

Security Council

2008 Round-up

WORKING GLOBALLY TO BLUNT CONFLICT, EASE TRANSITIONS TO PEACE, SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2008

GUIDED PROGRESS IN LONG-TERM PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS, FACED GAZA CRISIS AT YEAR'S END

Although seized of new crises in Kenya, Georgia and the Horn of Africa, the bulk of the Security Council's work in 2008 involved pushing forward numerous initiatives it had authorized in the previous year concerning existing crises, including the deployment of innovative peacekeeping arrangements in the Sudan and the implementation of hopeful accords in the Middle East and various African conflict situations.



In total, the Council convened 217 public meetings in 2008, a marked increase from the 170 held in 2007. It issued 48 presidential statements and adopted 64 resolutions. Once again the Council strove for consensus to heighten the effectiveness of its decisions, with only four resolutions requiring a vote and just one resolution occasioning vetoes by permanent Council members.

Among the hard-won decisions from 2007 that were implemented in 2008, constant attention was paid to the deployment of the joint African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) to ease suffering and facilitate aid in the strife-torn western region of the Sudan. Its slow-but-steady progress was hindered by a stalled political process, a lack of helicopters and other capabilities, logistical problems and continuous combat. The Council also oversaw the deployment of the “multidimensional presence” in neighbouring Central African Republic and Chad, authorized in 2007 to protect humanitarian operations and displaced persons from armed

groups. The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) was backed by troops from the European Union. Deeming the situation still “fragile”, however, the Council decided to add a United Nations military component when the mandate of the European force expired in early 2009.

Meanwhile, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), also authorized in 2007 with a view to being succeeded by a possible United Nations mission, was able to assist humanitarian operations but found itself overwhelmed by continuing anarchy. The Council was able to act forcefully against the growing problem of piracy off the coast while reaffirming that its root cause was the lack of a functioning Government in Somalia. Most members, however, expressed the view that conditions did not yet exist for a United Nations peacekeeping force to take over from AMISOM, as there was no peace to keep.

Another major challenge for the Council was nurturing several promising but brittle political agreements reached in 2007. Accords reached in Annapolis, Maryland, in November of that year seeking a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the end of 2008 did not achieve their ultimate goal, but the Council supported efforts of the diplomatic Quartet (United Nations, European Union,

Russian Federation and the United States) to maintain direct negotiations throughout the year despite outbreaks of violence. On 16 December the Council produced the first Middle East resolution in more than four and a half years to reaffirm the irreversibility of the Annapolis process and subsequent negotiations, while purposefully showing a united front after the 26 December breakdown of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. It issued a press statement instead of holding an open meeting to air member States' views, but the growing civilian toll in Gaza moved it to hold a public meeting in the final hours of 2008.

Last year's Ouagadougou Agreement to end the division of Côte d'Ivoire made some progress but also hit major snags, leading the Council to urge the parties to hold thrice-delayed elections by spring 2009. Meanwhile, the Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the north and south, which had the parties cooperating in a Government of National Unity, saw setbacks when tensions over the disputed oil-rich Abyei region exploded with fighting and new displacement; the Council supported a road map to bring stability to the area, asking the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) to assist that effort. Agreements reached at the beginning of 2008 to end conflict in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were breached by a massive offensive by the rebel army of Laurent Nkunda, causing the Council to refocus the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) on the protection of civilians and implementation of the agreements in the east.

The Council oversaw the closure of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), decided upon last year, and the transition to the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), which would cooperate with the Peacebuilding Commission. The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), meanwhile, closed down due to obstacles imposed on its operations by the Eritrean Government.

As the Council had made clear in 2007 that its authorization for the Multinational Force in Iraq would conclude at the end of 2008, it confirmed that on 22 December, as part of a resolution extending until the end of 2009 arrangements to deposit proceeds from the sale of fossil fuels into the Development Fund for Iraq. It also decided to review all resolutions pertaining to Iraq from 1990.

In other areas, disagreement continued over which domestic conflicts should come under the Council's purview. Myanmar stayed on the agenda and the Council was seized of the situation in Kenya after disputed elections there produced a violent reaction early in 2008. However, proposed sanctions on Zimbabwe following similar election-driven violence drew the only vetoes, with both China and the Russian Federation saying they did not deem the situation in the Southern African country to constitute a threat to international peace and security.

Among new crises, fighting between Djibouti and Eritrea and the outbreak of open warfare in Georgia also garnered much Council attention in 2008, as did continuing items such as non-proliferation in Iran; security in Timor-Leste, Guinea-Bissau and Haiti; democratic transition in Nepal; and the completion of extant international tribunals.

As in recent years, the Council heard frequent briefings by humanitarian and human rights officials, as well as principals of the Peacebuilding Commission and regional organizations. Thematic issues, particularly terrorism and the protection of civilians, remained high on the agenda through public meetings and subsidiary committees. General disarmament was on the agenda for the first time in many years during the Costa Rican presidency, which urged that military spending be redirected to development, although some members expressed the view that the Council was usurping an area that was more suited to the General Assembly.

Members went on two Council missions. One went to Africa from 1 to 10 June to assess progress in the Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire. The second visited Afghanistan from 21 to 28 November, after which Italy's representative said in a briefing that the country faced a difficult security situation, but not a security crisis.

The General Assembly elected Austria, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Uganda to serve as non-permanent members of the Security Council for two-year terms starting on 1 January 2009. They replaced Belgium, Indonesia, Italy, Panama and South Africa, whose terms ended on 31 December 2008. Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Libya and Viet Nam remain on the 15-member body through 2009. China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States are permanent members.

Following are summaries of major actions taken by the Council in the past year:

Africa

Sudan: Darfur

In the year since the transfer of authority from the African Union Mission in the Sudan to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), deployment of the mission had made steady progress but had been “much too slow in providing real improvements for the ordinary citizens on the ground”, who continued to be terrorized and displaced by the conflict between rebels and the Government and allied Janjaweed militias that erupted in 2003, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy told the Council on 19 December (Press Release SC/9550).

That assessment -- along with pleas for the provision of needed UNAMID capabilities -- was foreshadowed in regular briefings throughout the year by Mr. Le Roy, his predecessor Jean-Marie Guéhenno and others (Press Releases SC/9222, SC/9243, SC/9271, SC/9304, SC/9330 and SC/9485). At the December meeting, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support Susanna Malcorra said UNAMID was in reach of its scaled-back goal of 60 per cent of its authorized strength of 19,555 by the end of the year, but was plagued by insecurity, logistical problems and a lack of helicopters and other crucial resources. The mission lost 21 personnel during the year, with the Council strongly condemning attacks on it in January and July (Press Releases SC/9224 and SC/9397). Its mandate was extended on 31 July (Press Release SC/9412) until the same date in 2009.

Over the year, the Council was reminded in all its briefings that political progress was crucial to end the suffering and provide conditions for an effective peacekeeping mission. However, the parties lacked the determination to put down their arms and to build on the 2007 talks in Sirte, Libya, the body was told by United Nations Special Envoy Jan Eliasson, African Union Special Envoy Salim Ahmed Salim and Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Edmond Mulet (Press Releases SC/9304 and SC/9370). Instead, the year was marked by factional fighting and rebel offences, particularly by the Justice for Equality Movement (JEM), followed by large-scale ground and air military campaign by the Sudanese Government, causing numerous civilian deaths and tens of thousands of new displacements. A 10 May attack by JEM on the outskirts of the Sudanese capital Khartoum drew a strong condemnation by the Council in a presidential statement on 13 May (Press Release SC/9329).

On the human rights front, the Council, in a presidential statement on 16 June (Press Release SC/9359) urged the Government to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Court in order to put an end to impunity in Darfur, after Court Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo told the body on 5 June that the “entire Darfur region is a crime scene”, implicating “the entire State apparatus” of the Sudan. (Press Release SC/9349) The Prosecutor’s subsequent application for an arrest warrant against Sudanese President Omer al-Bashir -- for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity -- divided the Council, with the United States abstaining from the adoption of the mandate extension (Press Release SC/9412) because the text did not reflect the charge. Other Council members said they wanted to suspend the indictment or separate it from UNAMID issues, because of the need for cooperation from the Government for the mission’s deployment. With the International Criminal Court set to decide in January 2009 on whether to issue an arrest warrant for President Al Bashir, Mr. Moreno-Ocampo appeared again before the Council on 3 December to press for united action to assure that any warrant would be executed.

