



# Press Release

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## **FIFTY SPEAKERS ADDRESS SECURITY COUNCIL**

### **ON ESCALATING VIOLENCE IN WEST BANK, GAZA**

#### **Speakers Urge Israel to Close Tunnel that Extends Near Al-Aqsa Mosque; Say Israel's Prime Minister, Palestinian Authority President Should Meet**

Fifty speakers addressed the Security Council today, as it met in response to the recent escalation of violence in the West Bank and Gaza involving Israeli soldiers, Palestinian demonstrators and Palestinian police.

Speakers called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and President Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority to meet as soon as possible to discuss joint action aimed at ending the violence and lessening tensions.

The Government of Israel was urged by a large number of speakers, among them many foreign ministers, to close a tunnel that extends under the western wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque that was recently opened to the public in Jerusalem. Israel was also urged to lift the closure of the occupied territories, refrain from building additional settlements in those territories and honour its existing commitments.

The observer for Palestine, Farouk Kaddoumi, told the Council that Israeli forces had conducted a "brutal assault" on the Palestinian people which had resulted in 86 deaths and more than 1,000 wounded. Those actions appeared to have been designed as a warning to Arab countries, he said. The new Israeli Government had already said no to a return to the 1967 borders, no to withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and no to an independent Palestinian State.

David Levy, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, said that his Government was the victim of an "orchestrated attempt to place blame". Israel had been repeatedly subjected to demands regarding the final outcome of peace talks, he said. The meeting of the Security Council, convened under the pretence of responding to the opening of the western wall tunnel, was just such an attempt. The Chairman of the Palestinian Authority should instruct his forces and the residents of the autonomous areas to refrain from violence.

While many speakers called for Council action in response to the crisis, the representative of the United States said the Council's focus should be on how to stop the violence. The first objective was to restore calm and the second was to accelerate the negotiating process, she said.

The representative of Ireland, on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said the lack of progress in the peace process, together with such decisions as the lifting of the freeze on settlements, the failure to redeploy Israeli troops from Hebron, and the most recent actions of the Israeli authorities, were undermining the partnership between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. Regarding the status of Jerusalem, the European Union believed in the principles set out in relevant Council resolutions, notably the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

Evgeniy Primakov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, called for the adoption of a Security Council resolution, lest those guilty of the violence be sent the wrong signal. The new Israeli Government had retreated from commitments made to the peace process. As a participant in that process, the Russian Federation could not watch hard-won gains being set aside.

No one but Israel was to blame for recent violence, said Amre Moussa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt. That Government's policy of oppression, blockade and demolition would yield a harvest of frustration and blood. Israel was carrying out policies of settlement in the occupied territories and of demographic alteration in Jerusalem, despite provisions of the Oslo agreement which proscribed action which could affect the outcome of final status agreements.

The observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference assured the Council that as soon as the necessary measures to restore peace and security in the area had been undertaken, the Conference and its 53 member States, representing the very serious concerns of more than 1 billion Muslims all over the world, would also reinforce their wholehearted support of the peace process.

Statements were also made by representatives of the United Kingdom, France, Indonesia, Chile, Germany, Poland, Honduras, Italy, China, Republic of Korea, Botswana, Guinea-Bissau, Algeria, Kuwait, Malaysia, Senegal, Tunisia, Canada, Morocco, Libya, Iran, Argentina, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Australia, Sudan, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, Norway, Mauritania, Turkey, Japan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Lebanon, Cuba, India, Costa Rica and Brazil.

A statement was also made by the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting, which began at 11:22 a.m., was suspended at 1:05 p.m., resumed at 4:58 p.m. and ended at 9:37 p.m.

#### **Security Council Work Programme**

The Security Council meets this morning to consider the situation in the occupied territories. The meeting is in response to a 26 September letter to the Council President from the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for September (S/1996/790).

In that letter, he condemns the action taken by the Government of Israel in opening an entrance to the tunnel extending under the western wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem, and the shooting by Israeli Army forces of civilian Palestinian demonstrators protesting against that action, which resulted in hundreds of dead and wounded.

The Arab Group strongly condemns that Israeli action, says the letter, adding that it considers them to be a flagrant violation of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and of resolutions of the Security Council, as well as being incompatible with agreements concluded by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel.

The Council also has before it a letter dated 26 September from the Permanent Representative of Egypt ([S/1996/792](#)) supporting the request for a meeting.

A letter dated 26 September addressed to the Secretary-General from the Permanent Observer of Palestine ([A/51/411-S/1996/791](#)) refers to previous letters and states that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, has worsened and become even more dangerous. "We believe that the Security Council cannot stand by and watch such extreme deterioration of the situation, as well as the faltering of the peace process, as a result of Israeli policies and actions." He requests an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation, especially actions to achieve the closure of the tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as actions to restore hope and peace in the area.

A letter dated 26 September from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General is also before the Council. He expresses the greatest anxiety at the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory following Israel's decision to open a new entrance to the archaeological tunnel in East Jerusalem which runs under Arab property along the western wall of the Al-Harem al-Sharif, the third-largest site in Islam.

The letter states that those developments follow repeated warnings about the devastating consequences for Palestinian hopes and living conditions, of the delayed implementation by Israel of the agreements already reached, its prolonged closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the resumption of land confiscation and settlement, and actions against Palestinian property and institutions in Jerusalem. Supporting the call for an urgent meeting of the Security Council, the letter stresses that the current serious situation engages the responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of peace and security in the area.

#### Statements

FAROUK KADDOUMI, observer for Palestine, said the Palestinian people had been the subject of a brutal assault by Israeli forces which had caused 86 deaths and more than 1,000 wounded. The actions appeared to be designed by the current Israeli Government as a warning to Arab countries. That Government had taken a number of provocative steps, including encouragement of Israeli settlements and the destruction of a Palestinian settlement in East Jerusalem. The Israelis had previously sworn to leave Palestinian institutions untouched in East Jerusalem. Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres had formally agreed to that. The current Israeli Government had endorsed the use of force by the army and security forces, as well as encouraging further settlement.

