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Jerusalem, 23 June 2002

Cabinet Communique

(Communicated by the Cabinet Secretariat)

At the weekly Cabinet meeting today (Sunday), June 23, 2002:

1. Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer briefed ministers on current security matters and pointed out that Israel has endured another difficult week in the confrontation with Palestinian terror. Thirty-three Israelis were killed and over 90 were wounded, with the most prominent attacks being the suicide-attack at French Hill in Jerusalem, the suicide-attack at Patt junction in Jerusalem and the horrifying attack at Itamar in which five people were killed, including a mother and three of her children.

Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer said that Israel is facing a renewed wave of terrorism, most acts of which it foils but a minority of which succeed in causing us painful damage. In light of this wave of terror, Israel has decided to go back to deepening its preventive actions in the main Palestinian cities in Judea and Samaria, which constitute hothouses of terror.

At this stage, Israel is operating in Jenin, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Kalkilya and Tulkarm.

The presence in the aforementioned cities disrupts and impedes the carrying out of attacks and enables the enhanced exposure and destruction of terrorist infrastructures. Israel will stay in, and operate in, these cities as necessary; there is no intention to conquer the areas, but to conquer terrorism.

Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer said that he had approved the emergency mobilization of reservists. In addition to actions in the cities, the IDF and the security forces are carrying out preventive and counter-terrorist measures in rural areas.

Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer drew attention to the sharp debate in the Palestinian arena over the efficacy of the continuation of the violent conflict, including suicide-attacks in Israel.

2. The concept of a "seam area" was presented to the Cabinet.

Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer emphasized that from his point of view, this was a security separation design to impede as much as possible the infiltration of terrorists and war materiel into Israel; it is not a diplomatic-political separation.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stressed that the fence and the obstacles comprising the "seam area" are security measures, the construction of which does not express a border of any kind, political or otherwise. It is a means only. Following the discussion, which lasted several hours, the Cabinet decided as follows:

A. The Cabinet reiterates the supreme importance of unity, which enables it to stand as one body in the face of challenges and security and political problems in the future.

B. The Cabinet was presented with the security concepts of the "seam area", for the Jerusalem area, and for the eastern security zone, about

which a discussion will be held.

C. The Cabinet approved the implementation of the first stage of the fence as it was presented by the security establishment.

D. In the framework of the first stage, the Cabinet decided to approve the construction of security fences and obstacles, the objective of which will be to reduce the infiltration of terrorists from Judea and Samaria into Israel.

E. The fence and the other obstacles are security means. Their construction expresses neither a political nor any other kind of border.

F. Ministers may submit their proposals, in writing, regarding the placing of the fence to Prime Minister Sharon or Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer by June 30.

G. The exact and final placing of the fence will be determined by Prime Minister Sharon and Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer. The final placing will be submitted to the Ministerial Committee on National Security or the Cabinet. In the event that there is no agreement, Prime Minister Sharon will submit the matter to either the Ministerial Committee on National Security or the Cabinet for a decision.

H. Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer and Finance Minister Silvan Shalom will discuss the various budgetary issues.