On 15 October the Council extended the mandate of the expert panel monitoring the weapons ban on Darfur until 15 October 2009 (Press Release SC/9497).

Southern Sudan

In support of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that in 2005 ended 21 years of civil warfare in Southern Sudan, the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) through 30 April 2009 (Press Release SC/9317), calling on the Government of National Unity to prepare for elections and to accept monitoring in the disputed, oil-rich Abyei region, after Ashraf Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General said in a briefing that the peace remained fragile (Press Release SC/9256).

Following an 18 May outbreak of violence in Abyei, during which the town was burned and looted and 50,000 people were driven from their homes, the Council issued a presidential statement welcoming agreement on a road map for the area and urging the parties - - the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) -- to use the opportunities created by the accord to resolve all outstanding differences, including the demarcation of borders (Press Release SC/9371). On 18 August, Mr. Qazi

again briefed the Council, saying that although the mandate of UNMIS should be reviewed, the Mission had done its job during the Abyei crisis (Press Release SC/9424). In a 5 November briefing (Press Release SC/9493), Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said that the parties were working together and displaced persons were returning home, but the holding of free and fair elections and agreement on other core Comprehensive Peace Agreement issues remained a major challenge.

Security Council Mission to Africa

The week-long Council mission to Africa visited the Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, and the co-leaders of the mission -- South Africa and the United Kingdom -- briefed the Council on their findings in those countries on 18 June (Press Release SC/9363).

Following a visit to the Sudan and Chad, John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, told the Council on 3 December that attacks on humanitarian aid workers in the Sudan had reached their highest levels in 2008, with over 261 carjackings and 172 compound break-ins. In south Sudan, the Abyei violence had worsened displacement. In neighbouring Chad, tensions had eased since the February attack on the capital, but the situation remained fragile due to lingering tensions and the spillover from Darfur, and banditry threatened displaced persons and humanitarian workers in the east of the country (Press Release SC/9517).

Central African Republic

On 2 December, Council members heard a briefing by François Lonseny Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), in which he announced that a long-awaited inclusive political dialogue was set to take place in December in Bangui and would focus on: politics and governance; security and armed groups; and socio-economic development. The two-week meeting would help create the peaceful environment needed for the 2010 general elections. (Press Release SC/9515)

Chad

In response to the escalating violence by armed groups against Chad's Government, the Council issued a presidential statement on 4 February in which it strongly condemned the attacks and welcomed the good offices efforts by the African Union. Once again, on 16 June, the Council condemned attacks conducted by armed groups since 11 June and attempts to destabilize the situation in Chad by force. The Council urged all parties to respect the 25 October 2007 Sirte Agreement between the Government and the main rebel groups. (Press Releases SC/9360 and SC/9238)

Central African Republic , Chad and Subregion

In order to deal with the humanitarian threat posed by armed groups on the borders of the Darfur region in the Sudan, the Council in 2007 had authorized a "multidimensional presence" in eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic, made up of a new United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) and troops deployed by the European Union (EUFOR).

In a briefing on 19 September, Victor da Silva Angelo, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINURCAT, informed the Council that the situation in the Central African Republic and Chad remained fragile and that an effective international presence in the region when EUFOR departed in 2009 was important. On 24 September, the High Representative of the European Union, Javier Solana, told the Council that, in order to prevent a security vacuum after the end of EUFOR's mandate, a United Nations operation was vital. That same day, the Council expanded MINURCAT's mandate until 15 March 2009 and expressed its intention to authorize a United Nations military component to succeed EUFOR when its mandate expired on 15 March 2009. (Press Releases SC/9449 and SC/9454)

On 12 December, Mr. da Silva Angelo informed the Council that Chad had agreed to the deployment of a United Nations force after 15 March 2009 of 4,900 troops and briefed members on options for the United Nations presence in the north-eastern Central African Republic. (Press Release SC/9536)

Somalia

The Security Council met 16 times on Somalia, hearing pleas to authorize a multinational force or establish a United Nations peacekeeping operation to take over from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) -- whose mandate was extended for six months twice during the year -- and addressing the issue of piracy off Somalia's coast.

On 15 February, the Permanent Observer of the African Union launched a "solemn" appeal for urgent action to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping operation in Somalia to help long-term stabilization and the rebuilding of the country (Press Release SC/9249). On 20 March, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, called on the Council to expand its presence there significantly (Press Release SC/9282). On 15 May, the Council endorsed the three-pronged approach proposed by the Secretary-General in his 14 March report, which aligned the political, security and programmatic efforts of the United Nations in a "sequenced and mutually reinforcing way". (Press Releases SC/9505 and SC/9331)

In a 23 July briefing, the Secretary-General's Special Representative suggested that the agreement between the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia opened the first opportunity in a decade to end the pervasive violence and he urged the Council to send a strong message of support, perhaps by re-hatting AMISOM or deploying an international stabilization force (Press Release SC/9404). In a presidential statement of 4 September, the Council welcomed the signing in Djibouti of the peace and reconciliation agreement and took note of the parties' request that the United Nations authorize and deploy an international stabilization force within 120 days (Press Release SC/9440).

On 20 November, the Council heard briefings by representatives of the Secretariat and the African Union and members were informed that a proposal for a multinational force as a precursor to a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation had not yet garnered significant pledges of either troops, resources or leadership.

In the face of the increasing number of incidents of piracy off Somalia's coast, the Council adopted on 2 June resolution 1816, allowing States for a period of six months to enter the territorial waters of Somalia to repress piracy by all possible means. On 7 October, the Council called upon States interested in the security of maritime activities to deploy naval vessels and military aircraft to actively fight piracy on the high seas off the coast of Somalia. On 2 December, the Council extended that authorization for a period of 12 months and, on 16 December, by resolution 1851, the Council authorized States and regional organizations to use land-based operations in Somalia in the fight against piracy (Press Releases SC/9344, SC/9467, SC/9514 and SC/9541).

In order to control the flow of arms into Somalia, on 29 April, the Council extended for six months the mandate of the Monitoring Group on Somalia tasked to monitor implementation of the arms embargo in Somalia, established by resolution 733 (1992). On 19 December, the Monitoring Panel was re-established for one year with an extended mandate. The Council also strengthened the arms embargo on 20 November through travel restrictions and an asset freeze on individuals and entities that engaged in activities that threatened the peace and the political processes and obstructed humanitarian assistance. (Press Releases SC/9315, SC/9546 and SC/9504)

Also, in a presidential statement on 30 October, the Council condemned in the strongest terms the terrorist suicide attacks that had taken place in the Somali towns of Hargeysa and Bosasso the day before and had targeted the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Government offices, causing numerous deaths and injuries (Press Release SC/9491).

Democratic Republic of Congo

The 10 meetings the Council held on the Democratic Republic of the Congo this year were dominated by grave concern over continued violence in the eastern provinces of the country and the accompanying toll on civilians. Two presidential statements in October strongly condemned attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the Oriental Province (Press Release SC/9477) and then the massive offensive by Laurent Nkunda and his Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP), which nearly took Goma, the capital of North Kivu, killing, brutalizing and displacing thousands in its wake (Press Release SC/9488).

On 26 October the Secretary-General's Special Representative Alan Doss told the Council that 250,000 people had been displaced by that month's fighting alone and stressed that, 10 years on, the operational structure of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) had to be reconfigured to deal with the troubles in the east (Press Release SC/9511).

Accordingly, the mandate of MONUC, extended until 31 December 2009 on 22 December, was strengthened and refocused on protection of civilians in the eastern provinces (Press Release SC/9552).

The year started on a more hopeful note, with a presidential statement welcoming the agreement for a ceasefire and reconciliation reached by representatives of the Government and armed groups meeting in Goma from 6 to 23 January. In a January resolution, the Council also authorized MONUC to provide assistance to the Congolese authorities in the organization, preparation and conduct of local elections (Press Release SC/9236).

