



Security Council

Sixty-first year

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Thursday, 20 July 2006, 11 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. I now give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: The bloody conflict that has engulfed Lebanon and northern Israel following the crisis triggered by the Hizbollah attack across the Blue Line on 12 July continues to rage. Almost every day brings a new escalation.

The Lebanese people, who had hoped that their country's dark days were behind them, have been brutally dragged back into war. Already, over 300 Lebanese have been killed and over 600 wounded. The casualties are mainly among the civilian population, about one third of them children. Much of the infrastructure in Beirut and around the country has been destroyed. Lebanon remains under an Israeli military blockade, imposed by sea and air.

The Israeli people, who had hoped that Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon — which was certified by this Council six years ago — would bring about security along their northern border, find themselves under constant Hizbollah rocket attacks, which every day reach further into Israeli territory. To date 28 Israelis have been killed and over 200 wounded.

On the humanitarian front, conditions continue to deteriorate. Israeli operations have made it impossible for United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners to reach almost any part of southern Lebanon, even to assess needs, let alone to deliver the actual assistance needed. The lack of access and in situ assessments make it difficult to determine the exact figures of people in need.

Based on preliminary information provided by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the national Lebanese Red Cross and the Lebanese Government, United Nations agencies are

currently working on the basis of a combined total of up to 500,000 people affected, comprising both internally displaced persons and those under siege. That includes nationals from some 20 foreign countries. According to extrapolations of the Lebanese Ministry of the Interior, those figures could likely double. In addition, Syrian authorities report that more than 140,000 people have now crossed into Syria, the majority being nationals of Lebanon, Syria and other Arab countries.

Since the fighting began I have been in constant touch with regional and world leaders, both by telephone and during the Group of Eight (G-8) Summit in Saint Petersburg and my visit to Brussels. The G-8 issued an important statement, which the Council has seen. But, as I have repeatedly stressed, what is most urgently needed is an immediate cessation of hostilities, for three vital reasons: first, to prevent further loss of innocent life and the infliction of further suffering; secondly, to allow full humanitarian access to those in need; and thirdly, to give diplomacy a chance to work out a practical package of actions that would provide a lasting solution to the current crisis.

I repeat: hostilities must stop. But while they continue it is imperative to establish safe corridors for humanitarian workers and relief supplies to reach the civilian population.

The humanitarian task facing us is massive and must be funded urgently. As early as next week I hope to issue a United Nations flash appeal, covering an initial response period of three to six months.

Because of the continued fighting, restrictions imposed by Israel and the destruction of many roads, UNIFIL has no freedom of movement and is unable even to provide humanitarian escorts for displaced persons. Its personnel remain confined to the Naqoura headquarters and their positions in the area of operations. One UNIFIL staff member and his wife have been missing in Tyre since Monday, when the building they lived in was hit by an Israeli air strike and collapsed. We are gravely concerned about their fate, since the approach road to Tyre is now impassable and UNIFIL engineers have been unable to reach the area.

UNIFIL now urgently needs a window of time in which to bring in stocks of food, water and fuel from Israel for its own personnel. If UNIFIL is to remain operational, it will also need to distribute fuel supplies to its positions within the next 24 hours.

We are not going to desert the people of Lebanon in their hour of need. But we have to proceed with caution. As we come to their aid, our Department of Safety and Security has been coordinating efforts to ensure the safety of staff in the affected areas from all parts of the United Nations system, and their dependents. Most non-essential staff and dependents have been moved outside the country. Meanwhile, we are bringing in additional humanitarian experts.

Let me be frank with the Council. The mission's assessment is that there are serious obstacles to reaching a ceasefire and even to diminishing the violence quickly. On 13 July I dispatched an urgent mission to the region, led by my Special Adviser, Vijay Nambiar, and accompanied by Terje Roed-Larsen and Alvaro de Soto, whom the Council knows well. I sent them to urge all parties to show restraint and to explore ways of defusing the crisis. Mr. Nambiar and his colleagues returned to New York last night, and they are here with me now. I am very grateful to the Governments of Spain and of the United Kingdom for enabling them to cover so much ground in such a short time.

Hizbollah's provocative attack on 12 July was the trigger for this crisis. It is clear that the Lebanese Government had no advance knowledge of the attack. Whatever other agendas they may serve, Hizbollah's actions, which it portrays as defending Palestinian and Lebanese interests, in fact defend neither. On the contrary, they hold an entire nation hostage and set back prospects for the negotiation of a comprehensive Middle East peace.

I have already condemned Hizbollah's attacks on Israel and acknowledged Israel's right to defend itself under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. I do so again today. I also condemn Hizbollah's reckless disregard for the wishes of the elected Government of Lebanon and for the interests of the Lebanese people and the wider region.

Israel has confirmed that its operation in Lebanon has wider, more far-reaching goals than the return of its captured soldiers and that its aim is to end the threat posed by Hizbollah. The mission was informed that the operation is not yet approaching the achievement of that objective.

Israel states that it has no quarrel with the Government or the people of Lebanon and that it is taking extreme precautions to avoid harm to them. Yet a number of its actions have killed or hurt Lebanese

civilians and military personnel and caused great damage to infrastructure. While Hizbollah's actions are deplorable and, as I have said, Israel has a right to defend itself, the excessive use of force is to be condemned.

But while Israel has stated its military objectives to be to hit Hezbollah's infrastructure and physical strength, it has, in the words of the Lebanese Prime Minister, torn the country to shreds. As Prime Minister Siniora also said yesterday, no Government can survive on the ruins of a nation.

