



# Press Release

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Security Council  
4474th Meeting (PM)

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## **SECRETARY-GENERAL, ADDRESSING SECURITY COUNCIL ON MIDDLE EAST, PALESTINE,**

### **SAYS 'OUTLOOK IS BLEAK' -- BUT NOT IRREVERSIBLE**

#### **Council President Promises Further Debate on Issue**

It was imperative that the Security Council and the wider international community work with the parties to the conflict in the Middle East towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful settlement, Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Council this afternoon.

As the Council met to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the Secretary-General said that despite the fact that the news from the Middle East was grim, there was still room for hope. In the midst of the bitterness and the despair, there was a path back to the negotiating table. New thinking and imaginative new ideas were being proposed from several quarters. Such ideas should be considered promptly and thoroughly both by the parties and the international community.

A reduction in the violence was the most immediate priority, he said. However, trying to resolve the security problem on its own could not work. Security could not be dealt with in isolation -- it had to have a context. It must be addressed alongside key political issues, particularly the question of land, and the economic and social issues, including the increasingly desperate conditions of the Palestinians.

The lack of mutual confidence between the two sides made a third-party role essential, he said. The breakdown of trust was so total that neither side would believe the other when it came to the implementation of agreements. In light of the gravity of the situation, he had asked the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Rød Larsen, to intensify his consultations with the parties, as well as with regional and international actors.

The outlook was bleak, but the present course of events was not irreversible, he stressed. He called on the international community to do everything in its power to persuade the parties to pull back from the brink and return to the high road.

Adolfo Aguilar Zinser (Mexico), Council President, speaking on behalf of the members, said the situation in the region entailed serious risks to international security. The Council deplored the suffering of the civilian population and the loss of human life and property. Everyone wished to do something to end the violence. He supported the United Nations presence in the complex scenario and backed the Secretary-General's efforts.

The Council welcomed the Secretary-General's words and would examine his suggestions, he continued. On that basis, new initiatives would be proposed. He shared the conviction of the Secretary-General and Secretariat officials that the Organization's work was essential to building peace in the region. The will of the parties was essential, however. Without it, any international efforts would prove sterile.

The representatives of Yemen, as Chairman of the Arab Group, and Israel were invited to participate in the meeting, as was a representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine.

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 p.m. and adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

The full text of the Secretary-General's remarks is available in Press Release [SG/SM/8129-SC/7305](#) of 21 February.

#### **Background**

The Security Council met this afternoon to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

The Council had before it a [letter from the representative of Yemen, Chairman of the Arab Group](#) (document S/2002/184), requesting that the

Council convene an urgent meeting to consider the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. Also before the Council was a [letter from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations](#) ( [document S/2002/182](#) ), which gives an overview of events in recent days in the occupied Palestinian territory.

#### Statement by Secretary-General

Secretary-General KOFI ANNAN said the news from the Middle East was grim. Day by day the toll of the dead and wounded on both sides mounted and the bitterness and mutual distrust between Israelis and Palestinians intensified. Increasingly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict risked sliding towards full-fledged war. “Truly”, he said, “we are nearing the edge of the abyss”.

During the past seven days, there had been more than 60 deaths on both sides. Unless something happened to change the dynamic, it was all too likely that violence would escalate still further. Particularly alarming was the growing belief, among both Palestinians and Israelis, that there could be no negotiated solution to the conflict. As all knew, hopelessness and despair tended to lead to more extreme measures, with tragic consequences for the region.

Eighteen months after the beginning of the second “intifada”, the cost to both Israelis and Palestinians grew ever higher, he said. The key problems remained: occupation; security -- the need to end violence, including terrorism; and economic deprivation and suffering. Those were interlinked problems, encompassing the political and economic domains.

There was still room for hope, though, he said. In the midst of the bitterness and the despair, with clamour on both sides for revenge and for ever more desperate and reckless measures, there was a path back to the negotiating table. The parties had agreed, in principle, that there was a way out – namely the Tenet understandings and the [recommendations of the Mitchell Committee](#). However, “in principle” was not “in practice”. In fact, as was known, the parties had not implemented either of the plans. Clearly, the situation that was now unfolding required urgent steps, moving beyond a discussion focused on how to pursue Tenet and Mitchell.

New thinking and imaginative new ideas were being proposed from several quarters, he said. That was to be welcomed, and such ideas should be considered promptly and thoroughly both by the parties and the international community.

A reduction in the violence was the most immediate priority, he said. However, trying to resolve the security problem on its own could not work. Security could not be dealt with in isolation – it had to have a context. It must be addressed alongside key political issues, particularly the question of land, and economic and social issues, including the increasingly desperate conditions of the Palestinians.

Failure to address those issues together would only spawn new and perhaps deadlier exchanges of reciprocal violence, he said. Unless both parties had a political horizon on which their hopes for peace and an improved livelihood could be based, there would be no enduring ceasefire. It was imperative that both parties exercise maximum restraint, particularly with regard to attacks against civilians. It could not be overemphasized that both sides must adhere to their obligations under international law to protect the basic rights of civilians.

The lack of mutual confidence between the two sides made a third-party role essential, he said. The breakdown of trust was so total that neither side would believe the other when it came to the implementation of agreements. It was imperative for the Council and the wider international community to work in a concerted manner with the parties towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East.

He said that he and his representatives had been in close contact with leaders on both sides, in the region and among the international community. However, in light of the gravity of the situation, he had asked the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Rød Larsen, to intensify his consultations with the parties, as well as with regional and international actors.

The outlook was bleak, he said. But the present course of events was not irreversible. He called on the international community to do everything in its power to persuade the parties to pull back from the brink and return to the high road.

#### Statement by Security Council President

Council President ADOLFO AGUILAR ZINSER ( [Mexico](#) ) then made a statement on behalf of Council members. He thanked the Secretary-General for his frankness, clarity and the urgency with which he had set forth his thinking. He repudiated the violence and regretted the vicious circle of death in Palestine, Israel and the occupied territories. The situation entailed serious risks to international security. He also deplored the suffering of the civilian population and the loss of human life and property. Everyone wished to do something to end the violence. He supported the United Nations presence in the complex scenario and backed the Secretary-General’s efforts. He also expressed his concern for United Nations staff deployed in the region.

He said he could see that a process was unfolding. The Council had agreed to hold periodic consultations on the Middle East. Based on the proposals put forth by the Secretary-General today, Council members would consult with their capitals and hold a debate shortly. That was why Council members had preferred not to take the floor this afternoon. He looked forward to the debate. The Council’s efforts to resolve the conflict and halt the bloodshed would be an essential part of its negotiations. Palestine and the Arab Group had asked the Council to hold the meeting urgently, and it would shortly do so.

The Council welcomed the Secretary-General’s words and would examine his suggestions, he continued. On that basis, new initiatives would be proposed. He shared the conviction of the Secretary-General and Secretariat officials that the Organization’s work was essential to building peace in the region. The will of the parties was essential, however. Without it, any international efforts would prove sterile.

