

PALESTINE CHRONOLOGY 2009

JANUARY

Jan. 2: Protests against Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip are taking place after Friday prayers throughout the Arab and Islamic world.

Jan. 3: Israeli aircraft bombard Gaza and Israeli ground forces enter the Strip to "destroy the Hamas terror infrastructure in the area of operations," according to military spokesperson Maj. Avital Leibovitch. - The OIC FM meeting in Jeddah harshly condemns Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

Jan. 6: Israel shells UNRWA school, killing at least 42 Palestinians.
- Egypt and France put forward ceasefire initiative.

Jan. 8: UNSC Res. 1860 calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire.

Jan. 12: The UN Human Rights Council adopts a resolution strongly condemning Israel's ongoing military operation in Gaza.

Jan. 15: Israeli forces shell the UNRWA HQ in Gaza, destroying tons of food and humanitarian supplies.

- Hamas Interior Minister Said Siyam is killed in an Israeli air strike on his brother's home near Gaza City.

Jan. 17: Israel declares a unilateral ceasefire in its 22-day offensive in the Gaza Strip.

- The PCBS says Israel's military assault in Gaza caused damage to the Palestinian infrastructure totaling some \$476 million.

Jan. 18: Hamas announces immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and gives Israel a week to pull its troops out.

- European and Arab leaders meet in Sharm Esh-Sheikh to discuss Gaza humanitarian aid and reconstruction.

Jan. 19: According to OCHA, 1,314 Palestinians were killed during the Gaza War, 412 of them children and 110 women.

Jan. 26: The Arab League files a request for a UN investigation into possible Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

Jan. 27: In a violation of the ceasefire, members of an unknown military brigade detonate an explosive device near an Israeli patrol in the Kissufim area of Gaza, killing one soldier and wounding three others.

Jan. 28: A new Peace Now report reveals that Israel has accelerated construction in illegal settlements during 2008, with 1,257 new structures having been built last year compared to 800 in 2007, marking a 57% increase.

Jan. 29: Israeli air forces violate the ceasefire in Gaza by launching at least one missile targeting two PRC activists in Khan Younis, thereby injuring nine people, including eight children.

- Acting under a doctrine that allows prosecution in Spain of crimes against humanity or crime like terrorism or genocide, even if committed in another country, Spanish Judge Fernando Andreu begins an investigation into seven current or former Israeli officials (incl. former IAF commander Dan Halutz and DM Binyamin Ben-Eliezer) over the 2002 bombing in Gaza that killed Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh and 14 other people, incl. nine children.

FEBRUARY

Feb. 2: The UN launches a US\$613 million flash appeal for emergency relief efforts in Gaza.

- The International Criminal Court looks into ways to prosecute Gaza war crimes.

Feb. 4: At the request of the US, Denmark hosts a two-day international meeting on Gaza arms smuggling.

Feb. 5: The Israeli navy intercepts a freighter carrying humanitarian aid from Lebanon to Gaza and impounds it in Ashdod port. Lebanese PM Fuad Siniora expresses his "utmost condemnation for this blatant attack."

- Hamas officials leave Cairo without reaching an agreement with Egyptian mediators on a ceasefire with Israel. Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum says reasons were the insistence to link the Shalit file with other talks as well as the non-existence of any guarantees and many clarifications needed from the Israeli side.

- After a 4-day visit to the region, the UN Sec.-Gen.'s Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, says that despite the Gaza ceasefires, children continued to suffer and remained in a precarious state of insecurity.

Feb. 9: UNRWA resumes import of humanitarian supplies into Gaza after Hamas returns aid supplies they had seized earlier.

- UNRWA complains that its food aid to 900,000 refugees in Gaza continues to be jeopardized by the Israeli government's refusal to allow entry of three truckloads of nylon pellets used for making plastic bags used for food distribution.

- Israel launches air strikes on two Hamas targets in Gaza.