The political programme of the new Israeli Government had already said no return to the 1967 borders and no withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and no independent Palestinian State, he continued. Issues that formerly were to be negotiated were thus being removed from the agenda. When Israel announced the opening of the tunnel under the western wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, the spark was touched off. In addition, the economic restrictions caused the Palestinians heavy losses, including 56 per cent unemployment. The slogan of the Israeli Government was now "peace for peace sake". This ignored the principal of land for peace. The root cause for the economic blockade of the Palestinians was political, not economic. The continuing closure of the territories created intolerable conditions. The Israeli Prime Minister believed that the arrogance of power was the way.

Israel, instead of withdrawing from Hebron and the other occupied territories, had chosen to use military force, he said. If the Israeli actions continued, then the peace process was in mortal peril. The Israeli Prime Minister had even sounded a note of racial supremacy in his statement encouraging Israeli settlements. The intransigent stance and provocative acts of the Israeli Government had created the need for the appeal to the Security Council. The final stage of the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis dealing with such areas as the status of Jerusalem and the return of refugees represented a litmus test for the peace process. The Council must act by demanding the end of Israeli provocation and closure of the tunnel in East Jerusalem. The Council should send a fact-finding mission and then take action.

DAVID LEVY, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, said that he was attending the Council in the face of an "orchestrated attempt to place blame on Israel" for the recent "harvest of blood". He refuted in their entirety the distortions of fact that were being spread at the United Nations regarding the events of recent days.

No claims against Israel could justify the use of live weapons by those empowered by recent agreements to ensure law and order, he said. Since its inception, the new Israeli Government had been subjected to calls for the normalization process to be halted and to threats that the intifada would return if Israel did not commit in advance to an outcome of negotiations. On other fronts, troops had been redeployed as a means of warning Israel that it should agree in advance to one single outcome demanded by the other side.

The present meeting of the Council, convened under the pretense of responding to the opening of the western wall tunnel, was in fact an attempt to pressure Israel and to predetermine the outcome of negotiations, he said. The supreme Muslim religious authority in Jerusalem, the "Waqf", had been informed in advance of the intention to open the tunnel, he added.

The Chairman of the Palestinian Authority should exert the authority vested in him and exercise a restraining influence, he said. He should instruct his forces and the residents of the autonomous areas to refrain from violence. In the weeks since assuming power, Israel's Government had conducted ongoing contacts with the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority and his colleagues. In those meetings it had agreed to ease the recent closure, thus assuming security risks. His Government had taken the decision to assist and ease the economic hardship of the autonomous areas.

The Security Council should not assist in attempts to isolate and impose unacceptable positions on the Government of Israel, he said. Lending its hand to the atmosphere of escalation would serve no purpose. "I come from Jerusalem and shall return to her", he said. "Jerusalem has always been and remains the heart and soul of the Jewish people, the eternal and historic capital of Israel."

AMRE MOUSSA, Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, said that recent events had been no surprise to those following the peace process, given the tunnel into which the Government of Israel was dragging the Middle East. President Mubarak had made clear that Israel's policy of oppression and blockade, demolition and impress would yield a harvest of frustration and blood. No one but Israel – stalling its commitments under the agreements – could be blamed for the events.

The events of recent days had grave implications for the Palestinian, Syrian and international tracks of negotiations, he continued. Israel was not adhering to agreements. They were avoiding any mention of the "land for peace" principle and had returned to a policy of settlement despite a specific provision of the Oslo Agreement which proscribed any action which would affect the outcome of final status agreements. Israel was attempting to alter the demographic composition of Jerusalem, also in violation of that accord.

Israel had also refused to implement the Oslo Agreement regarding the redeployment of its forces in Hebron and other areas, he said. Israel had returned to its policies of aggression against civilians by wounding 60 Palestinians and wounding hundreds of others. All of those events had taken place against the backdrop of the continuing blockade, which prevented the Palestinian people from achieving any economic development.

Peace required a serious commitment by all sides, including Israel, he said. The lack of commitment by Israel now threatened to set back the entire process, returning the region to a cycle of violence and forcing Arab governments to reconsider their role in the peace process. Egypt had aimed to "close the file" on the Arab-Israeli conflict. That was still its objective. Israel should reconsider its policies. The alternative to peace was something that the international community could not bear. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, MALCOLM RIFKIND, said that fires of frustration had been smouldering because of the lack of progress on Hebron, the continuation of the closure, which Palestinians saw as collective punishment, and move to develop settlements. The decision to open the tunnel had added the fuel which sparked the conflagration.

He said urgent action was required on several items: a moratorium on the opening of the tunnel to tourism; a meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat to achieve a cessation of fighting; implementation of outstanding issues under the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, starting with Hebron; and, as proposed by King Hussein of Jordan, agreement to an international commission to work out ways of dealing with the sensitive questions that arose in Jerusalem on archaeological matters. The leaders should make a leap of faith to snatch progress from the jaws of setback, he said. "Who can forget that in even more difficult circumstances, Mandela and de Klerk were able to rise to an ever greater challenge?"

HERVE DE CHARENTE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, said the tragic events currently under way were the most serious in many years. It was a major risk to the now frozen peace process. France had already cautioned Israeli authorities against increasing tensions, and measures to improve the daily lives of Palestinians were absolutely necessary. The latest move to open the tunnel was provocative and, at the very least, a grave psychological error. The confrontations had caused primarily civilian casualties, as well as casualties in the Israeli army and the Palestinian police, who for the first time were in conflict. An important provision of the agreement between the parties involving the entry of Israeli forces into an area – known as Zone A – had been seriously violated.

He said it was difficult to believe that the situation was any sort of orchestrated attack upon Israel. France was doing its utmost to bring the parties back to the peace process. The deliberations of the Council would bring back peace when it took certain action. The Council should affirm the closing of the tunnel and demand the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Zone A. It should avoid condemnations and encourage the leaders to meet and resume negotiations.

EVGENIY PRIMAKOV, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said that for the first time since 1973 a dangerous level of violence had been reached and an extremely serious crisis had arisen. In the past four months, since the coming to power of the new Israeli Government, there had been a retreat from previous commitments in the peace process. A provocation involving a sensitive religious area had taken place and had been a culmination of the process of recent months.