On 15 February, the Council in resolution 1799 extended the sanctions regime, consisting of an arms embargo against armed groups as well as a travel ban and assets freeze on those violating the embargo, until 31 March. That sanctions regime was again extended in resolution 1799 of 31 March until 31 December with some technical alterations. The regime was once more extended on 22 December until 30 November 2009, again with some modifications. (Press Releases SC/9236, SC/9289 and SC/9553)

Great Lakes Region

On 13 March, gravely concerned that the continued presence of armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo perpetuated insecurity in the whole region, the Council adopted resolution 1804 (2008) by which it demanded that their members immediately lay down their arms. It also demanded that the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), former Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR/Interahamwe), and other Rwandan armed groups operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo immediately stop recruiting and using children. The Council also called for implementations of the Congolese and Rwandan Governments' commitments under the November 2007 Nairobi communiqué (Press Release SC/9257).

In a presidential statement on 22 December, the Council strongly condemned the recent attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Southern Sudan, and demanded that LRA cease its recruitment and use of children and release immediately all women, children and other non-combatants (Press Release SC/9555).

Welcoming recent steps towards the restoration of peace and stability in the Great Lakes region, the Security Council on 10 July terminated in resolution 1823 (2008) several measures imposed in the wake of the 1994 Rwanda genocide to prohibit the sale and supply of arms and related materiel for use in that country (Press Release SC/9393).

Burundi

The political and security situation in Burundi deteriorated significantly during the first half of 2008. On 24 April, the Council issued a presidential statement expressing serious concern about the confrontations between the Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu-Forces Nationales de Libération (Palipehutu-FNL) and the National Defence Forces of Burundi and calling on both sides to resume their dialogue to overcome the obstacles hindering implementation of the September 2006 Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement. (Press Release SC/9309)

On 22 May and 26 August, the Council heard briefings by the Chairs of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. They focused on the international and national economic situation, which complicated peacebuilding, and on the progress made and the obstacles faced in organizing free and fair elections scheduled for 2010. (Press Releases SC/9338 and SC/9433)

On 11 December, South African Defence Minister Charles Nqakula, Facilitator for the Burundi peace process, told the Council that the Burundi Government and the Palipehutu-FNL had finalized agreement on 4 December with regard to matters that had threatened to scuttle the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement. (Press Release SC/9531)

On 22 December, the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB) until 31 December 2009. (Press Release SC/9554)

Côte d'Ivoire

The Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI) and the French force backing it until 15 January, and once more until 13 January 2009 to help stage free and fair elections set for 30 November. On 29 October, the

Council also renewed for another year its arms embargo and diamond trade ban on Côte d'Ivoire, as well as financial and travel measures against individuals threatening the peace process in the West African country. (Press Releases SC/9225, SC/9409 and SC/9486)

In a 29 April presidential statement, the Council warmly welcomed the approval by Ivorian authorities of the Independent Electoral Commission's proposal to organize presidential elections on 30 November. The elections had originally been planned for 27 October 2007. (Press Release SC/9315)

Following a 27 October briefing by Choi Young-jin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNOCI, on difficulties with the identification process and voter registration, the Council issued a presidential statement on 7 November, in which it expressed deep concern about the possible delay of the elections for the third time. [The elections were cancelled on 10 November.] (Press Releases SC/9482 and SC/9496)

Liberia

Further implementing the drawdown process for the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), begun in 2007, the Council extended the Mission's mandate on 29 September for one year. It reduced the military presence by 1,460 personnel, but increased the police presence by 240 officers (Press Release SC/9461).

On 14 April, the Security Council was briefed by Ellen Margrethe Løj, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of UNMIL, who said that Liberia, a country that had been free of conflict since 2003 after a devastating 14-year-long civil war, was now a place of hope. But, that hope was tempered by a tenuous and fragile peace, with security still heavily reliant on United Nations military and police presence (Press Release SC/9297).

On 18 June, the Council renewed until 20 December the mandate of the panel of experts that was to monitor financing for the illicit trade of arms; compliance with the freezing of assets of former President Charles Taylor; the Government's compliance with the diamond certification scheme known as the Kimberley Process; recent forestry legislation; and progress in the timber and diamond sectors. The mandates for sanctions and the panel of experts were again extended, until 20 December 2009, on 19 December. (Press Releases SC/9362 and SC/9547)

Sierra Leone

To consolidate Sierra Leone's progress in emerging from the devastating civil war that ended in 2002, the Council decided on 4 August to establish a peacebuilding office in the West African country (Press Release SC/9414). That action followed a 7 May briefing on the Secretary-General's latest report, in which he said the Government had made strides in its reform agenda, in conjunction with the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), which had replaced the earlier peacekeeping Mission. (Press Release SC/9325)

The Council authorized the new United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) for the 12 months following the 30 September wrap-up of UNIOSIL. It was mandated to prioritize assistance to the Government in resolving political tensions, completing reforms, strengthening the justice sector, effecting security reform and empowering youth and women. In that work, it would support the frameworks established in conjunction with the Peacebuilding Commission, which had taken on Sierra Leone as one of the first cases on its agenda.

Guinea-Bissau

The Council met four times to consider the situation in Guinea-Bissau, focusing on peacebuilding efforts, elections and the threat to stability from drug-trafficking. The country had been assisted since 1999 by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), in the wake of a 1998 civil war. Last year, the country had become the third State to come under the purview of the Peacebuilding Commission.

On 26 March and 25 June, the Council heard briefings by the Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau and the Chairperson of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as, on 25 June, from the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (Press Releases SC/9285 and SC/9373)

On 7 October, the Council was briefed by B. Lynn Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who noted that the current international efforts to help strengthen the country's national capacity to fight the drug traffickers -- who had become a major threat to the country and its neighbours -- were not sufficient. He recommended sending an expert panel to study the problem (Press Release SC/9468).

In a presidential statement on 15 October, the Council, while welcoming the Government's commitment to hold legislative elections on 26 November, stated that it remained seriously concerned by the continued growth in drug trafficking and called for continued international support for capacity-building of national law enforcement and judicial authorities. It also expressed its concern about the rising food and fuel prices and encouraged the Government to continue its dialogue and cooperation with the international financial institutions (Press Release SC/9437).

Ethiopia and Eritrea

On 30 June, the Security Council terminated the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) as of 31 July. The operation was established in the aftermath of the 1998-2000 border war between the two countries and the Council expressed regret, as it closed the mission, that Eritrea's obstruction of UNMEE had reached a level undermining the basis of its mandate and had compelled it to temporarily relocate. The Council also emphasized that it was without prejudice to the obligation both countries had under the 2000 Algiers Agreements and noted that the options proposed by the Secretary-General as follow-up -- designed as conflict prevention measures aimed at demonstrating the international community's commitment to a peaceful resolution of their border dispute -- had been rejected by both parties. (Press Release SC/9410)

In January, the Council had extended UNMEE's mandate until 31 July, demanding that the two countries immediately take concrete steps to complete the process started with the 2000 peace agreement by enabling physical demarcation of the border (Press Release SC/9237). A presidential statement of 15 February strongly condemned the Government of Eritrea for its lack of cooperation with UNMEE, as well as for the impediments and logistical constraints it had put on the Mission's relocation attempts (Press Release SC/9250), as did a further presidential statement on 30 April (Press Release SC/9318).

Western Sahara

The Security Council granted a year-long mandate extension to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) on 3 April, taking it until 30 April 2009. The Mission had been in the Non-Self-Governing Territory since 1991 to monitor the ceasefire between Morocco and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario Front) and to conduct a long-stalled plebiscite on self-determination. (Press Release SC/9319)

Zimbabwe

As the situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated, with a "staggering degree of violence", between the 29 March first-round presidential election and the run-off poll scheduled for 27 June, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe briefed the Security Council on 23 June. In a presidential statement, the Council condemned the Government's actions in denying its political opponents the right to campaign freely, expressed regret at the absence of conditions for a free and fair run-off election, and noted that the results of the 29 March election must be respected. (Press Releases SC/9368 and SC/9369)

On 8 July, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro told the Council that three African observer missions had unequivocally condemned the electoral process leading up to the run-off election -- in which opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai had declined to participate after State-sponsored violence had resulted in the killing of more than 80 supporters of his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) -- as well as its results. She also drew attention to the fact that the humanitarian situation, if unattended, could leave 5.1 million people at grave risk. (Press Release SC/9387)

Finally, on 11 July, the Council's efforts to adopt a measure intended to impose sanctions against President Robert Mugabe failed when China and the Russian Federation, two of the 15-member body's permanent members, voted against a draft resolution that

would have imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe, as well as a travel ban and financial freeze against the President and 13 senior Government and security officials. (Press Release SC/9396)

Djibouti-Eritrea

The Security Council was confronted with a new conflict in the Horn of Africa on 10 June, when fighting broke out at the border between Djibouti and Eritrea. On 12 June, a presidential statement called on the parties, in particular Eritrea, to engage fully in efforts to resolve the crisis and encouraged the Secretary-General to urgently use his good offices to facilitate bilateral discussions (Press Release SC/9353).

