



Secretary-General

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NEGOTIATIONS ONLY WAY TO MIDDLE EAST PEACE, SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

EXPRESSING DEEP CONCERN OVER PROSPECT OF RENEWED ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN VIOLENCE

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at the open meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, in New York today, 25 March:

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Council on what is undoubtedly one of the most important items on your agenda and mine -- the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Three weeks ago, I briefed you on the tragic developments then under way in Gaza and southern Israel. While I am glad that the violence has abated somewhat since then, tensions remain high. I am deeply concerned about the prospect of renewed violence, and what this would mean both for the civilian populations in the conflict zone and for the peace process we are all trying to advance.

Despite many difficulties on the ground -- difficulties that must be addressed -- I commend the commitment of President [Mahmoud] Abbas and Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert to the political process. I am personally and profoundly committed to supporting this process in every way I can, and I admire both leaders for their tenacity in the face of much scepticism. Let us remember that negotiations are the only means to achieve legitimate Palestinian aspirations for an end of occupation and independent sovereign statehood, and legitimate Israeli aspirations for sustainable security and an end of conflict.

At Annapolis, the international community bore witness and expressed its support as Israeli and Palestinian leaders set themselves the target of reaching an agreement by the end of the year. It is my hope that we can achieve this ambitious goal. I believe all of us must ask ourselves, and the parties, two simple questions: If not this, what? If not now, when?

This process is too important to be allowed to lose momentum through inaction or indifference, or to be overwhelmed by violence. It is essential that it receives the support of the international community, including this Council.

I remain personally determined and committed to working towards peace within the framework agreed upon: an end to the occupation that began in 1967, based on the foundations of the Madrid Conference; the principle of land for peace; Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515; and the Arab Peace Initiative.

This framework will lead to an end of conflict, the creation of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and a comprehensive regional peace.

I assure the Council that my senior advisers and I will make unceasing efforts to press forward this agenda in all contacts and fora available to us, including dialogue with the parties and the regional parties, the Quartet and of course this Council itself.

Mr. Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, will now report on the developments over the past month.

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