Only through negotiations could the situation be resolved. As a participant in the peace process, the Russian Federation could not watch hard won gains in the peace process being set aside. A return to the process, started in Madrid, and the idea of land for peace was the way forward. His country had warned that the longer there was instability in the peace process the greater the possibility of violence. That prophecy had been fulfilled.

The presence of so many ministers in the Council was an opportunity to take action, he said. The Council must adopt a resolution on the situation today to seize that opportunity, or those who had been guilty of the violence would be sent the wrong signal.

ALI ALATAS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, said Israel's confiscation of Arab lands and establishment of settlements, failure to lift the closure of Palestinian territories, refusal to withdraw forces from Hebron, attempts to change the demographic and geographic conditions, failure to implement the provisions of the 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements – had again turned the region into a flash point of crisis fraught with far-reaching consequences. It was clearly a case of bad faith on the part of Israel and its manifest lack of commitment to the peace process. The most dangerous development that precipitated the current cycle of violence was Israel's provocative action of opening a new entrance to the tunnel which ran along the western wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, triggering an open confrontation resulting in death and injuries to scores of civilians. He strongly condemned the indiscriminate use of force in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus and Gaza against the Palestinian population.

The unilateral action of the Israeli Government to change the facts on the ground to alter the status of Jerusalem was in utter disregard of the timetable set by the 1993 Declaration of Principles, which scheduled that critical issue for the final phase of negotiations in May of 1997. It was imperative that the Council, in unambiguous terms, call upon Israel to close the tunnel and return to the initial state of affairs before the crisis. He further called for the cessation of all acts affecting the safety and well-being of the Palestinian people. He also urged the Israeli Government to resume negotiations with the PLO in resolving the crisis.

JOSE MIGUEL INSULZA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, said that since its beginning, the peace process had been seen as being of great importance for the international community. The hope for peace should not be renounced.

Everyone realized the delicate balance that must be maintained in Jerusalem, he continued. Accumulated tensions in that city were so high that a tiny spark had triggered the fire seen in recent days. It was indispensable that the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority reduce the tensions and resume dialogue. Men and women had committed to a vision of peace. The minority who opposed peace should not be allowed to replace dialogue and understanding with intolerance.

KLAUS KINKEL, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, said that his Government would make financial assistance available to the victims of the recent violence. The encouraging developments of the last few years, particularly the demise of the East-West conflict, had made the process between Israel and the Palestinians a promising one. Thus, he was disappointed at the recent events. The parties should negotiate in a constructive manner and he welcomed the initiative of Egypt to invite the parties to speak.

The weapons should remain silent, and the situation should undergo a general de-escalation, he continued. The confidence that had been lost should be restored. He appealed to the parties to stick to the spirit and letter of their agreements. The issue of Hebron would have to be resolved and a solution found for the people sealed off in the Palestinian territories. Those people should be made to feel that they had something to gain from the peace process.

DARIUSZ ROSATI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, said that the outbreak of violence and continuing confrontation threatened to jeopardize the results of the peace efforts already achieved. The incidents that had taken place had grave significance, as they involved an open exchange of gunfire between Israeli security forces and the police of the Palestinian Authority. The parties should take decisive steps to defuse the situation.

The Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority should respect and implement the agreements, as well as avoid creating problems bound to impede constructive dialogue. The peace process initiated in Oslo and Madrid was an important element of international peace and security. The question of Palestine could be resolved by peaceful means and confidence-building through cooperation.

DELMER URBIZO PANTING, Foreign Minister of Honduras, said that his Government viewed with concern the situation brought about by Israeli action in the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the occupied territory of East Jerusalem, as well as the Palestinian response which had, unfortunately, resulted in dozens of casualties. While deploring the attacks against Palestinian civilians, his Government believed that the attempts to alter the demographic composition of East Jerusalem was a violation of the Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and of the peace process.

Measures taken by Israel violating the rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories must cease forthwith, he said. Further, the special character of Jerusalem for the Palestinian people should be respected. The parties should put an end to the dangerous situation. The Security Council should take measures to prevent escalation.

The meeting suspended at 1:05 p.m.

When the meeting reconvened at 4:58 p.m. PAOLO FULCI (Italy) said in the past three days, a spiral of events had taken place that threatened the very foundations of the peace process. One of the deepest values of mankind, religious sentiment, had entered the fray. For the first time, the Palestinian police and the Israeli soldiers, who were supposed to be leading the way to peace, exchanged gunfire instead. The ensuing clashes were the heaviest in many years and the situation might spin out of control. Israel needed to take an action would demonstrate it remained committed to peace. There were concrete measures that the Israeli Government could take to implement its commitments and dispel the misgivings and deeply felt concerns not only of the Palestinians and Arabs, but of the many other countries whose voices had just been heard in the Council.

He hoped that all the frantic efforts being made at present to save the peace process would be truly successful, and quick, because there was not a moment to lose. He appealed to the Israelis and the Palestinians to stop the fighting and take rapid action to "appease the restless consciences". In the current phase, that was the primary though not the exclusive responsibility of the Israeli Government. The good will, commitment and courage that had been invested in the peace process must not be squandered.

QIN HUASUN (China) said Israeli forces had clashed with Palestinian forces, resulting in a great loss of life. The acts of the Israeli forces were not conducive to peace in the region. The parties should take measures to end the bloodshed. They should show restraint, respect their commitments and refrain from any action that would impair the peace process. The international community was disturbed at the state of the peace process. The question of Palestine was the key to peace in the Middle East and the concept of land for peace was the major component in the peace process.

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT (United States) said her Government joined other Council members in expressing deep sorrow at the loss of life during these last days in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. The Council's focus today should be on how to stop the violence. That violence was not only an unfolding tragedy for the victims, but also for the hopes invested in the peace process.

The United States wanted to restore that process, as it was the best way to end the continuing sorrows, not only now, but for the future as well, she continued. The first objective was to restore calm. The second was to accelerate the negotiating process. That process was the way to resolve the outstanding issues for implementation of the interim self-government arrangements. Implementation must go forward. Tangible results must be seen.

