



Press Release

Department of Public Information · News Coverage Service · New York

GA/PAL/885
17 April 2002

INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE APPROVES NICOSIA DECLARATION

Speakers at closing meeting stress urgency of ending the Israeli occupation
and establishing Palestinian State as a key to peace in the region

NICOSIA, 17 April – At the close of the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Middle East Peace this afternoon, participants approved the [Nicosia Declaration](#), calling on the Security Council to exercise fully its responsibilities under the Charter and to use all means at its disposal to have its resolutions implemented on the ground.

Approving the Declaration after two days of panel discussions, the participants stated that the political track should be pursued vigorously on the basis of the principles outlined in Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#), [338 \(1973\)](#) and [1397 \(2002\)](#). They endorsed the idea of deploying some form of international presence to monitor a ceasefire once it was secured.

Under the Declaration, the Meeting agreed that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory remained the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and emphasized that the continued reliance of Israel on massive military force throughout the Palestinian Territory, the closures and economic blockades, the incursions into and reoccupation of Palestinian-controlled areas, and all other illegal actions against the Palestinian people must end immediately. It voiced serious concern at the besiegement of Chairman Arafat in his Ramallah headquarters and demanded that it be ended at once.

The participants stated that they were particularly appalled by the human tragedy and unprecedented level of destruction caused by the Israeli reoccupation of the Jenin refugee camp. They called on the Government of Israel to facilitate humanitarian agencies' full and unimpeded access to the camp and for its fullest possible cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The Meeting stated further that peacemaking efforts by the "Quartet", i.e. the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations, as well as by other international and regional actors should continue and be intensified.

Also this afternoon, the Meeting heard statements by experts on the urgency of ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a Palestinian State. The experts discussed a wide range of topics including the growth in the number of Israeli soldiers who have selectively refused to participate in the recent Israeli Army actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a review of European participation in facilitating the peace process and an examination of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's motives for isolating Chairman Yasser Arafat. Panellists included journalist and Israeli peace activist Peretz Kidron, former Prime Minister of Iceland Steingrímur Hermannsson, Director of the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding Sir Cyril Townsend, and Director of the Institute for Historical Research for Peace Areti Demosthenous.

Statements were also made by the representatives of Hungary, Malaysia, Oman, Cote d'Ivoire, United Arab Emirates and Belarus.

The representatives of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also spoke.

The Nicosia Declaration was introduced by the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

A representative of the Jerusalem Center for Women read out an appeal on behalf of the non-governmental organizations attending the meeting.

Closing statements were made by the Chairman of the Committee, Papa Louis Fall, and the representative of Cyprus. The representative of Palestine also made a closing statement.

The two-day meeting, convened in Nicosia from 16 to 17 April under the sponsorship of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, was organized into three plenaries. The first plenary focussed on the Occupied Palestinian Territory since September 2000.

Under that title, speakers reviewed the security situation on the ground, the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the impact of the conflict on the Palestinian Authority and the destruction of the Palestinian economy. The second plenary was devoted to discussion of international efforts at containing the crisis and resuming the peace dialogue. Experts discussed the role of the co-sponsors of the peace process, initiatives of the European Union, regional parties and the non-aligned movement, and the permanent responsibility and engagement of the United Nations. The subject of the third plenary was the urgency of ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a Palestinian State.

In addition to the Committee delegation and the representative of the Secretary-General, 12 experts attended the meeting, as did representatives of 51 Governments, Palestine, 3 intergovernmental organizations, 8 United Nations system entities, 31 non-governmental organizations and 25 media organizations. The delegation of Cyprus was led by Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides.

Invited expert panellists Kamal Al-Sharafy, Member of the Palestinian Council, and Gabi Baramki, President of the Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace, were not able to attend due to Israeli travel restrictions.

On 18 April, the Committee will host the United Nations NGO Meeting in Solidarity with the Palestinian People. At the morning meeting, panellists will discuss the role of civil society in time of crisis. Issues to be addressed include the participation of Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations in the peace efforts; people-to-people diplomacy – building bridges of understanding and trust; strengthening non-governmental organizations networks in time of crisis; and development of action-oriented proposals and mechanisms for their implementation.

Plenary III

The urgency of ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a Palestinian State

Palestinian statehood – a key to peace in the Middle East

Presentation by experts:

PERETZ KIDRON, journalist and peace activist, Jerusalem, said that currently there were 38 Israeli soldiers in prison because they had refused to participate in the recent activities of the army. A thousand Israelis of military age had declared that they would refuse to take part in a campaign of repression against the Palestinian population. Since the population of Israel is 6 million, that number was significant. Selective refusal was a long tradition in Israel. It was not an act of pacifism or conscientious objection. It arose out of the twin parameters of a basic acceptance of army and military service and the fierce objection to some of the purposes to which the army is exploited. “Yesh Gvul”, the Hebrew colloquialism for “enough is enough,” was formed on the basis of selective refusal. Selective refusal was now the catalyst of the Israeli peace movement. Israeli soldiers were responsible for their individual actions and could refuse to carry out an order that they believed to be illegal.

