



Press Release

Department of Public Information · News Coverage Service · New York

Security Council
4861st Meeting* (AM)

SC/7923
19 November 2003

PERIOD OF INERTIA, EXCUSES, CONDITIONALITY IN MIDDLE EAST PEACEMAKING MUST END,

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

The period of inertia, excuses and conditionality in Middle East peacemaking must end, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Kieran Prendergast, said this morning, as he briefed the Security Council.

He said when he had last addressed the Council (21 October, Press Release [SC/7902](#)), he had called on the Israelis and Palestinian to return to the negotiating table and recommit to the [Road Map](#) process, and had urged the international community to reassert its role. Sadly, since then, everyone – the Israelis, Palestinians and the international community – had waited for others to act.

Particularly now, with a new Palestinian Prime Minister, “we cannot afford just to keep waiting”, he said. Progress could not be contingent on the actions expected of others. Even if not directly negotiating, there was much the Israelis and Palestinians could and should do to meet their Road Map obligations.

The Palestinian Authority must confront and reign in militant groups, he continued. Israel, whose Prime Minister recently declared a readiness to carry out Road Map obligations, could take immediate steps to build confidence, including easing closures, removing settlement outposts and halting construction of the separation barrier. Bolder steps, such as evacuating settlements in the Gaza Strip, might be necessary in order to put the process back on track. The international community, through the Quartet, must be actively engaged in assisting the parties to fulfil Road Map obligations.

There had been talk about a possible meeting between the Prime Ministers and of another ceasefire, he said. Those tender shoots needed nourishing. The peace process could not be allowed to remain stalled. In such a dangerous environment, “continued inertia could be deadly”. The threat of terrorism still hung over the head of each Israeli. The Palestinian Authority had done little to address that core issue. For their part, Palestinians continued to suffer from closures and Israeli military operations, settlement activity, construction of the separation barrier, and destruction and appropriation of Palestinian property. Israel had done little to remedy that situation. Violations of the Blue Line by both sides continued. It was essential to address seriously the regional track of the peace process.

He said since his last briefing 44 people had lost their lives – five Israelis and 39 Palestinians. Absence of large-scale terrorist attacks by one side and extrajudicial killings by the other might lead to the conclusion that there was improvement. However, the deaths of more than one Palestinian per day and the killing of five Israeli soldiers highlighted the need for increased seriousness of purpose on the part of the parties and the international community towards achieving peace.

Last week, the Palestinian Legislative Council had confirmed the appointment of Ahmad Qurei as Prime Minister, Mr. Prendergast said. He expected him to take immediate steps to establish law and order and to start confronting those who engaged in terror, thereby addressing Israel’s security concerns and building the necessary confidence.

The humanitarian situation continued to worsen, he said. Movement restrictions on Palestinians continued to hamper everyday life and strangle the Palestinian economy. The donor Task Force on Implementation had prepared a paper that concludes that security measures taken by the Israeli Government had greatly increased the difficulty and the cost of providing humanitarian support to the Palestinian population, with the operational environment deteriorating to a degree that many donors find unmanageable.

He said that Israel’s assurances that donor activity would be fully facilitated contrasted starkly with the facts on the ground, and there was no empowered interlocutor on the Israeli side with whom the issue could be discussed. He called on that Government to take immediate and practical steps to remedy the situation.

The humanitarian crisis among Palestinians, he said, was exacerbated by the funding shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). He urged donors to provide adequate funding. The capitals-level donor ad hoc liaison committee meeting had been postponed, in part to allow the new Palestinian Government to prepare for it.

Despite the international protest against the construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank, its planning and construction continued unabated, he said. Such unilateral acts were in contravention to the Road Map, diminished trust, and made the realization of a two-State solution more difficult.

Working for peace could not be held hostage to actions by extremists, he said in conclusion. Instead, the international community must take advantage of the current opportunities, which included a new Palestinian government and a reiteration by Israel of its commitment to the Road Map. “Track-two” initiatives, such as the Geneva Accord, underlined the existence of a glaring vacuum in peacemaking and, as such, were welcome. They have revealed a strong desire, on the

part of both peoples, for a peaceful settlement.

It was neither worthwhile nor constructive to spend time analysing who has what authority in the Palestinian Government, speculating on the commitment of the Israeli Government to the process, he said. The parties must be judged by their actions. Those actions, and the readiness of the international community to play its part, would speak louder than any words.

The meeting, which started at 10:12 a.m., was adjourned at 10:32 a.m., after which the Council continued its consideration of the matter in closed consultations.

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* The 4860th Meeting of 18 November was closed.

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