To be effective, both sides must reach out to each other as real partners, she said. The United States was working intensively with both sides to achieve a restoration of calm and forward movement to produce tangible, positive events on the ground. The Council must work actively to that end. Words were no substitute for action in the region. Rhetoric offered Palestinians and Israelis alike no comfort. The world should turn its attention not to condemnation, but towards encouraging the parties to restore the peace process and return to efforts to achieve concrete progress.

PARK SOO GILL (Republic of Korea) said a sombre shadow had been cast over the Council today. He had consistently supported the peace process in the region, and considered the recent violence to be detrimental not only in terms of the heavy casualties, but also because of the implications of heavy fighting between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian police.

The reason for the recent explosive turn of events, he went on, was clearly the opening of the tunnel in the vicinity of Islamic holy places. The events could easily have been anticipated and avoided. It was the wisdom, patience and courage of both Israelis and Palestinians that would enable them to overcome the problems facing them. Perhaps the best way to overcome the situation on the West Bank would be to restore the status quo, which would allow both sides to compromise to implement the agreement in which they had so high a stake.

LEGWAILA J.M.J. LEGWAILA (Botswana) said that the policies of the Government of Israel had had the effect of reversing important aspects of the peace agreements. The Palestinians in that situation were bound to lose their sense of purpose. Israel and the Palestinian Authority had accepted the principle that they could not build peace on each other's graves. They had, therefore, committed themselves to agreements aimed at establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. The present situation should not be allowed to derail that process.

The armed confrontation between the Israeli Defence Force and the Palestinian Authority Police was an unfortunate and ominous development which could seriously poison the atmosphere of cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, he said. He appealed to the Government of Israel to honour its obligations under the agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority, in particular concerning the Israeli withdrawal from Hebron. Israelis and Palestinians needed to be constantly reminded that their destinies were permanently and inextricably interlinked. They could not wish one another away.

The President of the Council, ADELINO MANO QUETA (Guinea-Bissau), speaking in his capacity as representative of his country, said the confrontations over the past two days had prompted the current meeting of the Council. Peace and security in the Middle East had been threatened. The climate of confidence must be restored and rancour must be dispelled. The parties must return to the negotiating table. The wounds of the past had been re-opened. Rather than opening a symbolic tunnel, it was more important to take every measure required to bring about peace.

He said the peace process could not hinge on political issues of the moment. The actions of all extremists must end. All the factors of confrontation must be addressed, and all the previous commitments scrupulously adhered to. An immediate meeting between the two leaders must be preceded by actions designed to ease tensions and remove the possibility of more violence.

AHMED ATTAF (Algeria), speaking also on behalf of the League of Arab States, said that the Council was meeting during an explosive situation that could be described as a new turning-point in the Middle East. The Council must face the logical results that flowed from Israeli actions far beyond the norms laid down by the international community for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Israeli action was aimed at achieving the security of one side to the detriment of the other, he continued. Its horrendous actions in the stricken areas and the opening of the tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque were part of Israel's policy of flouting every agreement mandated by the international community. The freezing of the Israeli withdrawal from Hebron, the refusal to finalize arrangements in the Palestinian areas, confiscation of Arab lands, economic sanctions and daily acts of violence, were all a part of that policy. Algeria condemned that policy, which ran counter to peace in all its aspects.

He said the Council must shoulder its responsibilities in the resolution of a conflict whose settlement flowed from its own resolutions. The present policy of the Israeli Government ran counter to the principles of the Madrid and Washington agreements. It was clear that Israel wished to replace and threaten the peace process as a whole. What kind of peace could be envisaged and maintained without the complete withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon? Given Israel's scorning of its commitments, he could only deduce that its aim was a rejection of Arab rights and establishment of its security at the expense of Arab non-security.

At a time when the Palestinian territories were going through a tragic period, after a period of hope, the Council must come forward with a just opinion reflecting a just cause and condemning Israel's refusal to honour the commitments it had made, he said. He called for a closing of the tunnel and for full respect by Israel of its commitments, including the intransigent measures that were now undermining the peace process. The Council must once again insist on the principles of the Madrid Conference and on the principle of land-for-peace as a basis for a settlement.

SHEIKH SABAH AL-AHMAD AL-JABER AL-SABAH (Kuwait) said the Council was in session at the request of the Arab Group, which could not ignore the ongoing events in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the holy city of Jerusalem. The Council's agreement to that request showed its appreciation of the danger of the tunnel project on the physical safety of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Israeli measures had been taken within an overall plan of action by Israel to Judaize Jerusalem, to change its legal status and to suppress its Islamic physical features and cultural heritage, he continued. Those measures had not come into being overnight. They culminated the new strategy and platform of action pursued by the Government of Israel to pre-empt the provisions of the agreements reached, to back away from obligations, to expedite settlement activities, to seize and annex more Palestinian land and to displace more Palestinians, to dissociate itself from the land-for-peace principle, and to shift towards inadmissible notions that sought security for Israel, irrespective of the cost and consequences.

He said that while Kuwait condemned those grave Israeli measures that could destroy the peace process, it fervently hoped that rationalism and wisdom would prevail through adoption of a unanimous resolution reflecting the sensitivity and significance of the current situation. Such a resolution would show the Council's response vis-à-vis actions that undermined peace.

DATUK ABDULLAH HAJI AHMAD BADAWI, Foreign Minister of Malaysia, said his country condemned the blatant act of provocation by Israel in opening the tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque and called on Israel to rescind its decision and close the tunnel. The measures taken by Israel to create new demographic facts and to change the status of Jerusalem were illegal and invalid.

Regrettably, he continued, since the new Israeli Government had been elected, announcements had been made that it was not bound by the peace agreements and that it ruled out any compromise on Jerusalem or a Palestinian state. It had long delayed redeployment of Israeli soldiers from Hebron and departed from the "land-for-peace" principle. The present Israeli Government must honour all peace agreements. Any departure from those agreements would dash all hopes for peace. He urged the United States, which had invested so much effort in the latest peace process, to earnestly encourage Israel to honour its commitments to the peace agreements. The momentum towards a successful peace process in the Middle East must be maintained.