In the present intifada, the refusal movement was picking up, he said. It was the subject of vicious criticism as the army saw it as a threat and the overwhelming majority of public opinion supported the campaign of repression. Sharon, despite his political record, was elected Prime Minister with 63 per cent of the vote. A major factor in swinging public opinion behind the hardliners had been Palestinian acts and omissions. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians convinced Jewish opinion that “the Arabs are out to get us”. The Palestinian leadership had failed to mount a serious effort to win over Israeli opinion. For example, although hundreds of Palestinians were fluent in Russian, the Palestinian leadership had never published any material in Russian or given any radio time to broadcasts directed to that community. It was no wonder that the Russian Israelis were among the most hawkish hard-line elements.

As long as national States existed, a national army had its legitimate functions of national self-defense. But when the army exceeded its legitimate functions, when soldiers were required to take part in acts of repression or aggression, that was the time to stand up and say – “So far and no further!” or “Yesh Gvul!”

STEINGRIMUR HERMANNSSON, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Millennium Institute and Former Prime Minister of Iceland, said Chairman Arafat had made a mistake in not accepting Prime Minister Barak’s proposal at Camp David or at least by not making a counter proposal. It would have shown a strong will by both to reach an agreement. The most difficult issue in the conflict was the demand for millions of refugees to be allowed to return to their previous homes in Israel. That demand had become unrealistic. After years of violence it would be an invitation to continuous violence within the borders of Israel. That issue must be solved through international compensation and resettlement assistance.

He said the extensive coverage of the horrors taking place in the Near East had opened the eyes of many. Demands by European leaders for the killings and violence to end had become louder. Not least important was a fast growing public support for the Palestinian people. With Israel ignoring the recent Security Council resolution calling for an independent Palestinian State, there was no question that it should be punished. Not doing so would show a double morality. The most important step for settlement of the conflict was the “land for peace” proposal unanimously accepted by the Arab countries. It gave Israel its only hope for a peaceful existence in the Middle East. The United States held the key to the solution of the Palestinian tragedy. Without its support there was no future for Israel.

He felt Sharon did not want to give back any of the territories and he had found nothing encouraging in Powell’s statement today. The land for peace proposal must be enforced. The two peoples must learn to live together in peace. He suggested that a joint assembly of the people be established where differences were discussed and resolved.

Sir CYRIL TOWNSEND, Director of the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding (CAABU), said it was difficult for the Arabs to take seriously United States talk of ending the violence and establishing a Palestinian State when it had such a biased record towards Israel. There were question marks over the leadership of Israel, Palestine and indeed the United States. Prime Minister Sharon’s attempts at isolating President Arafat to make way for a leader who would be more conducive to his idea of semi-autonomous Palestinian areas were totally unacceptable. The Palestinians were a people whose collective national will could not be broken by force. Any collapse of the Palestinian Authority would be accompanied by a further destabilization in the area. The international community should ensure the survival of the Palestinian Authority but in the

long run the Authority must improve its record in terms of governance, democratic practice and human rights.

The notion that Barak had made an unprecedentedly generous offer must be smashed, he said. President Arafat had rightly turned it down but that decision must be explained, as a sceptical Israeli public needed convincing that that rejection was not a rejection of peace. The suicide bombings were not only repugnant but counter-productive to the Palestinian cause. However, force, torture and massacres would not end those attacks. It was vital to address the economic imbalance between the two diverging economies. Without a massive boost to the Palestinian economy, there was the risk of prolonging the conflict and transforming a national conflict into a socio-economic one. It was in Israel's interest to assist a fledgling Palestinian State rather than impede its development. The Palestinian economic and civilian infrastructure should be rebuilt with compensation from Israel.

He said the Mitchell recommendations must be implemented to kick start a political process. Over 25 new settlements had been established since Ariel Sharon had been elected. If such policies continued, Israel's hold on the occupied territories might become irreversible. Until the hypocrisy of the United States policy was adequately addressed, there would never be enduring peace and stability in the region. Being selective in choosing who must obey Security Council resolutions would only lead to further resentment in both the Arab and Muslim worlds. It would be perceived as a double standard in world affairs.