During an emergency meeting on 24 June, Djibouti's Prime Minister informed the Council that Eritrean troops had not only invaded Djiboutian soil, but were occupying and building on it. Eritrea's representative called those accusations "baseless" and added that the current campaign had been designed elsewhere to divert Eritrea from its legal pursuit to ensure Ethiopia's eviction from its territories. Council members called for an immediate return to the situation that had existed before the current crisis (Press Release SC/9372).

According to a 12 September report (document S/2008/602), a United Nations fact-finding mission had visited Djibouti and Ethiopia, but had not been able to get visas to Eritrea. The mission recommended, among other things, that the offer of the Secretary-General's good offices to defuse the tension be made an "urgent priority". In the event that that offer was rebuffed by Eritrea, the matter should be referred to the Council for appropriate action.

The Council met again on the issue on 23 October, when it heard from Djibouti's President and Eritrea's representative. Djibouti's priority was, according to that country's President, demilitarization of the area and establishment of mutual trust, possibly through arbitration for border demarcation. Eritrea's representative reiterated his country's position of the 24 June meeting, saying there had been no new developments. Council members urged dialogue leading to peaceful adjudication of the border, mediation through the African Union and the African League and the use of the Secretary-General's good offices (Press Release SC/9480).

Kenya

In the violent aftermath of the disputed 27 December 2007 elections in Kenya, the Security Council on 6 February adopted a presidential statement in which it expressed its deep concern that civilians continued to be killed, abused and displaced, as well as its concern at the political, security and economic impact of the crisis on the wider region. The Council expressed its support for the African Union and the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in their efforts to stem the violence. (Press Release SC/9242)

On 25 February, the Council heard a briefing by John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who reported on his trip to Kenya on 8 to 10 February (Press Release SC/9263).

Mauritania

Condemning the 6 August military overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Mauritania and the State Council's move to seize the powers of the presidency, the Security Council on 19 August demanded the immediate release of President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdellahi and the immediate restoration of the legitimate, constitutional, democratic institutions. Before the adoption of the presidential statement, Mauritania's representative assured the Council that the country had not turned its back on democracy and that the "corrective change" of 6 August, massively supported by the people, could not be qualified as a coup d'état, because fundamental liberties had been preserved and the administration was functioning normally (Press Release SC/9428).

Middle East

Question of Palestine

Meeting on the night of 8 January 2009, the Security Council expressed grave concern about the deepening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the resulting heavy civilian casualties "since the refusal to extend the period of calm" between Israel and Hamas and called for an "immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza".

Adopting resolution 1860 (2009) by a vote of 14 in favour, with the United States abstaining, the Council also expressed its grave concern at the escalation of violence and emphasized that Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations must be protected in the densely populated territory that had been the theatre of a deadly 13-day conflict between the Israel Defense Forces and Hamas militants.

The measure, which recalled that “a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved by peaceful means”, capped days of intense ministerial-level negotiations after Arab foreign ministers and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas flew to New York for urgent meetings with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Council diplomats to craft a binding resolution to end the fighting, which began on 27 December with Israel’s launching of a major offensive in response to rocket and mortar attacks by Hamas.

Immediately following the vote, Secretary-General Ban said he was heartened and relieved by the adoption of a resolution to end the tragic situation, stressing, however, that a political way forward was required to deliver long-term security and peace. “My visit to the region next week will focus on helping to ensure that the ceasefire is implemented, that urgent humanitarian assistance reaches those in need and encouraging the diplomatic efforts currently under way.” (Press Release SC/9567)

The action capped a two-week period of Council meetings and consultations over the escalating violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, and the ever-worsening humanitarian situation in the densely blockaded Palestinian enclave. In an emergency New Year’s Eve meeting, the Secretary-General said he was profoundly troubled that the Council’s call for an end to the violence -- issued in a press statement the previous Sunday -- had gone unheeded.

“The conflict must end once and for all,” he stressed, noting that Gaza’s civilian population, its fabric, the Middle East peace process and the stability of the region and the world were all trapped by the indiscriminate rocket attacks carried out by Hamas militants and the disproportionality of Israel’s continuing military operation.

Conditions for the 1.5 million Gazans were “nothing short of terrifying”, he said, noting also that a continuing stream of rockets fired by militants were hitting southern Israel, with hundreds of thousands of Israelis now within range. He emphasized that, even as the crisis raged, the underlying issue should never be forgotten -- that there must be an end to occupation, an end to conflict, and the creation of a Palestinian State.

The meeting adjourned just hours before the Council’s composition would change, with five new elected members -- Austria, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Uganda -- replacing Belgium, Indonesia, Italy, Panama and South Africa. (Press Release SC/9560)

Throughout the year, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, re-launched at Annapolis in November 2007, strained to make headway, but the increasingly uneasy situation on the ground -- particularly the complex political, security, human rights and humanitarian crisis in Gaza -- dimmed hopes for a settlement with each passing month. Despite regular bilateral contacts between the two sides, senior United Nations officials described a situation that was not improving in the way required to ensure a durable settlement. They stressed the importance of making decisive advances towards peace as the calendar sped through 2008.

On 16 December, after failing for several years to evolve a unified position on the Palestinian question, the Council adopted resolution 1850 (2008), with Libya abstaining, in which it declared its commitment to the irreversibility of the ongoing bilateral negotiations and supporting the parties’ “determined efforts to reach their goal of concluding a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues...”. The Council called on the parties and regional and other States, as well as international organizations, to intensify efforts to achieve a two-State solution and peaceful coexistence among all States in the region.

Prior to adoption of the text, Secretary-General Ban had asked the Council to help “set us firmly, finally and irreversibly on the path to peace in the Middle East” by passing the resolution, acknowledging that it had been hoped by now that the world would be marking the conclusion of a peace agreement and turning to implementation. Regrettably, that was not the case but “we must ensure that what has been started is seen all the way through to its conclusion”. Four permanent members were represented by ministerial and other high-level officials at the meeting. (Press Release SC/9539)

Two days later the Council held an open debate on the Gaza situation, with Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, stressing that the creation of a Palestinian State was “possible, necessary and urgent”. Following statements by Israel’s representative and the Permanent Observer for Palestine, Council members and non-members alike underscored the importance of the

2008 advances leading up to the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) and called for more progress on the ground, including a halt to Israel's settlement activity and an easing of restrictions in Gaza and the West Bank. They urged the Palestinians to advance their political unification. (Press Release SC/9544)

The Council's formal consideration of the situation in 2009 began on 22 January with a briefing by B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who expressed concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza and urged Israel to cease its policy of allowing civilians to suffer for the unacceptable actions of militants, and to permit unimpeded delivery of fuel and basic necessities into the area. He also condemned the escalation of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza by Hamas militants, noting that they had launched more than 150 of them since 15 January. (Press Release SC/9232)

The Libyan delegation called a meeting on 3 December concerning the return by Israeli authorities of a Libyan vessel carrying humanitarian supplies to the port of Gaza, asserting that the Israeli actions were an act of piracy. Israel's representative responded by saying that no Member State would allow a shipment originating from a hostile State to reach a territory that served as a launching pad for terrorist attacks against its citizens. If Libya truly wished to provide humanitarian assistance to Gazans, there were ways and means to do so.