MOUSTAPHA NIASSE, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal, said the new clashes were all the more deplorable because they were taking place in a city holy to three religions -- a city of peace. It was regrettable that the historic role of Jerusalem continued to be betrayed. The practices of changing the historic and demographic nature of the city had been continuously condemned. He appealed to the Israeli Government to modify its position in the peace process and to fulfil the hopes of all for a true peace in the region. For Senegal, which had long presided over the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, that peace process and the establishment of a Palestinian state were of special importance. In Israel and in the Arab world, a majority desired peace. All nations should strengthen that reality and not succumb to the practices of extremists.

HABIB BENYAHIA (Tunisia) said that the Council was meeting in the shadow of a volatile situation in which bloody events had erupted, leading to a large number of casualties. The situation was escalating with every passing moment. The Israeli action in opening the tunnel was a provocation against not only the Palestinian people, but the whole Arab world. That measure aimed at changing the legal status of Jerusalem in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the resolutions of the Council, and the agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinian people.

Opening the tunnel had been but one link in a series of actions whose aims were well known, and had become increasingly apparent since the coming to power of the new Government of Israel, he said. The continued building of settlements and the siege and starvation of the Palestinian people did not reveal a determination to reach an accord between neighbours. The world was witnessing a return to brute force and the worst expectations were now being fulfilled. Israel was reneging on all agreements. In the absence of justice, there could be no security. Justice flowed from patience and tolerance, not from tyranny.

The legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to independence must be supported, he continued. Tunisia today expressed its full solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people, solemnly warned of the dangers threatening the peace process, and called on the Council to intervene swiftly in order to stop the violence and inaugurate a relaunching of the peace process.

He called on Israel to renounce its policies, renounce its interference in the holy places, abstain from building settlements, and return to the negotiating table to bring about full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and to implement fully agreements already committed to, before it was too late.

LLOYD AXWORTHY (Canada) said the escalation of violence in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had caused great concern among Canadians. They were equally concerned over the future of the peace process in the Middle East. Those events had shattered the trust painstakingly built up over the years. Restoring that trust must be the first priority.

Israelis and Palestinians alike had agreed that violence was not the answer, he continued. He called on both parties to honour their existing commitments on Palestinian autonomy, as well as talks between Syria and Israel. As a first step to end the violence, the Israeli Government must close the contentious tunnel, and cease other actions, such as the expansion of settlements, in order to restore the confidence of both sides in the prospects for peace.

Only negotiations could resolve the situation, he said. The international community also had a responsibility to the peace process in the Middle East. It must speak out in the cause of peace and call on the parties to return to the principles of previous accords, such as the Madrid agreements. Canada's active participation in the peace process was well known, and would continue. The Madrid Conference had heralded a new era in the Middle East, with leaders of exceptional courage stepping forward to build peace, often at great personal sacrifice. He hoped for a return to those efforts.

ABDULKARIM AL-ERYANY, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen, said recent tragic developments had led to the current explosion in Jerusalem and in the Palestinian cities and towns. It occurred because of the provocations by the Israeli authorities. The actions of the Israelis were a blatant violation of international law and could return the region to the cycle of violence. Israel had clearly and flagrantly violated the peace agreements. The Council must adopt all necessary measures to stop Israeli practices against defenceless Palestinian civilians -- the desecration of holy places, the seizures of land, the changes in the demographic nature of Jerusalem. Israel must adhere to all relevant Council resolutions and all of its commitments in the peace process.

ALEXANDER DOWNER, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, said peace must be pursued with vigour and must be accompanied by serious attempts to eliminate fundamental sources of injustice. He called upon Israel and the Palestinian Authority to do everything in their power to stop the violence. They should ensure that no steps were taken that might further provoke violence. All parties should honour the obligations and commitments they had made, including commencing substantive talks on final status issues and redeployment of forces.

ALI AMATA (Jordan) told the Council that the accelerated bloody events in the occupied territories confirmed that the peace process had reached a crucial turn,

calling for an appropriate response from the Council. Jordan had opened the channels of communication with the new Israeli Government and the Israeli people, with a view to returning the peace process to its original hopeful path.

Jordan's position during the recent Cairo Arab conference called for the new Israeli Government to define its position vis-a-vis the peace process, he said. It had called on Israel to cease the provocative actions that were certain to lead to explosion – in particular Israel's commitment not to touch the holy places of Jerusalem. But recent events had confirmed Jordan's gloomiest expectations. He called on the Israeli Government to resume peace negotiations with the Syrian Government at the point where they had stalled. The peoples of his region were yearning for peace. Arabs and Israelis must rise to the expectations of their peoples in order to bequeath to their grandchildren a future of peace and serenity.

FAROUK AL-SHARA (Syria) said the new Israeli Government had come to power with a strategy unrelated to peace, as the opening of the tunnel had demonstrated. Israeli policy aimed at burying the peace process by any means possible. Since taking power, some 100 days ago, it had become clear that the Israeli Government would not miss a chance to undermine the peace process. Uppermost in that policy of intransigence was its backing away from the policy of land for peace, refusal to withdraw from Palestinian areas, and refusal to settle the Golan question.

The new Israeli Government had little regard for the agreements reached by its predecessor, he continued. The events of the past few days reflected clearly the tragedy of the Palestinian people. That people would not surrender, nor would it be an easy victim of occupation and Israel's settlement policy. The Palestinian people would accept nothing less than the restoring of all their territories to the lines extant in 1967. Further, Syria would not give up its strategic option for peace. It would not accept anything less than a withdrawal to the Golan lines of 4 June 1967.

The Israeli Government's attempts to renege on its predecessor's agreements represented a refusal to commit itself, he said. It was basically telling Syria and the whole world that it did not intend to respect any of the agreements concluded under the eyes of the international community. The resulting climate suggested that the Middle East was returning to the law of the jungle, rather than moving forward along the lines set down by the Security Council.

