick response by the Council. At present, the humanitarian situation remained grim in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in Gaza, and he urged Israel to immediately and fully implement resolution 1860 (2009) and fully open the borders and lift the blockade.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France) said the human toll of the operation had led his country to believe that there had been an unjustifiable and disproportionate use of force, which it condemned. But, before it drew any conclusions, it must know the facts, and full light should be shed through an in-depth investigation, which must be independent, credible and in line with international standards, and conducted immediately. The incident was a reminder of the need to re-establish humanitarian access to Gaza under resolution 1860 (2009), and France called for a lifting of the unsustainable and illegal Gaza blockade. France, like the European Union, was asking for immediate consular access, under the Vienna Convention, for the nationals of Member States being held in Israel following the operation.

Beyond the event and questions of the blockade, he said, the incident had been a reminder of the need to resume the peace process, for in the absence of a credible peace process, incidents like those were doomed to be repeated and become "bloodier and bloodier". A meeting of the Quartet principals, at the ministerial level, could enable both a lifting of the Gaza blockade and support resumption of the peace talks.

EMANUEL ISSOZE-NGONDET (Gabon) expressed his shock over the attack by Israeli forces

that had caused more than 10 deaths and left many wounded. He expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and support for the humanitarian organizations working in Gaza. The event fuelled tensions and attacks between the two parties, which were a hindrance to the peace process for both sides. He supported the Secretary-General's call for an international inquiry into the circumstances of the raid. The blockade against Gaza must be lifted in line with Council resolution 1860 (2009). All parties must refrain from violence. He called on the international community to do all it could to get talks moving again. He supported the proposed presidential statement.

IVAN BARBALIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) condemned in the strongest possible terms the attack by Israel that had left 10 people dead and others injured. He deeply regretted the tragic loss of life and injuries sustained. He expressed his deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy. The attacks came at time when new efforts had been made to create an environment for negotiations. Civilian ships were carrying humanitarian aid for 1.5 million Gazans under siege by Israel. The attack was a grave breach of international humanitarian law and a violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Nothing justified it.

An investigation should be conducted immediately, he said. He expressed deep concern over the hardship and tragedy of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Their living conditions were unsustainable. Israel must lift the blockade and open access to humanitarian aid into Gaza. It was unacceptable for Israel to continue to act as a State above the law.

The Council President for the month of May, NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon), speaking in his national capacity, said the Israeli navy's raid could be described as piracy against a humanitarian convoy transporting humanitarian assistance to Gaza. The raid had caused 15 deaths, and he expressed condolences to the families of the victims. The Israeli Defense Force had opened fire on a convoy despite the white banners it was flying. The convoy was made up of 600 unarmed civilians from many countries. Among its passengers were a Nobel Peace Prize winner, a survivor of the Holocaust and many eminent people and officials. It was providing medicines, prefabricated homes, wheelchairs and other basic necessities.

Despite the humanitarian nature of the convoy, the Israeli navy had launched an attack with three Israeli naval war vessels, he said. It was part of a pattern of acts committed by Israel against civilians. It violated the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Article 24 of the Charter made reference to the need not to use violence by any State in a way that was contrary to the United Nations purposes. The aggression had taken place beyond local waters. No State had the right to submit to its own sovereignty any portion of international waters, and civilians must be protected in wartime.

Israel continued to impose its illegal blockade on Gaza, he said. That meant the systematic closing of checkpoints and the blocking of humanitarian aid, food, fuel, medicines and building materials. Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister had stated that it was legal, but the action he was talking about was the law of the jungle. The United Nations was discussing the need to combat that type of law of the jungle. It was the manifestation of collective punishment being imposed by Israel. Israeli policy did not distinguish between civilians and the military. "This crime should not go unnoticed," he said. "The international community should not close its eyes." The perpetrators of the crime must be brought to justice. He supported the proposed presidential statement.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, said that President Abbas had condemned the crime that had taken place in international waters and considered it to have been a massacre. For that reason, the Palestinian Authority had declared a state of mourning for three days. Everyone was considered victims, regardless of their nationalities, to be mourned as martyrs of Palestine, and he extended his condolences to the families and loved ones. He also expressed Palestine's deep thanks and gratitude for the Council President's quick response to hold an extraordinary meeting of the Council, which had been requested by both Palestine and Lebanon, in addition to Turkey, to look into Israel's blatant aggression on the Gaza-bound ships. The people on-board were "perpetrators of peace" and their only slogan was of freedom and peace. They carried only foodstuffs, medical equipment and supplies for Palestinian civilians.