On 25 November, Mr. Pascoe drew the Council's attention to the landmark 9 November meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, between the parties to the Middle East peace process and the Quartet (United Nations, European Union, Russian Federation and United States). He welcomed the parties' engagement in "direct, sustained and intensive" negotiations, while cautioning that the inability of Tzipi Livni, Foreign Minister and leader of the majority party in the ruling coalition, to form a coalition Government and President Shimon Peres' decision to call new elections -- now scheduled for 10 February 2009 -- might complicate matters. Palestinians also remained divided as the rhetoric between Hamas and Fatah intensified. (Press Release SC/9509)

The Council had held a ministerial-level on 26 September, at the request of Saudi Arabia's Foreign Affairs Minister. Some speakers focused on Israeli settlement activity, saying it was changing the demographics of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and making it almost impossible either to establish a Palestinian State or convince Palestinians of the possibility of peace.

Israel's representative asked why speakers had failed to mention the missile attacks against Israel by Hamas, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons or its support of Hamas and Hizbullah. (Press Release SC/9457)

Dissatisfaction over the lack of progress following Annapolis had built up by the time Mr. Serry briefed the Council on 18 September, when he noted that, 10 months after the re-launch of the talks, the process was still at a crossroads. With agreement still outstanding on core issues, "the important period ahead must see decisive advances toward peace". (Press Release SC/9448)

In August, as Mr. Pascoe reiterated the Secretary-General's call to press ahead for real progress in overcoming differences and reaching agreement by the end of 2008, his briefing was also informed by the major rise in inter-Palestinian violence since July. Hamas had seized control of the last remaining Palestinian Authority institutions in Gaza and its forces had detained three governors, two of whom remained in custody. Reacting, Palestinian security forces in the West Bank had arrested dozens of Hamas activists, most of whom had later been freed on the orders of President Mahmoud Abbas. (Press Release SC/9431)

Meeting in an emergency session on 1 March, at Libya's request, Secretary-General Ban described the "deeply alarming escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel, and a terrible civilian death toll". He blamed both sides, condemning Palestinian rocket attacks and calling for the immediate cessation of "such acts of terrorism", while also condemning the "disproportionate and excessive use of force" by Israel. He called on all parties "to step back from the brink of even deeper and more deadly clashes". (Press Release SC/9266)

Israel and Syria

The Council twice unanimously renewed the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which has supervised the ceasefire between Israel and Syria since 1974. On both occasions, first on 27 June and then on 12 December, the resolutions extending the mandate for six-month periods were accompanied by presidential statements in which the Council identified itself with the Secretary-General's view that "... the situation is very tense and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive agreement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached". The most recent extensions would take UNDOF through 30 June 2009. (Press Releases SC/9378 and SC/9533)

Lebanon

Central once again to the Council's consideration of the situation in Lebanon was implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), by which the Council declared its support for a free and fair presidential election conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules, devised without foreign interference and, in that connection, calling on all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from the country.

In the wake of an agreement 15 October between the Lebanese and Syrian leaderships to establish diplomatic relations, Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Envoy for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), said in a briefing on 30 October that major stride could lead to a stable Government in Lebanon with a monopoly on the use of force throughout the territory. (Press Release SC/9490)

Under the auspices of the League of Arab States, Lebanese leaders had earlier reached agreement on 21 May to elect a President, establish a national unity Cabinet and address the electoral law. The Council issued a presidential statement the following day, welcoming the agreement and the decision to continue the national dialogue on ways to reinforce the authority of the State over all its territory, as well as the agreement to ban the use of weapons and violence to settle disputes. (Press Release SC/9337)

Previously briefing the Council on 8 May, Mr. Roed-Larsen had, however, warned that Lebanon remained a battleground for actors seeking to destabilize the region for their own benefit and aspirations of dominance. The electoral void, the stalled functions of Parliament and the defiant manoeuvres of militias were all threats to Lebanon's ability to operate as a sovereign, democratic and independent State. Those developments could have serious regional repercussions. (Press Release SC/9326)

Also central to the Council's consideration of the situation in Lebanon was implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), by which it called for an end to hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah in southern Lebanon, and mapped out steps for a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict. In presidential statement S/PRST/2008/8 of 15 April, the Council reiterated its commitment to the resolution's full implementation. (Press Release SC/9300)

Extending the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) until 31 August 2009 on 27 August, the Council commended the positive role of the mission, whose deployment, together with the Lebanese Armed Forces, had helped to establish a new strategic environment in southern Lebanon. (Press Release SC/9435)

Speaking after that action, Israel's representative said UNIFIL faced greater challenges than ever in light of the massive redeployment of armed Hizbullah elements, both north and south of the Litani River, and the continuing transportation of weapons from Iran and Syria in violation of Council resolutions. Israel expected UNIFIL to ensure that that area was not used for hostile activities of any kind, but the Lebanese Government's new policy guidelines further complicated its ability to fulfil its mandate and raised concerns about that Government's commitment to extend its authority over all its territory while ensuring there would be no outside weapons or interference.

Lebanon's representative said his country's compliance was evident by its deployment of the Army to southern Lebanon. It was Israel that had not fully implemented the resolution and which continued to violate its terms by persistently refusing to cooperate with the United Nations on the matter of cluster bombs. The question of Sheba'a Farms also remained unresolved.

The Council also held threemeetings on the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on 14 February 2005. In the first, on 8 April, Daniel Bellamar, Commissioner of the International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC), said he could confirm that a network of individuals had acted in concert to carry out the assassination. The Commission's next priority was to gather more evidence about that network, its scope, the identity of its participants, their role in the attacks and their links with others outside the network. (Press Release SC/9294)

On 2 June, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1815 (2008), deciding to extend the Commission's mandate until 31 December and leaving open the possibility of an earlier termination if the body completed its work. (Press Release SC/9343)

Meeting for the last time on the situation in 2008, the Council granted, on 17 December, a two-month mandate extension to the Commission so it could continue its investigation and gradually transfer its operations to The Hague in time for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to start functioning. It took that action by unanimously adopting resolution 1852 (2008), sponsored by France.

The Council established the Commission on 7 April 2005 by unanimously adopting resolution 1595 (Press Release SC/8353), with the Lebanese Government's approval, to investigate in all its aspects the terrorist attack that killed Mr. Hariri and others, and caused the injury of numerous people, including helping to identify its perpetrators, sponsors, organizers and accomplices.]

Iraq

The Council met several times on the situation in Iraq, against a backdrop of significant yet fragile improvements in the complex security environment. According to the Secretary-General's last quarterly report in November (document S/2008/688), on fulfilment of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), national reconciliation remained the main priority. The holding of inclusive provincial and national elections, resolution of internal boundary issues, and the adoption of constitutional and legislative measures in the political, economic and social fields presented important opportunities for all Iraqi communities to reach out to one another. The mobilization of Iraq's abundant economic and human resources could provide a further impetus to the national reconciliation effort.

Indeed, during the last of seven meetings, on 22 December, the Council adopted a resolution extending until the end of 2009 arrangements for depositing the proceeds from sales of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas into the Development Fund for Iraq. It also extended, for the same period, the task of the International Advisory and Monitoring Board in overseeing the Fund. And it decided to review all resolutions pertaining to Iraq from 1990. (Press Release SC/9556)

Annexed to that resolution is a letter dated 7 December 2008 from the Prime Minister of Iraq to the Council President reaffirming the Government's commitment to resolve debts and settle claims inherited from the previous regime, and requesting the international community's assistance in that regard.

On 14 November, Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, said Iraqis must seize the momentum to build long-term stability, following a significant reduction of violence in 2008. He called on the international community to stand firm in constructive re-engagement with the country, and pledged that the United Nations would remain by Iraq's side in "this delicate and challenging transition to stability". (Press Release SC/9500)

During that briefing, the representative of the United States spoke on behalf of the Multinational Force, describing the status of efforts by the coalition and Iraqi security forces. Iraq's representative said his country was keen to promote a new culture of respect for human rights based on tolerance and mutual acceptance. Council members welcomed the decrease in violence and affirmed that UNAMI's priorities should be reconciliation and further stabilization.