The peace process was dying, he said, and could soon be buried without possibility of exhumation. Arrogance and intransigence did not make peace, and Israel was now living in unparalleled arrogance and intransigence, backed by a huge arsenal of advanced weaponry. In those circumstances, it did not feel obliged to conform with the norms of international legality. The Council should therefore adopt whatever was appropriate to revive the peace process. The tunnel, the prelude to the current evil, should not be the Council's sole preoccupation. Instead, it should move to adopt a resolution that might revive the peace process, which was dying. It was high time for Israel to realize that it could not hold on to the occupied territories and have peace at the same time. It had to choose.

ABDELLATIF FILALI, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco, said the bloodshed and the innocent victims from the Israeli aggression had been expected by all. The closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the decisions of the Israeli authorities to continue the policy of expansion and other acts of provocation had led to the current situation. His Government had made every effort to bring about a just and comprehensive and lasting peace. His country had welcomed the Madrid process and the Oslo Agreement, which laid down the principle of land for peace. It had supported every step in the peace process. Despite the length of the negotiations, there was a belief in the peace process. When the new Israeli Government came to power, all those hopes came to an end. For the first time a democratically elected government refused to honour commitments made by a preceding government. The Israeli policy of fait accompli imposed by force must be opposed. The Council must insist that the Israeli Government honour all its past commitments.

OMAR MUSTAFA MUNTASSER, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Libya, said the Zionist usurpers had pursued their policy of displacement with the help of the United States, which had taken the side of terrorism – forgetting its role in the Security Council. The genocide now being carried out against the Palestinian people was being supported by the United States. At best, the greatest power could only appeal to both parties to exercise restraint. Such action could not expand international peace and security. Holy places were being demolished and innocent people were being thrown in prison. Attacks were being carried out in the area of the Palestinian Authority, as well as in the occupied territories.

His country had no hatred for the Jews, he continued. It considered the interests of the Palestinian people and the Jews. The peace must consider the interests of both parties. The solution was for both to live in a territory without arms. The Council must stop the Israeli aggressors from the judaization of Jerusalem. A deadline for Israeli response must be set or action under Chapter VII of the Charter should be taken. Israel had been exempt from such action for half a century. The Council had a double standard which only punished the Arabs and the Muslims.

ALI OSMAN MOHAMED TAHA (Sudan) said deep sorrow now prevailed in his country. Israel's reneging on its agreements squandered the chances for a just and permanent peace. There were clearly substantive contradictions between peace and the harsh realities of occupation. The opening of the tunnel and the resulting bloody killing of unarmed civilians was a violation of all civilized values, and ran specifically counter to all Council resolutions concerning the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, which enjoyed love and respect throughout the Islamic world.

The violation of the mosque's status had outraged Muslims throughout the world, he said. Israel's practices would ultimately lead to an explosion in the region and have negative repercussions on peace and security throughout the rest of the world. He called on the Council to immediately stop Israel's provocations, including those antedating the sacrilege inflicted on the mosque.

YUSEF BIN AL-ALAWI BIN ABDULLA (Oman) said the Council was meeting at a time when international peace and security were under real threat, particularly when the holy city of Jerusalem was becoming a scene of bloodshed, martyrdom and bereavement. The bereaved were the victims of Israel's reckless policy of arrogance and provocation. Further hatred and bloodshed could only be avoided by a return to the path of peace.

The Israeli Foreign Minister had said this morning that his Government agreed to no preconditions for a resumption of the peace process. The issue was now in the hands of the Council. Its five permanent members had the power and ability to adopt resolutions. He did not ask the impossible. He suggested that the Council adopt the ideas and proposals put forward in the morning's debate by the United Kingdom. The Council would surely not deny the Palestinian people its right to self-defence. Was it democracy to kill innocent people and bring tanks to the streets of the holy city? The Council had to lend assistance and advice to the Government of Israel.

SHAIKH MOHAMMED BIN MUBARAK AL-KHALIFA (Bahrain) said Israel's attempts to judaize the Islamic nature of Jerusalem had rightly been condemned throughout the Arab world. He condemned the Israeli policy which had thus led to the deaths of innocent civilians and called on Israel to close the tunnel which jeopardized the integrity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Bahrain appealed to the international community and the members of the European Union to stop policies aimed at judaizing and changing the character of Jerusalem, he said. It likewise called on Israel to make its practices in the occupied territories conform to the principles of justice, fairness, the restoration of rights, and observance of existing agreements.

ALI-AKBAR VELAYATI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran, said today was a day of mourning for the entire world of Islam and, in fact, humanity at large. The world witnessed the desecration of Islamic holy places and the indiscriminate massacre of those whose only crime was religious devotion. Nothing, even the distorted logic of Zionists and their supporters, could justify that inhuman atrocity. No one could label peaceful worshippers as terrorists. The recent developments in the occupied territories represented the most dangerous escalation of Israeli inhuman behaviour against Palestinian people.

He said the recent developments represented yet another step in the long series of intransigent behaviour on the part of the new Israeli Government that had undermined the very foundations of the so-called peace process. At the same time, it had exposed the inherent deficiencies in a plan whose aim was not to address the real issue in a realistic manner. The reneging by Israel of its commitments was another element in the general policy of continued occupation and expansion and step by step imposition of a fait accompli. The international community, however, had been prevented by certain members of the Council from reacting. Such double standards had given a sense of impunity to the Israeli regime. The Islamic world could not accept further indifference by the Council.

GUIDO DI TELLA (Argentina) said his country was linked to the Middle East by close ethnic, religious and cultural ties. Argentina, a land of immigrants, had been enriched by infusions both of Jewish and of Arab blood. It sought today to join its voice to all those who had called today for the preservation of peace and security on the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. Hopes for a lasting peace flowing from the Madrid agreements had now been dimmed by rigid and obstinate actions that honoured neither the spirit nor the letter of those agreements.

The situation was now playing into the hands of extremists on both sides, he said. It was essential to restore the dialogue and resume the process of negotiation. He urged the Council to redouble its efforts to end the bloodshed and create the conditions for a resumption of the peace process. He appealed to all parties to face the current crisis with a spirit of moderation, tolerance and patience.