Feb. 10: Fateh and Hamas hold preliminary talks on forming a national unity government in Cairo.

Feb. 11: In an interview with *Reuters*, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, says that the next Israeli government must restart serious peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Feb. 12: UN Sec.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon announces the establishment of a UN Board of Inquiry into incidents involving death and damage at UN premises in Gaza, to be headed by Ian Martin of the UK and including legal advisers and military experts.

Feb. 17: The European Commission Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and Gaza announces that the EU would contribute €25.5 million through its PEGASE mechanism for support to the Palestinians, to pay salaries and pensions to over 78,000 persons.

Feb. 18: The Israeli cabinet decides that "it would be inconceivable" for Israel to accept an Egyptian-proposed ceasefire calling for reopening of border crossings without the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit. Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan calls the decision "a stab in the back to the Egyptian efforts."

Feb. 19: In a joint resolution adopted by 488 votes in favor 5 against and 19 abstentions, the European Parliament called for a damage assessment in Gaza and an in-depth evaluation of the needs of the Gaza population as a basis for reconstruction plans.

Feb. 20: After Israeli Pres. Peres designates Binyamin Netanyahu to form the next government, Pres. Abbas' spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, states that the PA "will not deal with the Israeli government unless it accepts a two-state solution and accepts to halt settlements and to respect past accords," while Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum says that Israel had picked the "most extremist and most dangerous" person to lead the country whose choice "did not herald a period of peace or stability in the region."

Feb. 21: Over 600 students, third-country residents and medical patients left as Egypt opened the Rafah border crossing for those stranded in Gaza.

Feb. 26: Former peace negotiators call on the international community to engage directly with Hamas.

Feb. 22: An Arab League delegation arrives in Gaza to assess the destruction as well as people's needs. Its findings will be presented to Arab League Sec.-Gen. Amr Musa and to international donors.

Feb. 23: In Brussels, EU FMs call on the incoming Israeli government to re-launch the Middle East peace process.

- Amnesty International called for a freeze on arms sales to Israel and Palestinian groups such as Hamas following the recent Gaza conflict.

Feb. 24: Pres. Abbas says that any national unity government formed after a Fatah-Hamas agreement must respect all past agreements signed by the PLO.

Feb. 25: Reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas, mediated by Egypt Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman, started, with what was described as a series of "icebreaking" meetings by the participants. An aide to PA President Abbas said that agreement had been reached on the issue of exchange of prisoners and on stopping media attacks against each other. A Hamas representative described the talks as "positive and promising".

- After meeting Pres. Mubarak in Cairo, British Foreign Sec. David Miliband calls for the establishment of a "viable and strong" Palestinian State as crucial to the security of Israel and the Middle East and urges Palestinian factions to form a national unity government. He emphasizes that "the settlements are illegal, that a Palestinian State should be based on the 1967 borders, and that Jerusalem should be the capital of both States."

Feb. 26: In Cairo, Palestinian factions agree to work towards setting up a unity government. Former PM Qre'i'a calls it "a historic day," and announces the creation of five main joint committees (one each on unity govt., security, national reconciliation, elections and PLO reform).

- A group of former peace negotiators - incl. former Israeli FM Shlomo Ben-Ami, former UN Middle East envoy Alvaro de Soto, former EU envoy for Bosnia Paddy Ashdown, and former Australian FM and Cambodia peace negotiator Gareth Evans - release a public letter, published in *The Times*, calling for the international community to start engaging directly with Hamas as the only way to achieve peace in the Middle East.

MARCH

March 2: Donors at the International Conference on Gaza Reconstruction in Sharm Esh-Sheikh pledge some \$4.5 billion in aid.

March 4: US Sec. of State Hillary Clinton promises vigorous personal involvement in Mideast peace efforts and criticizes Israel's plan to demolish 88 Palestinian homes in Silwan as "unhelpful and not in keeping with the obligations entered into under the Road Map."