The mission reports many of its interlocutors in the region as noting that, whatever damage Israel's operations may be doing to Hizbollah's military capabilities, they are doing little or nothing to decrease popular support for Hizbollah in Lebanon or the region but are doing a great deal to weaken the Government of Lebanon. In short, the very Government which Israel wants to extend its control throughout the territory has itself become a hostage to the crisis, is less able than ever to deploy its forces in the areas necessary to control Hizbollah and is appealing to the international community for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Moreover, any analogy with Afghanistan under the Taliban is wholly misleading. Mr. Siniora's Government clearly espouses democratic values. It deserves, and must receive, all possible support from the international community.

Despite our assessment that a full ceasefire remains difficult to achieve at this time, I remain of the view that the international community must make its position clear on the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a far greater and more credible effort by Israel to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure while the conditions for such a cessation are urgently developed.

Both the deliberate targeting by Hizbollah, with hundreds of indiscriminate weapons, of Israeli population centres and Israel's disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the Lebanese people must stop. The abducted soldiers must be released as soon as possible, and in any event the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) must be granted immediate access to them. The Government of Israel must allow humanitarian agencies access to civilians. And the democratically elected Government of Lebanon must be urgently supported in its hour of crisis.

In addition to, and in parallel with, these urgent steps, we need to continue diplomatic efforts to develop, in the shortest possible time, a political framework which can be implemented as soon as hostilities cease. Most people in the region rightly reject a simple return to the status quo ante, since any truce based on such a limited outcome could not be expected to last.

The mission has suggested elements to me which, in my opinion, must form the political basis of any lasting ceasefire, and on which they have conducted consultations with the leaders of Lebanon and Israel. I and my advisers will continue to work with those elements, in dialogue with the parties and with regional and international partners.

The elements include the following. The captured Israeli soldiers must be transferred to the legitimate Lebanese authorities, under the auspices of ICRC, with a view to their repatriation to Israel and a ceasefire.

On the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, an expanded peacekeeping force would help stabilize the situation, working with the Lebanese Government to help strengthen its army and deploy it fully throughout the area. Meanwhile, the Lebanese Government would fully implement Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), to establish Lebanese sovereignty and control.

The Prime Minister of Lebanon would unequivocally confirm to the Secretary-General and the Security Council that the Government of Lebanon will respect the Blue Line in its entirety, until agreement on Lebanon's final international boundaries is reached.

A donor framework would be established, with immediate effect, to secure funding for an urgent package of aid, reconstruction and development for Lebanon.

A mechanism would be established, composed of key regional and international actors, to monitor and guarantee the implementation of all aspects of the agreement. An international conference should be organized, with broad Lebanese and international participation, to develop precise timelines for the speedy and full implementation of the Taif Agreement and further measures needed for Lebanon to comply with its international obligations under Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). The conference would also endorse a delineation of

Lebanon's international borders, including a final resolution on all disputed areas, especially the Sheba'a Farms. My letter to Prime Minister Siniora of 5 June 2006 covers those issues.

The planning and implementation of these elements should, as far as possible, be done in parallel — I repeat, in parallel. I should stress that these ideas would obviously require further elaboration and reworking, in close dialogue with all concerned. The Council would need to consider incorporating the elements of such a package in a draft resolution.

Meanwhile, the conditions for peacekeeping clearly do not exist. The Security Council will need to decide what to do about UNIFIL, whose mandate expires on 31 July. In my view, the continuation of UNIFIL in its current configuration, and with its current mandate, is not tenable. Should it be withdrawn? Should it be strengthened? Should it be replaced with something else altogether? The context is radically different from that of a few weeks ago.

We also need a peace track for Gaza — despite the issues involved — as much as we do for Lebanon. I am gravely concerned about Gaza. Palestinians there are suffering deeply, with well over 100 persons, many of them civilians, killed in the last month alone. As a result of the destruction by Israel of the Gaza power plant, more than a million people are without electricity for most of the day and night. Israelis in the south continue to endure Qassam rocket attacks, though, fortunately, without casualties in the past month.

I call for an immediate cessation of indiscriminate and disproportionate violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for a reopening of closed crossing points, without which Gaza will continue to be sucked into a downward spiral of suffering and chaos and the region will be further inflamed.

In my delegation's meetings with President Abbas, he underscored his readiness to engage in a proper dialogue with the Government of Israel. It is vital that the regional crisis not be allowed to dampen the hopes that had been emerging on this score. President Abbas's efforts to move the Palestinian side towards a national unity government that addresses the Quartet's principles must be fully supported. Israel needs to refrain from unilateral acts that prejudice final status issues and agree to negotiate in the peace process.

If the violence is to end, and dialogue and engagement to resume, the international community must also play its part and address the Israeli-Palestinian issue boldly and creatively. That would also help remove a pretext used by extremists throughout the region — including in Lebanon. As the G-8 summit concluded, and as Arab leaders stressed to the mission, the need to address a root cause of the region's problems — the absence of a comprehensive Middle East peace — is clear. We really need to focus on the quest for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Our hearts and minds must be with the civilians in Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, who are enduring daily violence and who are looking to the United Nations, as are many in the wider region, to find a solution to the current crisis.

I recognize that there are differences of approach within the Council. But today let us remember what unites us: our compassion for the victims and for all who have lost loved ones — to whom we must all express our deepest condolences — and our common desire to bring about a stable, long-term peace between Israel and its neighbours. That requires the international community, through the Council, to speak with one voice in the coming days.

I invite the Council to consider the parallel implementation of the package of concrete actions I have just presented. The support of the international community in the political, security and financial areas will be critical for the success of the entire process.

It is my firm belief that only the simultaneous implementation of the different elements of this package will allow for the transformation of any cessation of hostilities into a durable ceasefire. When that is achieved, the international community will need to develop a framework for the final delineation of the borders of Lebanon and a decisive revival of the Middle East peace process.

I urge the Council to take firm action towards ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East region, as mandated by the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.