



## Secretary-General SG/SM/10390

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

### IN MESSAGE TO ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT, SECRETARY-GENERAL REVIEWS

#### SITUATIONS IN KEY AREAS OF CONFLICT

Following is the text of the message by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the Summit of the League of Arab States in Khartoum, as delivered today, 28 March, by Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs

It gives me great pleasure to send my greetings to all who have come to Khartoum for this Summit meeting.

You gather during a period of continued turbulence in the Arab world and the surrounding region, and thus of many formidable challenges for you, the region's leaders, for your Organization, and for the international community as a whole.

In Iraq, while the main benchmarks of the transition timetable have been met, the situation remains dangerous and unstable. In the aftermath of last month's heinous bombing of the shrine in Samarra, sectarian violence has emerged as a leading threat. The United Nations continues to believe that an inclusive and transparent political process offers the best prospects for improving security, safeguarding human rights, consolidating gains towards democracy and improving the welfare of the Iraqi people. Therefore, it is now incumbent on all concerned to move swiftly to form a fully inclusive Government. The United Nations will continue to promote inter-communal dialogue and support the constitutional review process, as well as the Arab League initiative to convene a Conference on Iraqi National Accord, all of which offer opportunities to forge a broader national consensus. We will also maintain our efforts, as circumstances permit, to assist the reconstruction and the economic development of Iraq. Iraq's integration into the wider region must be another priority. While some of Iraq's neighbours have legitimate concerns about the current violence and instability, they also have a basic responsibility to refrain from interference in the country's internal affairs, and to uphold its unity and territorial integrity.

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is also at a critical stage. I respect the decision of the Palestinian people in January's parliamentary elections, whose conduct was a credit to Palestinian democracy. I hope that the new Government in the Occupied Palestinian Territory will address the Palestinian people's aspirations for peace and statehood, which have been powerfully articulated by President Abbas. The affirmation by the new Palestinian Cabinet of the Arab Peace Initiative would be a first and welcome step towards the reaffirmation of Palestinian commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. Just as the Quartet and the Security Council have recently reiterated the importance of these principles, we must remind Israel, in light of the continued creation of facts on the ground, that peace cannot be imposed unilaterally, or achieved durably outside the regional framework of the Middle East peace process. If a two-State solution is to remain the goal, as it must, both sides must be committed to the principles governing such a solution and the way to achieve it.

For its part, the United Nations will continue to work for an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and a settlement of the conflict in accordance with Security Council resolutions. Until that goal is achieved, the Organization will discharge the mandates entrusted to it by the Member States to assist the Palestinian people. We will also press for the easing of the severe closures in Gaza and the West Bank, which the United Nations carefully documents, and which cause severe hardships and humiliations. And we will remind all our partners that the Palestinian people should not be punished for the way they exercise their democratic rights, and that their precious institutions remain the foundation for building a Palestinian State that can live side by side in peace with a secure Israel and all its neighbours.

Lebanon is another country at a crossroads. Just as the Arab League and regional actors played an important role in helping Lebanon end its civil war and emerge from that dark period, so Lebanon's friends and neighbours again have a crucial role to play in helping it consolidate its independence and sovereignty. I urge all concerned to support Prime Minister Siniora's reform programme and the national dialogue that has just begun. The relationship between Lebanon and Syria will be a crucial part of the picture, and I urge the two countries to cultivate productive, friendly ties based on the explicit assurances of respect for each other's sovereignty, security and independence. The United Nations stands ready to assist these efforts in any way that these two Member States feel appropriate. We are also, of course, continuing with the investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, while we have established contacts with the Lebanese authorities with regard to their investigations of other recent murders and attempted murders of prominent political figures. The United Nations has also worked with them on the assistance needed for the establishment of a tribunal of an international character to try all those charged with involvement in the Hariri assassination.

Somalia continues to cope with violence, the weakness or non-existence of governing institutions, and a lack of national consensus on the future. The leaders of the Transitional Federal Institutions should be congratulated for their courage in ensuring the holding of last month's parliamentary session under extremely

difficult circumstances. Somalis should sustain this momentum, with a particular focus on improving security. As long as force is used to resolve grievances or to further political objectives, gains will be fragile and the country's recovery will be impossible. The United Nations, for its part, will continue to provide political, moral and material support for the transitional process, and I hope Arab States will actively seek opportunities to give both humanitarian and development aid.

Here in Sudan, aspects of the situation remain deeply troubling. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005, the parties have taken important steps in the implementation process. However, actions are falling short of expectations on several fronts. Meanwhile in Darfur, people continue to be killed, raped and driven from their homes by the thousands, and the security situation has worsened as a result of fighting between Chadian troops and Chadian armed opposition elements on the common border. I am pleased that the African Union, which has done a valiant job, has agreed to support in principle the transition from AMIS to a United Nations operation, within the framework of AU/UN partnership. Let me also stress that this transition means building upon the existing AU mission so as to make the UN successor mission in Darfur larger and more mobile. I expect that a significant number of AU personnel would have to be absorbed into the UN force, to ensure that the transition is effective. So let us give priority to and focus on our overriding goal of protecting people and letting humanitarian personnel do their vital work. And let us press the parties in the Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks in Abuja, where progress is painfully slow, to reach agreement more speedily, including on a workable ceasefire. Let us strengthen the AU force even now, since suffering people cannot afford to wait for the transition. And let us do whatever else we can to prevent any further deterioration of the situation.

Turmoil in the States of the Arab League is not limited to specific countries or political crises. In recent months, following the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad that many found deeply offensive, we have seen an apparent deepening of the already troubling rift between communities and nations of different beliefs and cultures. The Alliance of Civilizations initiative that I have launched with the support of Spain and Turkey is intended to generate a concerted effort by the international community – by Governments and civil society alike – to bridge divides, combat extremism and overcome prejudices, misconceptions, and polarizations which potentially threaten world peace. I am glad that the UN and Arab League have already found some common ground in response to the recent crises, and I hope you will give this wider initiative your full support.

Finally, I would like to thank you for supporting the process of United Nations reform. Important steps have been taken to implement the Outcome Document adopted at last September's World Summit, which many of you attended. We have a new Peacebuilding Commission, a Democracy Fund, a much improved emergency response fund, and now a new Human Rights Council, which will be elected on 9 May and will meet for the first time on 19 June. We also have, of course, the Summit's splendid declaration of willingness to take action "in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council" to protect populations whose own Governments fail to do so. And I have just placed before the membership a new set of proposals for an overhaul of the Organization's management. But all these changes will only bear fruit if Member States really commit themselves to making them work, and to ensuring that the United Nations can make a real difference in the lives of all those, throughout the world, who need it and look to it for help.

On all these issues, therefore, I will continue to count on your support in the months ahead. In that spirit of partnership, please accept my best wishes for a successful summit.

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