March 7: PM Salam Fayyad submits his resignation to Pres. Abbas to pave the way for the establishment of a unity government.

March 10: The British aid convoy 'Viva Palestina' arrives in Gaza with aid for the besieged Palestinians.

- Palestinian factions meet in Cairo for nine days of reconciliation talks.

March 14: Palestinian negotiators in Cairo sign an agreement to prohibit fighting or the use of weapons to settle internal disputes, while being deadlocked on the composition and obligations of a unity government.

March 15: Presidential Guards College in Jericho is formally opened.

March 16: Prominent jurists urge the UN Sec.-Gen. and UNSC to investigate international law violations during the Gaza War.

- Human Rights Watch says the EU should press for a comprehensive and impartial international inquiry into allegations of serious violations of international law committed by Israeli and Palestinian forces in Gaza and southern Israel.

March 17: Israel arrests 10 prominent Hamas leaders.

- The three-day 5th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) in Brussels backs the Arab Peace Initiative and efforts to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation. Parliamentarians also call on a freeze on *all* settlements and for an independent inquiry into the violations of international humanitarian law and the use in civilian areas of banned weapons in the recent Gaza War.

- Reconciliation talks between Hamas, Fateh and other factions conclude in Cairo, with remaining controversial issues having been referred to a higher committee for further discussion.

March 19: Special UN Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk, states in an interview that Israel's military assault on densely populated Gaza appeared "to constitute a war crime of the greatest magnitude under criminal law."

March 23: Deputy head of the PLO in Lebanon Kamal Medhat and three others are killed in a roadside bombing near the Mieh Mieh RC in southern Lebanon. Pres. Abbas condemns the attack.

March 24: Israeli DM Barak approves construction of a new Hebron settlement.

March 25: A new Human Rights Watch report says the Israeli army unlawfully fired white phosphorus shells over densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip during its recent offensive, knowing the munitions threatened the civilian population.

March 28: Ahead of the Arab League Summit at Doha Arab FMs prepare a draft declaration saying that the Arab initiative would not be on the table for ever, but was "dependent on an Israeli acceptance of it."

March 30: At the 21st Arab League Summit in Doha, Arab League Sec.-Gen. Amr Musa says "The deliberate targeting of civilians is just one example of how the Israeli military's ideology is nearing madness" and calls for Israeli soldiers to be held accountable for war crimes committed during the 22-day offensive in Gaza. Pres. Bashar Al-Assad says Syria is still pursuing peace with Israel but the "real aim of Israel's recently elected Government is against peace." UN Sec.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon addresses the summit, expressing his concern about recent events in Gaza and the peoples' suffering, and calling for a durable ceasefire, open crossings, Palestinian reconciliation, and Israel to freeze settlements as well as unilateral actions in Jerusalem.

March 31: Ali Abu Foul, a Palestinian resistance fighter killed in an Israeli attack along with one other.

- Israeli military investigators dismiss soldiers' testimonies of intentional killing of civilians during the Gaza war and conclude that no war crimes had been committed.

APRIL

April 1: New Israeli FM Lieberman says Israel is not bound by the Annapolis understandings.

April 2: Pres. Abbas rejects PM Fayyad's resignation.

- A Palestinian with an axe and a knife kills a 13-year-old Israeli boy and wounded a seven-year-old boy in the Bat Ayin settlement and then fled. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claim responsibility.

April 3: The UNHRC appoints a fact-finding mission to Gaza, to be led by Justice Richard J. Goldstone of South Africa, former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and including Christine Chinkin, member of the former UNHRC fact-finding mission to Beit Hanoun, Hina Jilani, former Special Representative of the Sec.-Gen. for Human Rights

Defenders, and Col. Desmond Travers, former member of the Board of Directors of the Institute for International Criminal Investigations. The PA welcomes the appointments.

