



Secretary-General SG/2158

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Statement by Middle East Quartet

The following statement was issued today in Moscow by the Middle East Quartet (United Nations, Russian Federation, United States and European Union):

The Quartet -- United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, United States Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell, and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union Catherine Ashton -- met in Moscow on 19 March 2010. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

Reaffirming the fundamental principles laid down in its statement in Trieste on 26 June 2009, the Quartet welcomes the readiness to launch proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians. The Quartet emphasizes that the circumstances which made it possible to agree to launch the proximity talks be respected. The proximity talks are an important step towards the resumption, without preconditions, of direct bilateral negotiations that resolve all final status issues as previously agreed by the parties. The Quartet believes these negotiations should lead to a settlement, negotiated between the parties within 24 months, that ends the occupation which began in 1967 and results in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. The Quartet reiterates that Arab-Israeli peace and the establishment of a peaceful State of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza is in the fundamental interests of the parties, of all the States in the region and of the international community. In this regard, the Quartet calls on all States to support dialogue between the parties.

The Quartet reiterates its call on Israel and the Palestinians to act on the basis of international law and on their previous agreements and obligations -- in particular adherence to the Road Map, irrespective of reciprocity -- to promote an environment conducive to successful negotiations, and reaffirms that unilateral actions taken by either party cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community. The Quartet urges the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, and to refrain from demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem. The Quartet also calls on both sides to observe calm and restraint, and to refrain from provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric, especially in areas of cultural and religious sensitivity. Noting the significant progress on security achieved by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the Quartet calls on the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order, to fight violent extremism and to end incitement. The Quartet emphasizes the need to assist the Palestinian Authority in building its law enforcement capacity.

Recalling that the annexation of East Jerusalem is not recognized by the international community, the Quartet underscores that the status of Jerusalem is a permanent status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties, and condemns the decision by the Government of Israel to advance planning for new housing units in East Jerusalem. The Quartet reaffirms its intention to closely monitor developments in Jerusalem and to keep under consideration additional steps that may be required to address the situation on the ground. The Quartet recognizes that Jerusalem is a deeply important issue for Israelis and Palestinians, and for Jews, Muslims and Christians, and believes that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree on an outcome that realizes the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem, and safeguards its status for people around the world.

Recalling that transformative change on the ground is integral to peace, the Quartet continues to support the Palestinian Authority's plan of August 2009 for building the Palestinian State within 24 months as a demonstration of Palestinians' serious commitment to an independent State that provides good governance, opportunity, justice and security for the Palestinian people from the first day that it is established and is a responsible neighbour to all States in the region. The Quartet takes positive note of Israel's steps to ease restrictions of movement in the West Bank, and calls for further and sustained steps to facilitate the State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet endorses fully the efforts of the Quartet Representative in support of Prime Minister [Salam] Fayyad's State-building and economic development programme, which has seen significant improvement in the Palestinian Authority's performance with respect to security and law and order, and improved economic growth. The Quartet supports the Quartet Representative in his vital efforts to promote change on the ground in aid of the political negotiations.

The Quartet further calls on all States in the region and in the wider international community to match the Palestinian commitment to State-building by contributing immediate, concrete and sustained support for the Palestinian Authority and, in this regard, looks forward to the upcoming meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to coordinate international support for the Palestinian State-building effort.

The Quartet is deeply concerned by the continuing deterioration in Gaza, including the humanitarian and human rights situation of the civilian population, and stresses the urgency of a durable resolution to the Gaza crisis. The Quartet calls for a solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns, including an end to weapons smuggling into Gaza; promotes Palestinian unity based on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commitments and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority, and ensures the opening of the crossings to allow for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, consistent with United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The

Quartet takes positive note that the Israeli Government has just communicated its approval of a number of the United Nations Secretary-General's civilian recovery projects, including a stalled housing project in Khan Younis, and looks forward to their early implementation. The Quartet condemns yesterday's rocket fire from Gaza and calls for an immediate end to violence and terror, and for calm to be respected. The Quartet reiterates its call for the immediate release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Recognizing the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet looks forward to closer cooperation with the parties and the Arab League, and urges regional Governments to support publicly the resumption of bilateral negotiations, enter into structured regional dialogue on issues of common concern, and take steps to foster positive relations throughout the region in the context of progress towards comprehensive peace on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515 and 1850, and the Madrid principles, including through the conclusion of peace agreements between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.

The Quartet commits to remain actively involved on all tracks and to encourage and review progress. The Quartet commits to meet regularly and tasks the envoys to intensify their cooperation, to maintain contacts with the Arab League Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative, and to formulate recommendations for Quartet action.

The Quartet reaffirms its previous statements, and supports, in consultation with the parties, an international conference in Moscow at the appropriate time, concurrent with direct negotiations.

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