ARETI DEMOSTHENOUS, Director of the Institute for Historical Research for Peace and Lecturer at the University of Cyprus, said that in the electronic age, in which the coming together of people did not depend on distance, common nationality or religion, mutual understanding and cooperation of citizens from different backgrounds was indispensable. Unfortunately, religion was often misunderstood, religious fanaticism was usually exploited by politicians and social inequality and poverty aroused people's indignation. Moreover, history books caused confusion and the media became victims of political monopoly. Historical thinking and religious studies, however, could help people get closer to each other and thereby avert massive catastrophe. Historical thinking was the process of understanding history deeply and widely. Peace was hidden by history because children learned more about wars and not much about the way to treaties or the national victories of neighbouring countries.

She said historical thinking could be used as a tool to help comprehend current developments and predict future possibilities and probabilities by speaking out about former mistakes. It gave people a different perspective and helped to educate politicians, reporters, teachers, philosophers and others to avoid the wrong behaviour of the past and create a basis for mutual understanding. Currently, when someone referred to Islam, many people automatically thought of "Jihad" only. For others, "Christianity" brought to mind the crusades. The mention of "Judaism" brought thoughts of the daily war in Palestine. The question should be asked, "Do these reactions really represent the deeper meaning or philosophy of those three world religions?"

Human beings instinctively feared the unknown, she said. The unfamiliar person thus became the enemy with whom any contact could prove dangerous. On the other hand, knowledge, which enlightened the mind, dispersed prejudices and promoted mutual understanding and trust, could decrease enmity and increase the social value of the formerly unknown person. Comparative religious studies were necessary. They were a *sine qua non* for co-existence, because they provided knowledge as well as cultural, social and legal elements. Moreover, they helped people to respect the faith of others and to learn about common concepts like tolerance and love.

The representative of Hungary said his Government supported the peace plan of the Arab summit. Before opening the final chapter of the peace negotiations, however, the international community had to tackle the alarming events in the region. Hungary had appealed to the Palestinian Authority to end acts of terror, to eradicate the terrorist organizations responsible for the attacks and to take measures against those involved. Israel had a right to safeguard the security of its frontiers and citizens but it must observe international law and internationally recognized human rights. He urged the State of Israel to end its offensive and called for the immediate withdrawal of its troops from the territories placed under Palestinian control, especially the town of Ramallah. He expressed concern over the destruction of the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian economy.

The representative of Malaysia said the suicide bombings were not just acts of terror but acts of desperation carried out by a people who live a life of frustration, hopelessness and despair and who have lost all visions of the future. They could not be condoned but they were as much a retaliation for the killing of Palestinians by the Israeli Defense Forces as they were intended to draw international attention to the plight of the Palestinian people. If the acts of suicide bombers are condemned, however, one should not shirk from condemning acts of state terrorism as attested to by international observers. The ruthless onslaught to destroy the so-called "infrastructure of terror" was not likely to end the problem. The United Nations must continue to address the question of Palestine at every opportunity. The United States, Russian Federation and European Union must also continue to play a facilitating role. They must take, however, an even-handed approach. Moreover, it was important for Palestine to demolish the myth that President Arafat had rejected at Camp David the best offer ever made by an Israeli leader.

The representative of Oman said he agreed that the purpose of today's meeting would be defeated if all it did was to make statements about the injustices inflicted by one State on another, while not suggesting what could be done to change the situation. The participants should recognize areas where they could promote and encourage effective steps towards achieving a permanent settlement to that tragic problem. They should send a strong message to Israel that no matter how long or how high the walls, or how deep the buffer zones it created, it would never have any security. The only way that Israel could be secure would be through the creation of a viable independent State of Palestine in the territories that it now illegally occupied. He called on Israel to withdraw immediately from all Palestinian territories administered by the Palestinians.

The representative of Cote d'Ivoire said the settlement of the Middle East crisis must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and the principle agreed in Madrid. He also supported the Arab peace plan of 28 March and the most recent Security Council resolutions. Occupation could not in any way replace the necessity for diplomatic efforts to solve the problem. The Council had requested the cessation of all acts of violence and terror and called on the Israelis to withdraw from Ramallah. Regarding the attempts to isolate Chairman Arafat, he said negotiations could only take place between authorities elected by their people. The international community must recognize that words would not be enough – it must act.

The representative of the United Arab Emirates said the world had been witness to Israeli violations despite the attempts to cover up those crimes. Neither hospitals, holy sites nor agricultural lands had been spared. Refugee camps were invaded and mass killings carried out. Israel was flouting all humanitarian principles. The Committee must move to stop Israel's crimes. Israel must withdraw its troops immediately. His Government strongly condemned Israel's crimes, aggression and violations. He expressed support for the Palestinian people in their quest to exercise their

legitimate rights. He asked for an international force to be immediately dispatched to the territories to protect the Palestinian people. It was important to put on trial the Israelis responsible for those crimes. He called on influential States to continue to put political pressure on Israel in order to stop its aggression.