April 6: In a speech to the Turkish Parliament, US Pres. Obama says that the US “strongly supported the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That is a goal shared by Palestinians, Israelis, and people of goodwill around the world. That is a goal that the parties agreed to in the Road Map and at Annapolis. And that is a goal that I will actively pursue as President.”

April 14: Pres. Abbas expresses reservations about an Egyptian document proposing a new joint Palestinian committee to prepare for parallel presidential and PLC elections, asking for modifications to the text so that it did not exclude the PLO.

- US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell meets with a number of Arab leaders in an effort to revive the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

April 15: Israel refuses to cooperate with the fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict.

April 18: In Cairo, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell says that a Palestinian State alongside Israel was the only way to end the Mideast conflict.

April 20: The US State Dept. calls PM Minister Netanyahu's demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people as a condition for renewing peace talks unacceptable.

April 21: At a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II, US Pres. Obama calls on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to take steps to build confidence and establish the ground for resuming peace talks.

April 22: US Sec. of State Hillary Clinton tells the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee: “We will not deal with nor in any way fund a Palestinian Government that includes Hamas unless and until Hamas has renounced violence, recognized Israel and agrees to follow the previous obligations of the Palestinian Authority.”

- The Israeli army announces that an internal investigation has determined that no civilians were purposefully harmed by IDF troops during “Operation Cast Lead” in the Gaza Strip. B'Tselem calls the army investigation flawed and says an independent inquiry from outside the army was needed. Human Rights Watch says the army's findings lacked credibility and confirmed the need for an impartial international inquiry.

April 28: Israel releases PLC member and former Finance Min. Omar Abdel Razeq from prison; he was jailed since Dec. 2008.

April 29: Hamas and Fatah ended a fourth round of talks in Cairo without an agreement, but were to meet again on 16 May.

MAY

May 6: At a news conference with visiting King Abdullah II of Jordan in Berlin, German Chancellor Merkel says that a two-state solution was the only path to peace in the Middle East and urged the new Israeli government to move quickly to begin talks with the Palestinians.

May 8: The Pope arrives in Amman for a week-long trip to include Israel and the OPT.

May 11: Upon arrival at Ben Gurion Airport, Pope Benedict XVI says “I plead with all those responsible to explore every possible avenue in the search for a just resolution of the outstanding difficulties, so that both peoples may live in peace in a homeland of their own, within secure and internationally recognized borders.” He will visit the Holy Land until 15 May.

May 14: Quartet envoy Tony Blair tells the Foreign Relations Committee of the US Senate that there was no workable alternative to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying, “The opportunity is there. But it won't remain if not seized. As President Obama has recognized, this is the right time to seize it.”

May 14-15: The 61st anniversary of Al-Nakba is commemorated across the WBGS.

May 16: Fateh and Hamas hold a new round of reconciliation talks in Cairo.

May 18: At a meeting with PM Netanyahu at the White House, US Pres. Obama stresses the need for a two-state solution, Road Map obligations, and halt in settlement activities.

- The Head of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Dept., Saeb Erakat, welcomes Pres. Obama's unequivocal support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and his call for Israel to abide by its Road Map obligations.

- Israel has published a tender to launch infrastructure work for 20 homes at the site of the former military base "Maskiyot" in the Jordan Valley, a move that is widely condemned as violating Israel's Road Map obligations.

May 19: Pres. Abbas swears in a new 20-member government with Salam Fayyad as reappointed PM and eight Fateh members. Hamas official Mushir Al-Masri calls the new government "illegal, unconstitutional."

May 24: PM Netanyahu rejects US calls to impose a freeze on all settlement activity, telling his cabinet, "We do not intend to build any new settlements, but it wouldn't be fair to ban construction to meet the needs of natural growth or for there to be an outright construction ban."

May 25: Pres. Abbas rules out restarting peace talks until Israel commits itself to the creation of a Palestinian State and halts the expansion of its settlements.