Mr. AL-NOAIMI (United Arab Emirates) said the serious events of recent days that had led to scores of dead and wounded were not a surprise, but part of an Israeli plan of fait accompli – which included policies of closure, demolition, imprisonment and torture. He expressed regret and disappointment over the reneging by the Israeli Government on its commitments. Israel must be pressured to renounce its regressive policy. He called on the Council to take the appropriate measure to contain the crisis. The Council must oblige the Israelis to close the tunnel and recognize the true aspirations of the Palestinian people for a Palestinian State.

LEMRABOTTT SIDI MAHMOUD OULD CHEIKH AHMED, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, said the provocation in the holy city of

Jerusalem had been one more link in the chain of measures Israel had launched against the Palestinian people. Peace could not truly exist as long as Israel did not withdraw from the Golan Heights and Lebanon. As the Arab summit last June had affirmed, peace required commitment from Israel as well as from the Palestinians. He requested the Council to take the necessary steps to deal with the consequences of the latest moves by the Israeli Government.

TANSU CILLER, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, said that in light of the already charged atmosphere, decisions regarding holy sites and places of worship were particularly susceptible to having wide-reaching implications and creating strong public sensitivities. The decision to open a tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque was of that nature. Al-Quds Al-Sharif was an equally sacred city for all three monotheistic religions. All interested parties should meticulously respect the delicate harmony and balance that, for centuries, had permitted the peaceful coexistence of the followers of those three faiths in that city. It was deplorable that the Israeli leaders, instead of adopting a conciliatory attitude, had opted to use force against the Palestinian people protesting that decision. There were no grounds to suspect the sincerity of the reaction of the Palestinians to that decision. The spontaneous reaction had to be taken into consideration. He called on both sides to exercise restraint and to refrain from actions which might be exploited by parties who were against the peace process. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat must meet immediately to find a way out of the crisis.

HANS JACOB BJORNLIN (Norway) said it was now of the utmost importance that a further escalation of the conflict be avoided. He urged both parties to immediately come together at the highest level to discuss how an escalation of the present crisis could be avoided, and how substantial discussions on the peace process could be achieved without further delay. His country had been in direct contact with the two parties to urge such a meeting.

He said it remained of the utmost importance to start substantial talks on the final status issues and to reach agreement on Israeli redeployment from Hebron, as stated in the Interim Agreement. The Israeli Government now had a special responsibility in acting to redress the situation and in ensuring that substantial progress be made in the implementation of existing agreements. He urged the Israeli Government to bring an end to the border closures, which further aggravated the economic crisis in the Palestinian areas. Norway had decided to make a contribution of \$2 million for budget support to the Palestinian Ministry of Finance.

HISASHI OWADA (Japan) said that in order to salvage the peace process, it was essential that the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority engage, without delay, in direct talks to bring about a cessation to the hostilities. The improvement of the present situation should be carried out on a double track – one, an immediate task and the other a more fundamental approach to the basic issues. The parties must immediately intensify efforts to bridge the chasm of mistrust that separates them by refraining from any action that could harm the prospects of the peace process. Confidence-building measures were necessary. On a more fundamental level, it was imperative that the parties directly involved continue, in good faith and with steadfast determination, to pursue the peace process. He said the international community should be seriously concerned about the ominous trend being witnessed in the occupied Arab territories. Japan was determined to contribute in whatever way possible towards the creation of an environment conducive to peace. It was incumbent upon the international community to fortify the peace process.

AHMAD KAMAL (Pakistan) said his Government was concerned and outraged by the Israeli Government's recent actions. Those provocations by Israel had dashed the hopes that the peace process would lead to the exercise of their right to self-determination by the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent homeland. That required the withdrawal of Israeli authorities from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territory.

The peace process must not collapse and agreements and accords already committed to must be implemented, he continued. Pakistan hoped that the new Israeli leadership would concede to the realities on the ground and resolve all pending issues with the Palestinian National Authority. The Council should take urgent measures to redress the current grave situation which threatened the peace in the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Council had the duty to call upon the Israeli authorities to immediately end those unjust actions and to desist from taking such measures in the future.

JOHN H.F. CAMPHELL (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said the lack of progress in the peace process was linked to recent decisions of the Israeli authorities, such as the lifting of the freeze on settlements and the failure to redeploy Israeli troops from Hebron. The most recent action of the Israeli authorities was undermining the partnership between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. Regarding the status of Jerusalem, the European Union believed in principles set out in relevant Council resolutions, notably the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

The international community must demonstrate confidence in the peace process, he said. The European Union urged the parties to resume negotiations on the basis of the principles already accepted by both parties, such as the past agreement by both parties that the question of Jerusalem would be negotiated. The parties must refrain from provocative actions and the leaders must lead their people towards peace.

ABDULRAHMAN MANSOURI, Assistant Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, said difficult negotiations had been held with Israel, such as the Oslo and Madrid talks, in order to carry forward the search for lasting peace in the Middle East. Unfortunately, Israel was not keeping up with the letter or the deadlines of the agreements it had reached with the Palestinians. The leaders of Israel had been putting forward the issue of security as a pretext for postponing the need to fulfil its obligations and to meet the deadlines set by its agreements with the Palestinians. The use of the tunnel in Jerusalem could affect the foundations and safety of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which was the site of the first "qibla" in Islam and an underpinning factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Saudi Arabia rejected any attempts to tamper with the Islamic sites in the city and to change the character of the city, in contravention of relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

He said that the Fourth Geneva Protocol applied to Israel as it related to the occupied territories. The Council should declare null and void Israeli actions that contradicted its agreements. Israel should not continue its economic siege, which was oppressive to the Palestinian people. Israeli arrogance made it accept concepts that were not accepted by other nations. Its actions had led to the current situations. Now, the media of the world were full of stories of massacres, rather than being full of reports that heralded progress being made on the road to peace. The international community should support the peace process until it was fully realized. The Council should put an end to illegal measures taken by Israel in relation to the city of Jerusalem. The co-sponsors of the Madrid conference and other members of the international community should try to get Israel to ensure the safety of the holy sites and to take further steps to fulfil its obligations.

ROBLE OLAHAYE (Djibouti) said that the construction work in old Jerusalem must cease, the Israeli troops must be withdrawn from Hebron as stipulated in the peace accords, plans to expand Jewish settlements must be terminated and border closures must be reversed.

