



# Press Release

Department of Public Information · News Coverage Service · New York

SG/SM/8282  
AFR/424  
GA/PAL/892  
25 June 2002

Français

## **SECRETARY-GENERAL, ADDRESSING UN AFRICAN MEETING IN SUPPORT OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, REQUESTS REAFFIRMATION OF SUPPORT FOR MIDEAST PEACE**

Following is the message of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the opening session of the United Nations African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Rabat, Morocco, 24-26 June. The address was delivered on his behalf by Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA):

Meetings like this one, organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, provide a valuable opportunity for participants to take stock of developments in the Middle East, and to adjust their ideas on ways to reach the so much sought-after and yet elusive peace in the region. I congratulate the Committee on its decision to hold this event on the African continent, and on its overall excellent work in pursuance of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Let me also thank the Government and people of Morocco for hosting this meeting and assisting in its preparation. This is only one example of Morocco's many contributions to the search for peace in the Middle East.

As the theme of your meeting suggests, the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people is an essential component of any peace agreement that can bring lasting stability and prosperity to the Middle East. These rights have been defined and affirmed in numerous United Nations resolutions. However, recent disturbing developments are moving us further away from their realization. The continuing violence and destruction have been consuming the Israelis and the Palestinians, bringing great suffering to both peoples.

Today, Palestinians are still confined to their towns, villages and refugee camps, without a State or an economy of their own. I have time and again expressed my dismay at the disproportionate and excessive use of force which Israel has too often used in conducting its self-defence, and which has caused the deaths of so many Palestinian civilians, as well as the frequent imposition of stifling closures, which are causing increasingly harsh economic hardship. The recent Israeli military operations have caused great damage to the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, and have further weakened the Authority's capacity to provide basic services to its population.

I have also called on Israel to halt its settlement activity throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

But I have also said on many occasions that the wilful killing of Israeli civilians in terrorist attacks can never be justified. Those who commit such acts should realize that the cause of the Palestinian people is not served by killing innocent people, many of whom are very young. Such acts should cease immediately. The Palestinian Authority itself must do more to prevent them.

And both sides must do much more to meet their obligations to protect civilians under international humanitarian law.

In recent months, in spite of the overall negative and discouraging trends on the ground, a modicum of hope has emerged. There is a growing international consensus that the end goal of the peace process should be two States -- Israel and Palestine -- living side by side in peace, within secure and recognized borders. This vision was affirmed in [Security Council resolution 1397](#), and is part and parcel of the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit last March. There can be no lasting security for Israel without an end to the occupation of Palestinian territory. But equally, there can be no permanent political settlement leading to the establishment of the State of Palestine unless there is also genuine security for Israel.

Much remains to be done before this vision of two States can become a reality. Many sensitive issues have to be settled and a timetable has to be set for the political process to address the permanent status issues. The leadership on both sides will have to make difficult decisions and painful compromises. Once again I call on Prime Minister Sharon and Chairman Arafat to assume their responsibilities and lead their peoples and the entire region away from the abyss. For that to happen, neither side should set conditions and no extremist should be allowed to derail this vitally important undertaking.

The international community has to intensify its engagement with both sides, so as to bring about a resumption of negotiations leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions [242](#), [338](#), 1397 and the principle of "land for peace". We need to help the parties chart a clear path that will lead to resolving this conflict once and for all.

But even while intensifying our diplomatic efforts, we should not forget that more than 20 months of violence and recurrent closures have dealt a severe blow to the Palestinian economy and the livelihoods of individual Palestinians. The damage to Palestinian social and economic infrastructure is now being assessed through joint efforts of the World Bank and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator (UNSCO), together with the donor community. But it is already clear that the damage is very extensive. A massive assistance programme is urgently needed to help Palestinians cope with the increased hardship and rebuild their lives and households. The United Nations is contributing to such efforts, through UNSCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations entities, working in the region.

UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the longest-running relief effort undertaken by the United Nations in any part of the world, remains a lifeline to more than 3.9 million Palestinians. Once again, I appeal to donors to assist the Agency so that it can continue to deliver its much-needed services to the refugees. Assistance is especially vital now, at this time of crisis and dire economic hardship.

Equally important is the need to restore and improve the effectiveness of the Palestinian Authority, which has been severely weakened. Let me reiterate the call made by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations within the framework of the "Quartet" for strengthening and assisting the Palestinian Authority, including through efforts to rebuild its infrastructure, security and governance capacity. That effort must be accompanied by serious and sustained reform of Palestinian institutions, led by Palestinians themselves and supported by the international community. The first steps taken by the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Legislative Council towards enhanced accountability are encouraging, and must now be fully implemented.

At the same time, coherent and determined steps must be taken to restore the political process and help the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach a permanent settlement. For my part, I pledge to continue to do whatever it takes to help these peace efforts, in coordination with the “Quartet” but also in cooperation with other important regional and international actors. The support of international public opinion -- including that of governmental agencies, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals -- is indispensable in this process.

I invite you all to lend your moral and practical support to the achievement of this noble goal for the benefit of both peoples, as well as for the good of the region and the entire world. This United Nations meeting gives representatives of Africa a chance to reaffirm their support for peace in the Middle East, and to demonstrate their solidarity with the Palestinian people at this time of crisis.

I wish you all success in your deliberations.

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