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SECRETARY-GENERAL, ADDRESSING INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF MIDEAST

PEACE, SUGGESTS 'THIRD-PARTY MECHANISMS' MAY BE VITAL IN DEFUSING CRISIS

Following is the message of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Middle East Peace, delivered on his behalf today in Nicosia, Cyprus, by Karen Koning AbuZayd, Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA):

I am pleased to be addressing another important international event organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I would like to convey my greetings to all of you who have gathered in Nicosia for this meeting and to pay tribute to the Government and the people of Cyprus for hosting this meeting and for assisting in its preparation.

Indeed, as the title of the meeting suggests, Middle East peace needs our support, more urgently than ever. In recent months and weeks, we have witnessed an extremely dangerous escalation of the violence, which has resulted in great pain, suffering and destruction. Since September 2000, over 2,000 persons have lost their lives and tens of thousands have been injured. Many of the victims are civilian, many of them very young people, who found themselves in the middle of this bitter confrontation. This is a tragedy that cannot be allowed to continue.

The past two weeks have seen the sharpest rise in escalation since the beginning of the current crisis. Dozens of Israelis have been killed by suicide bombs, and hundreds of Palestinians have been killed in Israeli military operations in the West Bank. These events, combined with a sharp rise in attacks against Israel from Lebanon, underscore the seriousness and potential dangers of the present escalation, not only for the Israelis and Palestinians, but also for the region and beyond.

The latest Israeli operation in the Palestinian territory has also caused great damage to the Palestinian Authority and its institutions. Chairman Arafat has been seriously restricted in his ability to lead his people and contain violence perpetrated by militants. The capacity of the Palestinian Authority to provide basic services to its population has been gravely weakened.

International humanitarian principles and human rights standards have also been widely flouted by Israeli forces. I am appalled by the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza, and have demanded that Israel provide full access to humanitarian agencies and services.

In the past weeks, I have warned of the serious risks of the continual recourse to violence. I have condemned as morally repugnant suicide bombings and other violence against civilians, actions which denigrate the very cause they purport to represent. I have warned against the excessive use of force, and called on all parties to abide by their responsibilities to protect civilians. And I have stressed the importance of respect for Security Council resolutions and decisions – which remain the only possible basis for stability and peace throughout the region.

Military action will not bring a solution to the problems. The core problems of occupation, violence including terrorism, and economic distress remain, and must be solved before the conflict can come to an end.

But there are rays of hope amidst the turmoil. Of late, international efforts at bringing the violence to an end and saving the peace process have picked up pace with the convening of the Beirut Arab League Summit and action in the Security Council. Just before the Summit, the Council adopted resolution 1397 affirming the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders. On 28 March, the Arab Summit endorsed a most important peace initiative, put forward by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, charting a path for normal relations between Israel and the Arab world in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories occupied since June 1967 and the establishment of a State of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem. We must seize this offer of peace and see how best to build on it.

Efforts to de-escalate the crisis and secure a ceasefire must be made concurrently with action on the political front. All the ingredients for this are laid down in Security Council resolutions [1402](#) and [1403](#). The diplomatic "Quartet" composed of the European Union High Representative, the United States Secretary of State, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation and myself has committed itself to pursue the immediate implementation of these resolutions, and to work for accelerated progress on the political front, in parallel with security measures. All these steps should help realize the vision of a permanent settlement based on resolutions [242](#), [338](#) and [1397](#), which embody the principle of "land for peace". In short, the vision and the political road map towards a lasting peace are available. What needs to be urgently injected is the political will and the necessary impetus for concrete and concerted action.

In this regard, I have warmly welcomed United States Secretary Powell's mission to the Middle East, and have lent him, through the "Quartet", my full support for his efforts.

The consolidation and furtherance of recent progress clearly depends on the position and actions of the leaders and of the people on both sides. At this

dramatic time, perhaps more than ever, both Prime Minister Sharon and Chairman Arafat should exercise their leadership with an enhanced sense of responsibility and moral authority. They are duty-bound to bring their people back from the edge of the abyss.

Peace in the Middle East should be given a new chance. We all yearn to see a new era of security, peace and stability in the region, a feeling shared by all the Arab leaders whom I met at the Beirut Arab Summit. I have always held the view that security and peace in the region must be addressed in parallel. The legitimate security concerns of Israel and the legitimate political aspirations of the Palestinians should be guaranteed at the same time.

In this regard, I am increasingly of the view that such guarantees cannot be provided in the absence of third-party mechanisms on the ground. Such a mechanism could take the shape of international monitors of a ceasefire. Other alternatives are being discussed, including within the framework of the Quartet. Whatever form such a mechanism takes, I believe it essential to the process of restoring mutual confidence and making progress on both the political and security fronts.

In the process, we should not forget that 19 months of violence and recurrent closures have dealt a most severe blow to the Palestinian economy. The extent of the damage on Palestinian towns, villages and agricultural facilities has been devastating and is yet to be fully assessed. A massive assistance programme is urgently needed to allow the Palestinians to rebuild their lives and households. The United Nations will continue its work of rehabilitating the Palestinian economy, with an immediate focus on providing effective emergency assistance to the Palestinian people. In this regard, much is being done by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and others in the United Nations family. I would like once again to express gratitude to all the donor countries and intergovernmental mechanisms for their invaluable assistance to the Palestinian people at this difficult time.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been at the forefront of providing assistance to the Palestinian people for over five decades. In recent weeks, it has suffered significant material and even human losses, but persists in its daily provision of social services, schooling and health care for over 3.9 million Palestine refugees. And yet, in spite of its important and dedicated humanitarian work, the Agency continues to experience recurrent financial problems. I wish to take this opportunity to call on donors to continue to assist UNRWA and contribute generously to its budget, especially now, when the refugee camps have become targets of military operations.

Equally important is the need to restore an effective Palestinian Authority, which has been severely weakened in recent weeks. I should like to reiterate the call made by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations at our "Quartet" meeting in Madrid on 10 April for the international community, particularly the Arab States, to preserve, strengthen and assist the Palestinian Authority, including through efforts to rebuild its infrastructure, security and governance capacity. Efforts are under way through the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, together with the co-chairs of the Local Aid Coordination Committee, to make an initial assessment of the scope of damage to institutions, and the "Quartet" has committed itself to further work in this field.

At this critical and pivotal point, the co-sponsors and other international parties should take coherent and most forceful steps to restore the political process and assist the Israelis and the Palestinians in reaching a fair and viable agreement. For my part, I pledge to continue to do whatever it takes to help these peace efforts.

I am hopeful that this United Nations gathering will make its contribution in its own way towards supporting peace in the Middle East. Allow me to thank the Committee for holding this very timely event and for faithfully pursuing the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. I wish you all an interesting and productive meeting and look forward to studying the results of your deliberations.

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