He said that, while other issues before the Council had been fully considered over the past 30 years, those relating to the Palestinians continued to languish in the Council's archives. Such indecisiveness by the international community was an embarrassment to the Council. It had created a situation of unrelieved tribulation and humiliation. While some progress had been made in the peace process through the Oslo and the Madrid talks, the promise of peace seemed to be receding from the grasp of the world. Peace should be given a chance to succeed.

SAMIR MOUBARAK (Lebanon) told the Council that a grave turning point had been reached in the region. That had not surprised Lebanon. Israel's preoccupations – above all security – led them to attempt to impose conditions incompatible with the agreements of Madrid. The hopes kindled at Madrid for a just and lasting peace had been disappointed by the persistence of colonialist sentiments on the part of Israel.

The Likud Government had already signalled its intentions by such acts as the resumption of settlement activity, he continued. The latest violation of the holy city of Jerusalem was the logical outcome of that Government's policies. But what was happening in the occupied territories demonstrated, once again, that their people would not accept what was being done to them.

Lebanon supported the Palestinian struggle, he said. Its own position was in accordance with all Security Council resolutions. The Council was duty bound to act in accordance with its resolutions, which stated that the administrative and legislative measures taken by Israel in regard to Jerusalem were null and void, and that Israel's evocation of its security needs was invalid. Violence continued daily in Lebanon, as in Palestine. Israel must withdraw from all occupied territories, including the Golan Heights and south Lebanon, to the lines accepted prior to June 1967. He requested a resolution from the Council clearly expressing international condemnation of Israel's recent actions and determination to maintain such principles as land for peace.

IBRA DEGUENE KA (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said the international community had welcomed with joy and relief the signing of various acts between Yasser Arafat and the late Prime Minister of Israel. It had hailed with optimism the practical arrangements calling for the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza and Jericho and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Hatred and bloodshed seemed banished forever.

But recent events had demonstrated how precarious such hopes were and how dangerous the practices of the new Israeli Government were, he continued. The construction of the tunnel in the Old City had followed a whole series of provocations, which proved that it was Israel's will to stifle the occupied territories economically and maintain their dependence. It was, therefore, vital for the international community and the Council to ensure that all such provocative acts cease, that the tunnel be closed, and that the peace process be resumed.

He said that in the final analysis the Middle East, a historic crossroads of world history, would find its place and make its contribution only through mutual reconciliation. He was convinced that many Israelis still believed in reconciliation, and he appealed to the Israeli Government to put the peace process back on the right road.



AHMET ENGIN ANSAY, observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said the Conference had joined forces with the international community in supporting the peace process in the Middle East in full measure, despite some of the disadvantageous elements that the relevant agreements carried affecting Palestinian interests. The hopes had been shattered by the unfortunate turn of events in Palestine, the responsibility of which must lie with Israel and Israel alone. Unless Israeli atrocities and violations were checked immediately, the situation threatened to go out of control. Instead of ushering in an era of peace, tranquillity and economic and social development, what the new Government of Israel had brought in, with impunity, was an era of insecurity and restlessness, coupled with economic and social chaos.

The last in an endless series of frustrations against Arabs by Israelis was the opening of the tunnel under the esplanade of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, thereby constituting a serious threat to the security of that important shrine. He demanded that, while encouraging bilateral discussions between the Palestinian authorities and the Government of Israel aimed at diffusing the present explosive situation perpetrated by Israel in Palestine, the Security Council resume its responsibilities concerning the maintenance of peace and security in Palestine, including measures to close the tunnel. He assured the Council that as soon as the necessary measures to restore peace and security in the area had been undertaken, the Conference and its 53 member States, representing the very serious concerns of more than 1 billion muslims all over the world, would also reinforce their wholehearted support of the peace process.

BRUNO RODRIGUEZ PARRILLA (Cuba) said the opening of the tunnel and the attack against the peaceful Palestinian demonstrators was a continuation of the Israeli policy of aggression against the Palestinian people. The international community had continued to appeal for a resumption of the peace process, but the appeals had been ignored. The occupying Power had been asked repeatedly to abide by Council resolutions, including any attempt to change the status of Jerusalem. Israel had continued to ignore those obligations. Was it that the resolutions on Palestine did not have the same weight and authority as other actions of the Council? he asked. Once again the Council was confronting the facts of the situation in the Middle East, because of the inconsistencies of its earlier actions. The root cause of the problems was impunity, he stressed. The history of the problems in the region was a history of impunity. The double standard of the United States was at the heart of the matter. What had happened to the fiery rhetoric about terrorism? Cuba joined in the resolute condemnation of the Israeli actions. Cuba reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to have an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. It rejected all attempts to change the status of Jerusalem. PRAKASH SHAH (India) said that the avoidable loss of innocent lives in the Middle East had horrified his country. Those tragic developments served to emphasize the moral, legal and humanitarian imperatives of the Middle East peace process, and the necessity of building further on the agreement and understandings on the basis of the principles and time schedules already agreed upon.

India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people was firm and binding, he said. Following the recent political changes in the Middle East, India had been encouraged by the reiteration by all parties of their commitment to the Middle East peace process. Less than 48 hours ago, the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement had expressed their concern at the recent Israeli action of opening the tunnel in Jerusalem and called for its immediate reversal.

FERNANDO BERROCAL SOTO (Costa Rica) said that the curse of peace ran through agreement, which was why his country had been disturbed at the violence of the events that had recently taken place. They did not contribute to creating the climate necessary for implementing the agreements initially arrived at in Oslo. He urged Israel to take every measure to protect the safety and security of the people in the troubled areas.

CELSO AMORIM (Brazil) said that the gradual erosion of a carefully and laboriously designed peace process in the Middle East now jeopardized efforts which had taken years to materialize. On several occasions his Government had expressed support for that process, which had seemed to symbolize a new era of understanding with far-reaching implications for the future of the region. It was most unfortunate that the loss of momentum in the peace process in the Middle East during the last few months had inexorably reignited hostility and resentment, leading to the extremely serious events that were now taking place.

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