He said the latest Israeli crimes and the threats that preceded them were not new to the occupying Power. The Palestinian Authority had severely condemned the acts of Israeli piracy and considered them to be flagrant acts of aggression perpetrated in the face of the international community's silence and inability to put an end to Israeli violations of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. The international community had condemned the Gaza blockade and called for an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. Israel must now be held accountable for the war crime it had committed today against that fleet and for all other war crimes it had committed against the Palestinian people. He called for an independent, impartial and international investigation into the day's events, and for the perpetrators to be punished, as well as for the immediate release and protection of the detainees.

It was high time for the Security Council to take decisive measures against Israel, which always acted beyond the law, he stressed. The continuation of the Gaza blockade and the starvation of the people who lived there was what had led to today's crime and had allowed hundreds from around the world "to be on our side". The fleets would continue to come until the blockade ended and the suffering ameliorated for the Palestinian people. The attack on unarmed civilians aboard foreign ships in international waters was more proof that Israel acted as a country beyond the law. Hence, the international community must take "urgent and suitable" measures. It was time for the Council to see the lack of application of its many resolutions on Palestine and the Middle East, time for it to put an end to the unjustifiable blocked imposed on 1.5 million Palestinians and to implement resolution 1860 (2006).

He urged the Council to put an end to Israel's lack of respect for its resolutions and compel the international community to take the necessary measures to ensure the cessation of the settlement activities and other illegal measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Occupied East Jerusalem. It was time for the occupation to end, so that the Palestinians could exercise their inalienable rights and establish a State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

DANIEL CARMON (Israel) said that, although the flotilla was portrayed in the media as a humanitarian mission, it was anything but. If that were truly the case, the organizers of the mission would have accepted weeks ago Israel's offer to transfer the aid brought on the flotilla through the Israeli port of Ashdod and through the established Israeli procedures. Much material and merchandise was entering Gaza daily through those mechanisms. "I would like to stress there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza," he said. The flotilla's organizers had not only rejected Israel's offer, but had stated that their mission was not about delivering humanitarian supplies, but about breaking the Israeli siege on Gaza.

“What kind of humanitarian activists demand to bypass the United Nations, the Red Cross and other internationally recognized agencies?” he asked. “What kind of peace activists use knives, clubs and other weapons to attack soldiers who board a ship in accordance with international law?” he asked. He asked what kind of activists embraced Hamas and terrorist organizations that openly shunned a two-State solution and called for Israel’s destruction. “The answer is clear. They are not peace activists; they are not messengers of goodwill. They cynically use the guise of humanitarian aid to send a message of hate and to implement violence.”

A state of armed conflict existed between Israel and Hamas, he said. Gaza was occupied by terrorists that had ousted the Palestinian Authority in a violent coup, and arms were continuously being smuggled into the territory, including by sea. A maritime blockade was a legitimate and recognized measure under international law that could be implemented as part of an armed conflict at sea. It could be imposed at sea, including in international waters. “Let me also stress that Israel provided, in due time, not only information about the existence of the blockade, but also appropriate notification to the relevant Governments and to the organizers of the Gaza flotilla. The flotilla had turned down Israel’s repeated offers to transfer aid to Gaza, because they had had other plans. The organizing group, the İnsani Yardım Vakfı, had a radical anti-Western orientation. Alongside its legitimate humanitarian activities, it supported radical Islamic networks, such as Hamas.

When it had become clear that the protest flotilla intended to violate the blockade, despite repeated warnings, Israeli navy personnel had boarded the vessels and redirected them to Ashdod, he said. The soldiers boarding one of the ships had been violently attacked with live ammunition, knives, clubs and other types of weapons. The intention had been to lynch Israeli soldiers. “Without any doubt, the soldiers acted in self-defence,” he said. The injured had been evacuated and were currently being treated at Israeli hospitals. The Israel Defense Forces, as part of standard operating procedures, would conduct a debriefing on the matter that would shed more light on the day’s events.

“Let me be very clear, this was not a peaceful protest. The İnsani Yardım Vakfı people on-board one of the ships were not humanitarian activists,” he said. The Israel Defense Forces’ operation had begun as a preventive measure to counter the illegal breakage of the blockade. Any responsible Government would act accordingly in similar circumstances to protect its civilians. Israel regretted the loss of innocent life, but it could not compromise its security. While assessing that particular event, it was important not to lose sight of the bigger picture. Council resolution 1860 (2009) tackled many aspects, not just humanitarian ones. The threat to peace and security posed by Hamas could not be ignored. It was necessary to continue to embrace positive developments in the past few weeks, so that the two parties could sit together in direct talks for their mutual benefit.

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