The representative of Belarus said the stability of the Middle East region was under threat. The use of force was leading nowhere as military actions could only lead to an impasse. The excessive use of force against the Palestinian people was completely unacceptable. The United Nations had made it clear that the only way out of the present crisis was through political negotiations. The move should be towards a permanent political agreement based on United Nations resolutions. The Arab peace plan provided a major contribution of conditions for peace. He also welcomed the intervention of the Co-sponsors of the peace process. He hoped that would lead to a cessation of violations. No effort should be spared to bring about a complete end to the violence. The world community was responsible for assisting in a meaningful way the reconstruction of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He stressed the importance of the contribution of international organizations to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said his agency was alarmed by the unfolding events in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He was particularly concerned about the adverse impact of closures and prolonged curfews that severely restricted civilian access, particularly of women, to life-saving services. The inability of women in labour to reach health facilities had resulted in unattended births at checkpoints and even the deaths of some women and their infants. Restrictions on movement had prevented medical personnel from providing vital services and ambulances from evacuating those in urgent need of care.

Since the outbreak of the intifada, he said, UNFPA had adopted a two-track strategy: meeting the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people while maintaining development assistance. The Fund has channelled some \$2.4 million worth of reproductive health equipment and commodities to help replenish the depleted supplies of the Ministry of Health and non-governmental organizations. More importantly, the agency had launched a joint initiative with the Ministry of Health to provide community-based maternal health services and emergency obstetric care. Some 100 physicians, midwives and nurses were being trained and equipped with clean delivery kits to provide such services to women in their own communities.

He said UNFPA also supported a \$7 million programme on population and reproductive health for the period of 2001 to 2004. Given the situation, only strategic and feasible projects were developed, focusing on the most underserved geographical regions and disadvantaged population groups. Unfortunately, the unfavourable political environment represented a formidable obstacle to the implementation of the programme and many other development initiatives.

The representative of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) said his agency prepared the United Nations Secretary-General's annual report on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan. The current report stressed that continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, delay in implementation of agreements and in settling all outstanding claims between the two parties, continued to aggravate the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Those delays and Israeli practices, particularly with regard to settlement expansion and closures, were among the primary causes for the outbreak of tensions and violence. Meanwhile, the percentage of Palestinian people living below the poverty line had reached alarming proportions.

He said the Israeli settlements and the roads, which separated Palestinian communities and deprived Palestinians of agricultural land, had fragmented both land and people. In effect, they foreclosed the possibility of a Palestinian State, as they destroyed the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory. ESCWA was considering convening a series of meetings aimed at providing the international community donors, regional and international organizations, with a blueprint for a reconstruction plan. Such an undertaking would assist the Palestinian Authority in ensuring a concerted effort in the process of economic rehabilitation in Palestine. As the Secretary-General had said, security could not be dealt with in isolation but must be addressed alongside key political issues, particularly the question of land, and economic and social issues.

The representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said the Seventh Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council had adopted a decision entitled the "Environmental situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories". The decision specified a series of UNEP follow-up actions to be carried out including a visit by the Director of UNEP to the area; preparation of a "desk" study outlining the state of the environment in the territories; identification of the major areas of environmental damage that required urgent action; and as deemed necessary, field studies to propose remedial measures to improve the environmental situation in the territories. The Programme was in the process of implementing that decision and was ready to work with a wide range of stakeholders.

SALWA HUDEIB QANNAM, speaking on behalf of non-governmental organizations attending the meeting, read out an Urgent Appeal to the participants. The appeal demanded the immediate lifting of the siege of President Arafat; the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops and the lifting of all closures and checkpoints; the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping and monitoring force; and immediate access by humanitarian workers and non-governmental organizations to the West Bank and Gaza. It also called for an independent team of lawyers to be given access to all detainees and political prisoners, an independent third party investigative commission to investigate the destruction of the West Bank and Gaza Strip infrastructure, the killing of civilians and other Israeli crimes. Calling on the United States Administration to immediately cease its support of Israeli policies and on the European Union to stop procrastinating and implement sanctions against the policy of terror, the appeal demanded that the United Nations take immediate measures to compel the Israeli Government to accept and implement all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Related document:

- [GA/PAL/880](#)

- [SG/SM/2100-GA/PAL/881](#)

- [GA/PAL/882](#)

- [GA/PAL/883](#)

- [GA/PAL/884](#)

For information media - not an official record