- OIC Members conclude their three-day meeting in Damascus, criticizing Israel but saying that they were open to better ties if Israel took steps towards a "just and comprehensive" peace deal.

- France's Pres. Nicolas Sarkozy says establishing an independent Palestinian State is a "legitimate right" and that "no one would think seriously about peace in the Middle East without giving the Palestinians a State they have been persevering for years." He adds that Israel must stop settlement construction "as it hinders peace in the region".

May 26: Jordan lodges a strongly-worded protest with Israel over discussion in the Knesset proposing Jordan as a homeland for Palestinians.

May 28: At a meeting with Pres. Abbas at the White House, US Pres. Obama stresses the need to advance peace in the Middle East and a two-state solution as well as commitment to Road Map obligations, a halt in settlement activities on the part of Israel and improving security on the part of the Palestinians.

May 30: After a meeting of leaders from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other factions, a joint statement says they would reject any international agreement Pres. Abbas might strike "on behalf of our people that would target our people's rights under the guise of peace." They also warn against the "US illusion of a new settlement under the slogan of a 'two-state solution'."

JUNE

June 4: In a speech at Cairo University, US Pres. Obama says there could be no denying of the right of a Palestinian State to exist and that he would "personally pursue" its realization. He also calls for a settlements freeze saying: "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements... This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace."

June 8: UN Asia and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine opens in Jakarta with the theme "Strengthening international consensus on the urgency of achieving a two-State solution."

June 14: In a speech at Bar-Ilan University, PM Netanyahu calls on Palestinian leaders to "begin negotiations immediately, without preconditions", and that "a fundamental prerequisite for ending the conflict is a public, binding and unequivocal Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation State

of the Jewish people.” He demands to solve the refugee problem outside Israel’s borders, a demilitarized Palestinian state without control of airspace, and “Jerusalem must remain the united capital of Israel with continued religious freedom for all faiths”. PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat says the speech only confirmed Israel’s intention to unilaterally dictate a solution instead of negotiating a peace, as Netanyahu “left us with nothing to negotiate as he systematically took nearly every permanent status issue off the table.”

June 23: Hamas leader and PLC Speaker Abdul Aziz Dweik is released from Israeli prison, where he had been detained since July 2006 following the capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in Gaza.

June 24: The Arab FM meeting in Cairo votes to support the plan outlined by US Pres. Obama in his 4 June speech, saying peace talks should not be resumed until a complete settlement freeze has been established. The ministers further stressed that peace would not be possible without a complete end of the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab areas and a just resolution to the refugee issue.

June 26: At the G8 summit in Italy, the FMs from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK, and the US as well as a EU observer reiterate calls for a halt to illegal Israeli settlement construction in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and urge Israel and Palestine to resume peace talks based on the road map.

- The Middle East Quartet, meeting at the sidelines of the G8 summit, also calls for Israel to halt all settlement construction including “natural growth.

June 28: Fateh and Hamas begin their sixth round of talks in Cairo.

JULY

July 5: During a speaking engagement at the Aspen Institute in the US, PM Salam Fayyad says that Jews remaining inside a future Palestinian state would be welcome and enjoy equal rights.

July 9: G8 leaders call for the immediate opening of Gaza crossings.

July 10: Following his visit to the Middle East, German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier tells *DPA* in Berlin that illegal Israeli settlements remain an obstacle to peace in the region, saying, "A solution has to be found... but a solution will not be found as long as the settlements continue to be expanded."

- On the ICJ ruling’s 5th anniversary, the UNCHR Chief and the Special Rapporteur call on Israel to dismantle separation barrier.

July 11: In London, EU top official Javier Solana suggests that the UN set a deadline for recognizing a Palestinian state even if Israel does not. Israel rejects the call.