Unanimously adopting resolution 1830 (2008) on 7 August, the Council granted a one-year mandate extension for UNAMI, emphasizing the importance of Iraq's stability and the security of its people, as well as those of the region and the international community, while reaffirming the importance of the United Nations presence in the country. (Press Release SC/9416)

Asia

Myanmar

The Council met twice in the aftermath of the violent suppression by the Government in Myanmar of peaceful opposition demonstrations. On 18 March, Ibrahim Gambari, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, reported on his visit earlier that month, saying it had yielded no immediate tangible outcome, even though he had been granted a meeting with detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. (Press Release SC/9278)

Following the announcement of a referendum on a draft constitution in May and elections in 2010, the Council issued presidential statement S/PRST/2008/13, which underlined the need to establish conditions conducive to an inclusive and credible process, including full participation of all political actors. (Press Release SC/9320)

Nepal

In 2006, upon the request of the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was established to monitor the ceasefire and assist in the election of the Constituent Assembly. UNMIN's mandate was extended for six months on 23 January. (Press Release SC/9233)

Following the Constituent Assembly elections on 10 April and a meeting on 18 July in which its members expressed support for a six-month extension of a scaled down United Nations special political mission, the Council extended UNMIN's mandate by another six months on 23 July, endorsing the Mission's phased, gradual drawdown and withdrawal. (Press Releases SC/9410 and SC/9403)

In a briefing on 7 November, Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Mission, informed the Council that, despite remarkable progress, a continued United Nations presence was needed beyond January 2009 to assist in the integration and rehabilitation of former Maoist combatants. (Press Release SC/9495)

Timor-Leste

In response to the 11 February attacks on the President and Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, the Security Council issued a presidential statement on the same day, condemning those actions as an attack on the country's legitimate institutions. (Press Release SC/9244)

Following a briefing on 21 February -- in which the Council was informed that leaders from all political parties had come together to urge calm and that Timor-Leste had remained peaceful -- the Council extended, on 25 February, the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) for one year. (Press Releases SC/9259 and SC/9262)

The Council heard a briefing on 19 August by Atul Khare, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIT, after which, in a separate meeting, it issued a presidential statement acknowledging that the political, security, social and humanitarian situation in Timor-Leste remained fragile. The Council reaffirmed the importance of security-sector reform, particularly the need to ensure a clear separation of internal and external security roles. (Press Release SC/9427)

Afghanistan

The Council held eight meetings on Afghanistan, which -- seven years after the fall of the Taliban regime -- faced a complex situation, characterized, as described in a number of briefings, by an insurgency that had proven to be more resilient and more ruthless than anyone had imagined, still fragile Afghan governmental institutions susceptible to corrosive corruption and a massive illegal drug economy thriving in the vacuum of State authority and abetting the insurgency.

On 20 March, stressing the importance of a comprehensive approach to the challenges facing the country, the Council, extended for another year the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA), which was established in 2002. It also sharpened the Mission's priorities by defining its role as supporting efforts to improve governance and the rule of law; combating corruption; playing a central coordinating role in facilitating delivery of humanitarian assistance; promoting human rights; and assisting in the electoral process, particularly through the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission. It stressed the importance of expanding UNAMA's presence and that of other United Nations programmes in the provinces (Press Release SC/9281).

Three months later, on 11 June, the Council issued a collective call on all United Nations member countries to tighten international and regional controls on the manufacture and trade of chemical precursors and prevent their diversion to illicit markets, in an expression of utmost concern at the widespread smuggling to and within Afghanistan of chemical compounds that are used illegally to refine heroin (Press Release SC/9352).

On 9 July, high-level United Nations officials and 26 country representatives, including the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan, addressed the situation's security and humanitarian challenges, as well as the hopes raised by the recent "Paris Conference" in support of the country, which had raised \$20 billion (Press Release SC/9395). Two months later, on 22 September, acting to curb the Taliban resurgence and the narcotics trade, the Council extended for 12 months the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, which was originally authorized in 2001 (Press Release SC/9450).

Assessing progress not long afterward, Kai Eide, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, told the Council on 14 October that "doom and gloom statements, many of which come from people who have not set foot in Afghanistan, are not helpful". It was crucial to build on positive political trends there in order to overcome the deteriorating security situation, he said, noting that Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan had improved and recent political changes could be significant. Electoral progress had also been made and efforts were under way to restrict the areas where illicit poppies were grown.

At that same meeting, Afghanistan's representative warned that, despite the hard work of the international coalition forces and Afghans, alike, terrorism appeared to be on the rise again. The Taliban was burning down schools, stamping out reconstruction and butchering civilians. They hampered international humanitarian relief and increasingly targeted ordinary people. They were fighting a war of perception, launching spectacular attacks that the media could easily seize upon. "The way forward in Afghanistan is to recognize that abandonment and failure are not options," he concluded (Press Release SC/9472).

To get a better measure of the situation on the ground, a Council mission travelled to the country from 21 to 28 November and, briefing the Council on its return, Italy's Ambassador Giulio Terzi said the country was at a critical juncture and faced a difficult security situation, but not a security crisis. Several important points of progress invited a sense of "cautious optimism," although daunting and multifaceted challenges remained. To address those, he had stressed the importance of avoiding any inclination to frustration, or worse, inconclusive discussions between Afghanistan and its friends in the international community. Instead, joint efforts should be redoubled (Press Release SC/9519).

Europe

Kosovo

The 17 February unilateral declaration of independence by the Serbian province dominated consideration of the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) this year, which authorized an international civil and military presence in Kosovo and placed it under interim United Nations administration. The unilateral declaration was issued by the Assembly of Kosovo, one of three Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, the others being the Government of Kosovo and the Judicial System of Kosovo. On 16 January, Boris Tadić of Serbia appealed to the Council to prevent any such unilateral action, warning that "hasty unilateral recognition of Kosovo independence would no doubt be a precedent". (Press Release SC/9227)

A day after the unilateral declaration, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the Council that, pending its guidance, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) would continue to implement its mandate, trying to ensure that the situation in Kosovo and the wider region remained stable. Mr. Tadić requested that the Secretary-General declare the secession null and void. Council members were sharply divided. The Russian Federation insisted that the declaration was a blatant breach of the norms and principles of international law, while European Council members who had recognized Kosovo's independence stressed that the European Commission's police and justice mission -- EULEX -- would allow the international community to supervise the emergence of a multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo. (Press Release SC/9252)

On 20 June, the Secretary-General presented to the Council a proposal for the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in Kosovo, which would involve police, courts, customs, transport and infrastructure, boundaries and Serbian patrimony. The proposal recognized the importance of an enhanced role for the European Union, under a United Nations umbrella, in areas relating to the rule of law. (Press Release SC/9366)

Council members discussed the Secretary-General's decision to reconfigure UNMIK, as described in his report of 15 July (document S/2008/458), on 25 July, exposing divergent opinions. While the representative of the Russian Federation insisted that the Secretary-General had exceeded his authority and intruded on the Council's prerogative, the representative of the United States welcomed the Secretary-General's decision since the Council remained deadlocked and unable to provide guidance on the future of UNMIK. Serbia's Foreign Minister stressed that any reconfiguration must be completed with Serbia's acceptance and the Council's explicit approval. (Press Release SC/9407)

Briefing the Council on 26 November, Special Representative Lamberto Zannier said the European Union was deploying its EULEX mission at an accelerated rate, and UNMIK's role was becoming much more political. Among other things, it was providing an interface for dialogue between Belgrade and Serbia. Serbia's Foreign Minister said a dialogue had begun and agreement had been

reached with the United Nations regarding the protection of Serbs and other gravely endangered communities in Kosovo, and that referral of the status question to the International Court of Justice would allow the issue to steer clear of the resort to force. In a presidential statement, the Council welcomed the intentions of Belgrade and Pristina to cooperate with the international community, as well as continuing efforts by the European Union “to advance the European perspective in the whole of the Western Balkans”. (Press Release SC/9512)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Noting that the signing on 16 June by Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Government of the Stabilization and Association Agreement had marked a fundamental step forward in the relationship between that country and the European Union, the Council on 20 November authorized the presence of the European Union Stabilization Force (EUFOR) for a further year (Press Release SC/9507).

