



Secretary-General
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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY-GENERAL BAN KI-MOON

AT UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, 17 DECEMBER 2008

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Before turning to your questions, let me briefly speak to several issues of peace and security for the coming year.

First, the Middle East. Below the radar, Israelis and Palestinians have engaged in direct, intensive negotiations. They have created trust where none existed and a framework for negotiation. Only they can reach agreement. But, we must help. On Monday, the Quartet met to support a Security Council resolution to reaffirm basic principles and reinvigorate the Annapolis negotiations. Yesterday, that [resolution](#) was adopted overwhelmingly by Council members. It is important to keep up this momentum so that, potentially, 2009 could be the year of peace in the Middle East.

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Question: ...

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And then, the second part has to do with the peace process. We Arabs are, at many times, we are actually accused of being paranoid with regards to double standards. We lately have heard statements by the Foreign Minister of Israel, Tzipi Livni, who is possibly going to be a leader of the Israeli Government, we don't know, concerning the 1.4 million Israeli-Arabs living in Israel, that they should go and achieve their aspirations in a Palestinian state when it's created. We heard nothing from the UN, a statement, written or verbal. Maybe I have missed it, but I haven't. We haven't heard any Western leaders speaking about it. I would like to give you the opportunity here to correct this and prove to us that there is no double standard and such racist statements don't go unnoticed. Thank you.

Secretary-General: ...

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On the peace process, you have watched yourself very intensive discussions among the major key players on the Middle East peace process. By this time, we had hoped, everybody had hoped, that we would be able to have a concrete agreement, the realization of the Annapolis peace process. Unfortunately, we may have to defer it until sometime next year. I hope the next United States administration, President-elect [Barack] Obama and his team, will take the Middle East peace process as a matter of priority. That's what I have talked to him, and talked to his transition team and I have conveyed through many channels. Now there is still some, many, many problems like you have mentioned just now. All these issues should be resolved based on mutual trust and confidence and also confidence-building measures. As I told you last time, according to their own briefing in Sharm El Sheikh, they have achieved quite promising and substantial progress, even though not much has been publicly released because of their agreement that, until everything is agreed, nothing is agreed. They have made quite good progress and this should be built upon, based on mutual trust and confidence. This is a very good process going on.

At the same time, I've been working, again, tirelessly with leaders in the region, particularly when it comes to the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank. I have been speaking, on numerous occasions, with Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert and Foreign Minister [Tzipi] Livni and other defence ministers. All these efforts will continue. We had a very good Quartet meeting last Monday. Quartet representative Tony Blair is working very hard to improve the situation on the ground. This is a very good process of confidence-building measures.

Question: I'm very sorry, but, sir, you didn't tackle this head-on. I'm asking about a particular statement by the Foreign Minister, an official, a high official who possibly could be the leader of Israel, making a statement that 1.4 million Israeli citizens should leave the country, based on their race, if a Palestinian state is created. If the Iraqi President stood up and said that Kurdish people should leave Baghdad and the Iraqi area and go up to self-rule of Kurdistan, or the Sudanese said that Darfurian people should get out of Khartoum and go to Darfur, the world would have stood and not sat down. We don't have anybody here from the Western leaders, from the United Nations, condemning such statements and, at least, saying they're not helpful to the peace process.

Secretary-General: There are many unresolved issues, including the return of refugees and all this --

Question: These are not refugees, they are citizens.

Secretary-General: -- and establishing these two States who can live in peace and prosperity side by side. Until this time is achieved, I think one should really be very sensitive before making any official positions. But I do not think this is an official position of the Israeli Government. Therefore, let us wait until any such official position is announced. I understand this as a statement by Foreign Minister Livni, I do not regard it as an official position. It's not desirable if it is.

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