

[Extract]

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## Security Council

Sixty-third year

**5824**<sup>rd</sup> meeting

Monday, 22 January 2008, 10:00 a.m.

New York

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[...]

### *The situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question*

**Mr. Ambassador Ricardo Alberto Arias**

Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations

**Mr. Arias** (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Sir, for convening this debate, the objective of which we, like the Ambassador of Indonesia, understand is to assess the situation in the Gaza Strip and the humanitarian situation there in particular.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of the United Kingdom and Costa Rica.

The information we received today on the situation in the Gaza Strip is frankly alarming. The actions of the Israeli Government have brought the humanitarian situation in Gaza to the brink of catastrophe and cannot from any point of view be justified. Although the attacks by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza against Israel do not contribute to the peace process and, on the contrary, work against the peace process, the Government of Israel must not allow the full weight of its retribution to fall upon an innocent civilian population.

We understand and accept that the State of Israel has the right to defend itself, however measures for self-defence should be carried out in a restrained manner that is proportionate to the threat. Even during outright war, a civilian population cannot be deprived of the basic means for its survival, which endangers the lives of hundreds of innocent people. The actions of the Government of Israel violate all humanitarian standards, including the most basic rules of international law. These actions are not those of a liberal democracy that wishes to be a fair partner in the peace process and can only serve to intensify the conflict.

Panama takes note of Israel's decision to partially lift the blockade of Gaza that it began four days ago. However, we are far from being in a position to state that the situation has improved. This Council must call for the cessation of all acts of violence and demand that the Government of Israel immediately lift the humanitarian blockade of Gaza. Only in that manner can we hope that the peace process in the Middle East will continue to progress in line with the expectations of the international community.