July 14: *Al-Jazeera* broadcasts a report with comments by senior Fateh member Farouq Qaddoumi, accusing Pres. Abbas of involvement in an alleged plot to kill Yasser Arafat. In response, Abbas orders the closure of *Al-Jazeera* offices in the West Bank, a move condemned by the Palestinian Media Forum. The next day PM Fayyad commissions Attorney General Ahmed Al-Mughni to file a suit for “incitement and false information,” against the news agency.

July 18: The world’s largest *knafeh* pastry is unveiled in Nablus during the second weekend of the city’s annual shopping festival, gaining an entry into the Guinness Book of Records.

July 19: Referring to a visit by a Hamas delegation to Bern two weeks ago, Swiss FM Micheline Calmy-Rey says “Hamas is a major player in the Middle East... and you cannot ignore it if you want to end this decade-long conflict.”

July 22: The Israeli Education Min. announces to ban the use of the Arabic term Nakba to describe the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.

AUGUST

Aug. 2: Foreign diplomats and the OIC protest the eviction of Palestinian families from their Sheikh Jarrah homes.

Aug. 4: The 6th General Assembly of the Fateh Movement, the first in 20 years and on Palestinian soil, begins in Bethlehem with over 2,000 delegates attending.

- Jordan's King Abdullah II reassures Jordanians about the Kingdom's position on the Palestinian issue, especially with regard to the refugees, saying the right of return and compensation was "constant, unchangeable and nonnegotiable."

Aug. 6: The Fateh Congress adopts a recommendation, calling for an open ended investigation into the circumstances of Arafat's death. Delegates also decide not to renew negotiations with Israel until a prisoner release, settlement freeze and lifting of the Gaza blockade.

Aug. 8: At the Fateh Congress, Pres. Abbas is re-elected as Chairman of the Fateh Central Committee.

Aug. 9: Fateh votes to endorse a platform that calls for a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, alongside Israel, while reserving the movement's right to take up arms against Israel. At the same time, it encouraged Palestinians to use more peaceful means like demonstrations and boycotting. Delegates elect members of the Central Committee (18) and the Revolutionary Council (80).

Aug. 11: Fateh 6th General Assembly elects a new Central Committee and announces Pres. Mahmoud Abbas as reelected party leader.

Aug. 13: Speaking at the conclusion of the Fateh congress, Pres. Abbas says that negotiations with Israel would only resume "on the basis of commitments made by both sides... particularly a halt to all forms of settlement activity without exception in Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied territories," adding "Our people are committed to the peace option but reserve the right to use legitimate resistance, guaranteed under international law, against occupation and to achieve its goals which are liberty, independence and the creation of its State."

Aug. 14: In Gaza, 24 Palestinians are killed and over 125 injured in clashes between Hamas and Jund Ansar Allah ("Soldiers for God"), believed to be aligned with Al-Qaeda, after Hamas' armed wing stormed a mosque taken over by the radical group.

- The UNCHR Commissioner says there was evidence of gross human rights violations by Israeli forces during operation Cast Lead.

Aug. 17: UNRWA launches a US\$181 million Gaza Ramadan Appeal.

- In an interview prior to his meeting with US Pres. Obama, Egypt's Pres. Hosni Mubarak says that Arab States would be willing to recognize and normalize relations with Israel only after a just and comprehensive Middle East peace was achieved, but not before, adding that the Arab experience with stalled peace talks "did not encourage" taking steps towards normalization with Israel.

Aug. 23: A Peace Now report states that there was no sign of a slowdown in the construction of settler homes despite Israel's announcement that it had stopped approving new building.

Aug. 25: At a news conference in Ramallah, PM Fayyad unveils plans to create a *de facto* state in two years without waiting for the outcome of peace talks with Israel. Among the plan's priorities are reducing the economy's dependence on Israel and foreign aid, trimming the size of the government, increasing the use of technology and implementing a performance-based system in the public sector.

Aug. 26: PM Netanyahu and US Special Envoy Mitchell fail to reach an agreement on settlements during their meeting in London.