The High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Miroslav Lajčák, briefed the Council. On 19 May, he warned that nationalism remained strong in the country, and that following Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence on 17 February, the leadership of the Republika Srpska entity had linked its future status with that of the breakaway Serbian province. On 5 December, he told the Council that, despite progress, nationalist and ethnic agendas prevailed over the one that should actually matter -- the Euro-Atlantic agenda -- and the negative political climate did not allow for the closure of the Office of the High Representative and transition to a stronger European Union engagement. (Press Releases SC/9332 and SC/9523)

Georgia

Apart from a six-month mandate extension (Press Release SC/9299) for the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), further consideration of the issue was overshadowed by the outbreak of hostilities on 7 August. On 8 August, the Council met twice to discuss the situation, with the representatives of Georgia and the Russian Federation giving conflicting views on the crisis.

During that day’s second meeting many Council members urged an immediate ceasefire and the resumption of talks. The representative of the United States called on the Russian Federation to cease its attacks on Georgia and withdraw its combat forces from Georgian territory. The representative of France, which held the Presidency of the European Union at the time, insisted that there must be a peaceful solution within the sovereign and recognized Georgian territory and announced that European Union emissaries were on their way to Georgia. (Press Releases SC/9417 and SC/9418)

On 10 August, the representatives of the two parties reiterated their views as Council members agreed that the priority was an end to hostilities. Some delegations condemned both Georgia’s decision to impose its authority over South Ossetia by force and the Russian Federation’s disproportionate and illegitimate use of force. The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations informed the Council that, as a result of increased bombings in UNOMIG’s area of operations, the Mission had had to scale down its operations. (Press Release SC/9419)

The Council met again on 19 August to consider a French-sponsored draft resolution calling for immediate compliance with the terms of a plan brokered on 12 August by France, on behalf of the European Union. The six-point agreement included withdrawal of forces to pre-conflict positions while allowing the Russian Federation to implement additional security measures, an immediate cessation of hostilities and the convening of an international discussion on security arrangements for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While most speakers expressed support for the draft, the representative of the Russian Federation rejected it, saying it reinterpreted the six-point “Moscow peace plan” for propaganda purposes. (Press Release SC/9429)

Following the Russian Federation’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent States on 26 August, the Council convened on 28 August at the request of Georgia, whose representative said Russian actions amounted to interference in the territorial integrity of States. The Russian Federation’s representative said his country had recognized the two regions’ independence in order to ensure the survival of their populations in the face of repression by Georgia, who’s President Mikheil Saakashvili “had gotten out of control”. (Press Release SC/9438)

Finally, on 9 October, the Council granted UNOMIG a four-month mandate extension, until 15 February 2009, in accordance with the recommendation of the Secretary-General, who observed that UNOMIG’s area of responsibility was unclear since the Russian-Georgian conflict. (Press Release SC/9470)

Cyprus

The launch of fully fledged negotiations between the leaders of both the Greek and Turkish communities of Cyprus aimed at the island's reunification was welcomed by the Security Council in a presidential statement on 4 September. Earlier, on 17 April, the Council had welcomed the 21 March agreement between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders on the preparations for such negotiations. (Press Releases SC/9303 and SC/9441)

The Council also twice extended the mandate of the 44-year-old United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for six-month periods (Press Releases SC/9357 and SC/9532).

Americas

Haiti

The Council heard two briefings from Hédi Annabi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). On 8 April, Mr. Annabi gave members an update on progress made and challenges faced by the Mission, warning that the progress achieved remained extraordinarily fragile and subject to swift reversal. On 8 October, he described the situation in Haiti in the wake of four devastating summer hurricanes, during which some 800,000 Haitians had lost their homes and infrastructure and crops had been destroyed. (Press Releases SC/9292 and SC/9469)

The Council extended MINUSTAH's mandate for one year on 14 October. (Press Release SC/9471)

Non-Proliferation

Taking up non-proliferation on 25 April, the Council reaffirmed that the proliferation of mass destruction weapons and the means of their delivery was a threat to international peace and security, and voted unanimously to extend the mandate of the Committee created to monitor implementation of resolution 1540 (2004), for three years, until 25 April 2011. Resolution 1540 (2004) called on all States to establish domestic controls and adopt legislation to prevent the proliferation and use by non-State actors of weapons of mass destruction. (Press Release SC/9310)

In an 18 August briefing to the Council on compliance with resolution 1540 (2004), Committee Chairman Jorge Urbina (Costa Rica) acknowledged that implementation by all States would take time, but noted that built into the text was a sense of urgency, given the gravity of the threat facing the international community. Once implemented, vigilance and innovation would be needed to maintain effective policies. (Press Release SC/9423)

The Chairman also held a number of briefings during the year in the context of the Council's consideration of the work of its subsidiary committees on terrorism. [For further details, see "Terrorism".]

In connection with its item on non-proliferation, the Council held six meetings concerning Iran -- four of them to hear briefings on the Committee set up under resolution 1737 (2006) to monitor sanctions against that country. (Press Releases SC/9526, SC/9443, SC/9355, SC/9276)

On 3 March, the Council approved a new round of sanctions against Iran for its refusal to suspend uranium enrichment and heavy-water-related projects, tightening restrictions on the country's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, increasing vigilance over Iranian banks and calling on States to exercise "vigilance and restraint" regarding entry into or transit through their territories of anyone engaged in, or providing support for, Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities or for the development of nuclear-weapon delivery systems. The Council took that action by adopting resolution 1803 (2008) by a vote of 14 in favour to none against, with 1 abstention (Indonesia) under Article 41, Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter [on binding measures not involving armed force]. (Press Release SC/9268)

By unanimously adopting resolution 1835 (2008) on 27 September, the Council reaffirmed its earlier resolutions on Iran's uranium enrichment and called on the country to comply with its obligations fully and without delay. (Press Release SC/9459)

International Judicial Organizations

Officials of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda briefed the Security Council on 4 June and 12 December on progress made in their “completion strategy” -- originally set at finishing trials of first instance by the end of 2008 and appeals by 2010 -- reporting that, due to circumstances outside their control, those targets could not be met.

The Presidents and Prosecutors of both Tribunals stressed that their mandate would not have been fully achieved if remaining fugitives were not arrested. They also underlined the importance of retaining qualified staff and of referring mid- or lower-level cases to domestic jurisdictions. A Council working group was addressing the question of establishing a residual mechanism to carry out certain essential functions after the Tribunals’ mandates expired. (Press Releases SC/9347 and SC/9535)

On 19 December, the Council issued a presidential statement in which it noted with concern that the 2010 completion target of the Yugoslavia Tribunal was unlikely to be met and underlining the need for it to concentrate on the prosecution and trial of the most senior leaders suspected of crimes within its jurisdiction, while referring lower-level cases to national jurisdictions. (Press Release SC/9549)

Adopting four technical resolutions, the Council extended the terms of some permanent and ad litem -- or “ad hoc” -- judges and authorized the appointment of additional ad litem judges to help the Tribunals achieve their respective completion strategies. (Press Releases SC/9257, SC/9400, SC/9462, SC/9534 and SC/9548)

International Court of Justice

Meeting twice On 6 November, independently of but concurrently with the General Assembly, the Security Council elected five judges to the International Court of Justice for nine-year terms beginning on 6 February 2009. (Press Release SC/9494)

International Criminal Court

For briefings by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on the situation in Sudan and action in that regard, see “Sudan”.

International Independent Investigation Commission

For meetings relating to the International Independent Investigation Commission (IIC) concerning the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and other crimes, see “Lebanon”.

Terrorism

“The best response to a corrosive, malevolent ideology is a strong assertion of collective resistance,” the Secretary-General told the Council on 9 December as it held a day-long debate on terrorism. “We need to defend the human rights that terrorism so brutally violates,” he said, adding that, although the United Nations was itself a target, the Organization would maintain its responsibility to lead international efforts to confront the menace.

