



Secretary-General

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STATEMENT BY MIDDLE EAST QUARTET

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

The Quartet principals -- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner -- met today in Paris to discuss the situation in the Middle East. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

The Quartet lauded the success of the 27 November Annapolis Conference, which resulted in agreement to launch bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty and demonstrated broad regional and international support for Israeli-Palestinian and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. The Quartet welcomed the commencement of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to resolve all outstanding issues, including all core issues, and looked forward to vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations. The Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to remain closely involved and to support the parties' efforts in the period ahead as they make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008.

The Quartet reaffirmed the importance of Palestinian economic and institutional capacity-building in order to lay the foundation for a viable and prosperous Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza. In that regard, the Quartet expressed its strong support for the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan presented by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, welcomed the generous support of the international community at the Paris Donors' Conference, and urged donors to maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet underlined that the success of this plan depends on the cooperation of all partners: the Palestinian Authority, donors and Israel. In this context, it stressed the importance of improved movement and access. The Quartet commended the excellent work of the European Commission and the World Bank in establishing and managing the Temporary International Mechanism since June 2006. Now, with the establishment of a responsible Palestinian Authority Government committed to peace, the re-establishment of a functioning Palestinian Authority single treasury account, and in light of the excellent Palestinian Reform and Development Plan presented to donors in Paris, the Quartet urged donors to resume direct bilateral assistance to the Palestinian Authority. Principals endorsed a final extension of the Temporary International Mechanism until the end of March 2008 to allow sufficient time for donors to make this transition.

Quartet principals noted the continuing importance of improving conditions on the ground and creating an environment conducive to the realization of Israeli-Palestinian peace, and the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. In this regard, the Quartet expressed concern over the announcement of new housing tenders for Har Homa/Jabal abu Ghneim. Principals called for all sides to refrain from steps that undermine confidence, and underscored the importance of avoiding any actions that could prejudice the outcome of permanent status negotiations. The Quartet called on both parties to make progress on their Phase One Road Map obligations, including an Israeli freeze on settlements, removal of unauthorized outposts and opening of East Jerusalem institutions, and Palestinian steps to end violence, terrorism and incitement.

The Quartet condemned the continued rocket fire from Gaza into Israel and called for an immediate cessation of such attacks.

The Quartet gave its strong support to the projects developed by Quartet Representative Blair and commended the constructive support of the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority for their implementation.

The Quartet reiterated its deep concern over the humanitarian conditions facing the population of the Gaza Strip and emphasized the importance of continued emergency and humanitarian assistance without obstruction. The Quartet called for the continued provision of essential services, including fuel and power supplies. It expressed its urgent concern over the continued closure of major crossing points, given the impact on the Palestinian economy and daily life. The Quartet encouraged contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to consider ideas such as Prime Minister Fayyad's proposal for the Palestinian Authority to assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of the Gaza crossings in order to improve operations and oversight for the passage of goods and people.

Recognizing the crucial role that Arab States must play in support of the peace process and the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet commended the broad and constructive Arab participation at Annapolis and called for their political and financial support for the Palestinian Authority Government and institutions. Principals looked forward to their meeting with Arab foreign ministers, to be hosted by the Portuguese Foreign Minister, which would present an opportunity to discuss the way ahead.

The Quartet agreed to meet regularly in 2008, to review progress and provide support for the parties' efforts. Envoys will meet to follow up and discuss how best to harness international support for progress towards peace.

The Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

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