- The Elders, a group comprising among other former Brazilian Pres. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former US Pres. Jimmy Carter, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former Irish Pres. Mary Robinson, visit the West Bank.

Aug. 31: Nabil Shaath tells journalists in Ramallah that only a full settlement freeze without exceptions or "loopholes" and an Israeli commitment to establishing a Palestinian State would bring Pres. Abbas back to the negotiating table.

- Speaking at a news conference in Ramallah, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Solana says that Europe supports PM Fayyad's vision of an independent Palestinian State that could be established within two years.

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 6: Hamas politburo Chief Khaled Masha'al confirms that Germany was mediating an Israeli-Palestinian prisoner swap that would include Gilad Shalit but stressed that the bid was in its infancy.

Sept. 7: Israel approves construction of an additional 455 housing units in settlements.

Sept. 9: In Brussels, EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner says Israel's continued settlement building was the main obstacle to the Middle East peace process.

Sept. 15: The UN fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict, led by Justice Richard Goldstone, releases its report, concluding that serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law had been committed by Israel, amounting to war crimes, and possibly crimes against humanity. There was also evidence that Palestinian armed groups had committed war crimes in their repeated launching of rockets and mortars into Israel. It recommended that the Security Council require Israel to report, within six months, on investigations and prosecutions with regard to the violations identified in the report. Israel rejects the findings of the Goldstone report.

Sept. 17: Pending a negotiated settlement based on justice for Palestinians the British trade unions (TUC) passed a resolution voting to boycott all Israeli products. The motion was passed at the Annual Congress in Liverpool. The union, which represents 6.5 million workers, will boycott, and divest from any involvement with Israeli companies.

Sept. 22: US Pres. Obama hosts a trilateral meeting with PM Netanyahu and PA Pres. Abbas in New York.

- The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Assistance to Palestinians welcomes the PA statehood plan.

Sept. 23: Pres. Obama tells the UNGA that it is time to re-launch Israeli-Palestinian negotiations without preconditions.

Sept. 24: After their meeting in New York, the Quartet releases a statement saying that it "shares the sense of urgency expressed by President Obama and fully supports the steps ahead as outlined in his statement to the General Assembly on 23 September. The Quartet calls on Israel and the Palestinians to act on their previous agreements and obligations – in particular adherence to the road map, irrespective of reciprocity – to create the conditions for the resumption of negotiations in the near term."

Sept. 29: The report of the UN commission investigating the events of Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip last winter, headed by Richard Goldstone, is formally presented to the UNHCR.

OCTOBER

Oct. 2: The UNCHR defers until its March session action on the draft resolution on the situation of human rights in the OPT, which deals with, among other things, the report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict.

Oct. 14: The UNSC holds an open debate on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”

Oct. 16: The UNCHR endorses recommendations of the Goldstone report.

Oct. 23: Pres. Abbas signs a decree calling presidential and PLC elections on 24 January; in response, Hamas bans elections in Gaza.

Oct. 27: The Arab League requests a UNGA debate in early November on the Goldstone report.

NOVEMBER

Nov. 2: The PA applauds the decision of the European Court of Justice not to exempt products manufactured by Israeli settlements from taxes imposed by the EU.

- Israel releases six Hamas-affiliated PLC members after holding them for over three years: Ahmad Attoun and Wael Al-Husseini from Jerusalem, Khalil Ar-Rabai, Samir Al-Qadi, and Maher Badr from Hebron, and Mahmoud Al-Khatib from Bethlehem.

Nov. 3: The US House of Representatives condemns the Goldstone Fact Finding Report on the Gaza War as biased in a nonbinding resolution passed by 344: 36 (22 abstaining).

Nov. 6: The UNGA in New York overwhelmingly endorses the Goldstone Fact Finding Mission report on the Gaza Conflict in a non-binding resolution with 114:18 votes (and 44 abstentions). Palestinian Amb. Riad Mansour applauds the vote.