Capping the debate was presidential statement S/PRST/2008/45 in which the Council expressed its deep concern about the continuous attacks around the world and called on Member States to renew international solidarity against terrorism. Members underlined the need to strengthen existing mechanisms and cooperation in order to find, deny safe haven for and bring to justice anyone supporting, facilitating or participating in the financing, planning, preparation or commission of terrorist acts. (Press Release SC/9524)

During an open debate on 19 March, there was broad endorsement of the revised organizational plan for the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and renewal of its mandate, as well as a deepening understanding that the most pressing need in combating terrorism was less about ensuring that countries understood the challenge and more about ensuring they had the capacity to carry out the fight. (Press Release SC/9279)

In the wake of that debate, on 20 March, the Council extended the Directorate's mandate until 31 December 2010, agreeing to conduct an interim review by 30 June 2009 and a comprehensive look at its work prior to the mandate's expiration. Unanimously adopting resolution 1805 (2008), the Council urged the CTED to strengthen its role in facilitating technical assistance for the resolution's implementation, with the aim of increasing the anti-terrorism capabilities of Member States. (Press Release SC/9280)

During the course of the year, the Council issued three presidential statements condemning in the strongest terms two terrorist attacks in Islamabad, Pakistan (documents S/PRST/2008/19 and S/PRST/2008/35), and one in Issers, Algeria (document S/PRST/2008/31). (Press Releases SC/9345, SC/9451, and SC/9430)

The work of the Council's subsidiary committees on terrorism was addressed on 6 May and 12 November in briefings on the activities of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, created after the 11 September 2001 attacks, and its Executive Directorate; the Taliban and Al-Qaida Committee; and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. (Press Releases SC/9323 and SC/9498)

In those meetings, the Committee Chairpersons affirmed that global cooperation remained crucial to fighting terrorism, and noted that the three Committees had increased their own cooperation with each other.

The "1540 Committee" Chair noted the development of new institutional mechanisms and the adoption of new legislation and enforcement measures to ensure that non-State actors did not acquire weapons of mass destruction, but stressed that more work was needed in that regard.

The Chair of the Taliban and Al-Qaida Committee said that body had been reviewing the names on its Consolidated List of those targeted by sanctions, as well as the posting on the Committee's website of the summary of reasons for their listing. Improvements had been made to the existing identifying information of some individuals and entities.

The Counter-Terrorism Committee Chairman said that body continued to analyse the preliminary implementation assessments (of resolution 1373 (2002)) of every Member State. It had thus far adopted some 188 of them, with the remaining five expected to be formally approved in the coming months. (Press Release SC/9498)

Peace and Security

Joined by the Secretary-General and former Special Adviser Lakhdar Brahimi, Heads of State and Government and other senior national officials on 23 September, the Council held a debate in which delegates stressed the importance of mediation for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Issuing presidential statement S/PRST/2008/36, the Council affirmed the crucial role of the United Nations, particularly that of the Security Council, in mediation efforts and encouraged the Secretary-General to consider how the Organization's mediation capabilities could be strengthened. (Press Release SC/9452)

Meeting to consider "Strengthening collective security through general regulation and reduction of armaments", under its agenda item on maintenance of international peace and security, the Council stressed, on 19 November, its concern over increasing global military expenditures and urged all States to devote as many resources as possible to economic and social development. In presidential statement S/PRST/2008/43, which preceded the debate, the Council recognized that development, peace and security and human rights were interlinked and mutually reinforcing. It stressed the importance of an effective multilateral system to better address the challenges and threats confronting the world. (Press Release SC/9501)

Civilians in Armed Conflict

Emphasizing during a 27 May meeting that protection of civilians was central to the Council's work, John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, advocated the appointment of an informal expert group, attached to the Council, to focus on the subject. He also presented a brief survey of crisis situations in which civilians were at risk.

The day-long discussion that followed his briefing culminated in a presidential statement (document S/PRST/2008/18) in which the Council expressed its deepest concern that civilians continued to suffer the brunt of the violence during armed conflict. The Council

condemned all violations of international law that threatened non-combatants and reaffirmed the responsibility of States and other parties to conflict to protect them. (Press Release SC/9340)

Women and Peace and Security

The Council demanded the “immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians” on 19 June as it unanimously adopted resolution 1820 (2008), which capped the first of two debates on the subject this year. It also expressed its deep concern that, despite repeated condemnation, violence and sexual abuse of women and children trapped in war zones was not only continuing, but, in some cases, had become so widespread and systematic as to “reach appalling levels of brutality”. (Press Release SC/9364)

After hearing more than 50 speakers on 29 October, the Council strongly condemned all violations of international law committed against women and girls during and after armed conflicts. Issuing presidential statement S/PRST/2008/39, it urged the complete and immediate cessation of such violations by all parties and urged Member States to bring to justice those responsible for crimes of that nature.

Children and Armed Conflict

Seeking to enhance the long-term protection of children, the Council stressed the need to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention that would address the root causes of armed conflict, according to one of two presidential statements it issued on the subject this year (document S/PRST/2008/6), each of which followed a lengthy open debate. During the first, on 12 February, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, outlined the main areas of concern, noting that 58 offending parties had been listed in the annex to the Secretary-General’s report (document S/2007/757). (Press Release SC/9246)

Following the second debate, on 17 July, the Council expressed its strong and equal condemnation of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and of their killing, maiming, abduction, rape and other sexual violence against them, as well as the denial by parties to conflict of humanitarian access to children and attacks against schools and hospitals (document S/PRST/2008/28).

Prior to issuing that statement, the Council heard from nearly 60 speakers, including the Secretary-General, who described the protection of children in armed conflict as a “litmus test” for the United Nations and its Member States; a moral call deserving to be placed above politics.

Having convened the meeting, Council President Pham Gia Khiem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, stressed that his country had seen several generations of children suffer from the scourge of war. Speaking in his national capacity, he said Viet Nam attached great importance to a preventive strategy with the dual objective of preventing armed conflict by addressing its root causes, and preventing children from being affected by armed conflict. (Press Release SC/9398)

Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

Emphasizing the critical importance of post-conflict peacebuilding in laying the foundation for sustainable peace and development after the scourge of war, the Council issued on 20 May a presidential statement inviting the Secretary-General to provide advice, within 12 months, to the relevant United Nations organs on how best to support national efforts to secure lasting peace more rapidly and effectively, including by scaling up coordination, civilian deployment and financing.

The presidential statement (document S/PRST/2008/16), which capped a day-long debate, also recognized that helping States to recover from conflict and build sustainable peace was a major challenge for the international community. It stressed the imperative to ensure that finances were available for recovery and peacebuilding activities to meet immediate needs and lay a solid foundation for longer-term reconstruction and development. (Press Release SC/9333)

Yukio Takasu (Japan), Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, said on 21 October that the upcoming third year of the new United Nations organ created to keep countries from slipping back into conflict would be its real test. By then, the Commission must consolidate its achievements and help mobilize resources so it could create a real difference on the ground, he said, highlighting the

work it had already carried out in the countries then on its agenda -- Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic. (Press Release SC/9476)

Security Sector Reform

Meeting once on 12 May on security sector reform under its item on Peace and Security, the Council issued a presidential statement (document S/PRST/2008/14) recognizing that the establishment of an effective, professional and accountable security sector was a necessary element for laying the foundations for peace and sustainable development. Although it should be a nationally owned process, rooted in the particular needs and conditions of the country in question, strong United Nations and international support were also critical in strengthening national capacities.

The presidential statement followed an earlier meeting on the subject, in which the Secretary-General acknowledged that, despite the rich and varied experience of the United Nations in security-sector reform, a common framework and coherent system-wide approach were lacking. There was a need to strengthen the ability to provide consistent, well-coordinated and high-quality technical advice during peace processes and in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development. Such an approach should be less piecemeal and more holistic, he said. (Press Release SC/9327)

Working Methods

Convened by the Belgian presidency on 27 August, the Council held a meeting on its working methods for the first time in 14 years. Opening the discussion, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said it was essential that the 15-member body address issues relating to its working methods as it confronted increasingly complex responsibilities and a growing array of new challenges to international peace and security. The commitment of Council members to interact with the wider United Nations membership through greater transparency, openness in decision-making and inclusiveness was pivotal to the way in which the Council worked and was perceived by the international community, he said. (Press Release SC/9436)

Annual Report

On 30 October, the Security Council met to adopt its annual report to the General Assembly for the period 1 August 2007 to 31 July 2008 (published as a document of the General Assembly, document A/62/2). The annual report is required under Article 15, paragraph 1, and Article 24, paragraph 3, of the United Nations Charter. (Press Release SC/9489)

Documents of the Security Council are available on the Council's website at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>.

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