
Ramallah, 14 March 2005 - Secretary-General's press encounter with Foreign Minister Nasser Al Kidwa following the meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas

[Mr. Al Kidwa made opening remarks, translated from Arabic]: Thank you all for coming. On behalf the Palestinian people, and the Palestinian Authority, I warmly welcome the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, who is honoring us in his presence at the occupied Palestinian territories.

Mr. SG has visited the occupied Palestinian territories before, and he is aware of the situation here, and we look forward for the day of hosting him here in independent Palestine, of which capital is Jerusalem.

We thank again the SG and I call him to start his speech.

SG: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. I'm extremely pleased to be back here again and I've had a very good discussion with President Abbas, where we followed up on discussions in London during the conference on the first of March.

We reviewed the progress that has been made here and the issue of disengagement from Gaza, the need for economic reconstruction and the need to sustain...[audio problems]

But let me say that I have discussed with the President the progress and developments that are taking place here, and particularly the disengagement from Gaza and the return of the five cities, which is going to take place fairly shortly.

I also had a similar discussion with Prime Minister [Ariel] Sharon yesterday and I am very encouraged by what I have heard. The international community is determined to work with both sides to press ahead with the peace process and the implementation of the Roadmap, and I think the positive development here gives us a chance to re-energize the process and work to ensure that the day when the Palestinian State will be established, living side by side with Israel, will not be too long.

I do not want to give the impression that it is going to be easy, there are hurdles along the road, but I think with a clear determination and good will on both sides, a lot can be done.

I also have had the chance to see the UNRWA staff and the work that they are doing in the region, and we have Peter Hansen here with us, the Commissioner-General, and I encourage them also to carry on their work and I also want to thank the population for the support they had given Peter Hansen and his staff in their urgent humanitarian work, and we do intend to continue that work. I will take your questions.

Q: Why is there so much pressure on Syria to comply with resolution 1559? Why not on Israel and all the resolutions it should comply with?

SG: I think that implementations of all resolutions are necessary. Some are implemented faster than others depending on circumstances. The UN stands by its resolutions, and I think the resolutions of the Security Council have been the bases for the peace discussions and the negotiations that are going on. I hope that a day will come when they would also be implemented, as others have been.

Q: A lot of Palestinians are wondering about what Ben-Gurion said -- 'Um Shmum' in the fifties -- regarding the United Nations and implementation of the UN resolutions.

SG: Let me put it this way: we have many resolutions, and the resolutions are not self-enforcing. You have to work with the parties in the circumstances on the ground to be able to implement them. In some situations, we have been able to implement them much faster; others have taken time. It does not mean, because it is taking time, that the resolution is irrelevant and, as I have indicated, if I'm here today and also I'm a member of the Quartet and I'm talking to the Israeli government and the Palestinian President, it is really in an attempt to implement those resolutions. Yes, we would have been happier if they had been implemented, if we could have implemented them the day they were passed, but that is not the reality. So now we all have to work together and press for its implementation, and that's exactly what we are trying to do, and that's why I'm here.

Q: A lot of Palestinians are now demonstrating in Ramallah, they want you to know your position on the Separation Wall. Why you have not gone and seen it?

SG: I think that the General Assembly resolution which also sought advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice is very clear, and we are guided by the decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. We have also been asked to establish a register to register damage claims. And that is also going ahead and, in fact, I had a chance this morning to discuss it with President Abbas, and we are establishing that register to be able, in time, to help those with claims.

Q: There has been lots of criticism on the UN work in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The UN have been active in many other conflicts in the world and not very active in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Al Kidwa: [responded in Arabic]

SG: You did raise a question about the implementation of UN resolutions. Let me say that in some crisis, in some situations, the UN is in the lead, and sometimes we are on the ground alone to implement resolutions or to assist the parties in implementing them. In other situations, we work with partners and we are not necessarily implementing it alone. In your region, and on this issue, we have the Quartet -- with the U.S, the Russian Federation and the EU and the UN -- working together to ensure that we do get peaceful settlement of this issues. We are working with partners, but it does not mean we are not engaged.