



Press Release

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Follows the comments made by the Secretary-General during this morning's closed consultations on the Middle East. At the request of the Council members, and with the approval of the Secretary-General, the comments are being released to the press.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

New York, 1 April 2002

Mr. President,

It is less than 72 hours since I last addressed this Council. During the intervening period, the situation on the ground between Israelis and Palestinians has seen a further sharp escalation. Chairman Arafat remains confined in his compound under extremely harsh conditions. The Israeli military campaign in the West Bank has continued to widen and intensify. And there have been several appalling suicide bombings within Israel itself.

We keep thinking that things cannot get worse. And yet they do get worse, day by day. It would take a reckless optimist to say that the worst is over. Indeed, I fear that much worse is to come if the escalation on both sides is allowed to continue. The parties are locked into the logic of war, and I fear for the consequences, including for the region. The question we face is how to persuade the parties to move from the logic of war to the logic of peace.

Security Council resolution 1402 is the best available instrument for halting the descent into further chaos and bloodshed. I applaud the Council for adopting it so swiftly, and call on you - collectively and individually - to act now to secure its implementation.

The resolution demands steps from both sides that are realistic, achievable and urgently necessary. Both sides can fulfill its demands if only they have the will.

Mr. President,

I must tell the Council candidly that I see no prospect of breaking the current downward spiral -- and recreating the possibility of peace and security for both sides -- unless we address the core problems in the Middle East - occupation; violence, including terrorism; and the economic plight of the Palestinians. I believe there is a growing international understanding of the need to treat security and peace as two sides of the same coin. Yet each of the parties remains unwilling to accept fully the other's basic demands.

As this Council is aware, I have long argued that security and peace must be addressed in parallel, in the spirit of Security Council resolutions 1397 and 1402. In other words, we need to take into account the legitimate security concerns of Israel and the legitimate political aspirations of the Palestinians - at the same time.

The events of the intervening week have underlined that need. Even while the Arab Summit was making important progress in its peace efforts, a suicide bomb exploded in Netanya, taking the lives of more than twenty Israeli civilians. There can be no doubt that the Netanya bomb was aimed not only at Israeli civilians: it was aimed at the very possibility of a peaceful co-existence between the two peoples.

Following the Netanya bomb, the Israeli armed forces attacked the compound of Palestinian Authority Chairman Arafat, began a re-occupation of parts of the West Bank and Gaza, and have imposed restrictions in Gaza. International and humanitarian personnel have been restricted in their movements, in contravention to UN conventions and international humanitarian law.

Israeli tanks and soldiers are besieging the compound of Palestinian Authority Chairman Arafat, the internationally recognized leader of the Palestinian people. Although the Government of Israel has given assurances that Chairman Arafat will not be harmed, the situation inside the compound is very dangerous and

could have disastrous results. Indeed, I believe that Israel's presence inside the compound of Chairman Arafat, and its military actions in the West Bank and Gaza, can only produce a further deterioration, and the loss of more innocent Palestinian and Israeli life, and should be ended immediately.

Mr. President,

There have also been worrying developments along the Blue Line. On two occasions there have been attacks from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line. First, there was a serious violation of the Blue Line by Hezbollah, which launched mortars and rockets against the Sha'ba farms area.

Late yesterday, there was a shooting attack against an IDF position in Israel from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, a further violation. In both cases Israel responded. I would like to stress that the Security Council, acting unanimously, has confirmed Israel's full withdrawal from all occupied territory in southern Lebanon. The Blue Line should not be violated by any party.

The combination of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, Israeli military action in Palestinian areas, and attacks from southern Lebanon across the Blue Line produce a situation which has the clear potential to threaten regional peace and security.

Mr. President,

Over the past few days, I have been in communication with the parties and with international leaders who can assist the parties in de-escalating the current, dangerous escalation. In the region, my Special Coordinator has traveled to Ramallah to meet with the Secretary-General of the Palestine Liberation Organization Mahmoud Abbas and has been in telephone communication with Chairman Arafat and his negotiators. He has also met with a series of Israeli officials, including Foreign Minister Peres.

My Special Coordinator has also been working intensively within the framework of the Quartet of envoys, while also keeping in close telephone contact with Egyptian and Jordanian officials. He has been working especially closely with General Zinni, to whom the Security Council lent its full backing in its resolution 1402. The Quartet, whose activities I fully support, will resume its consultations tomorrow morning.

Mr. President,

One week ago in Beirut I told the Arab Summit that there is no conflict in the world today whose solution is so clear, so widely agreed upon, and so necessary to world peace as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Tragically, however, there is no conflict whose path to resolution seems so thickly entangled with hatred and mistrust, or so vulnerable to the acts of extremists.

Allow me therefore to sound a small note of optimism, drawing on the larger historical context. Even as the situation on the ground - with immense suffering and fear on both sides - is perhaps the worst in decades, we must not lose sight of the fact that only last week the Arab states as a whole declared their readiness to live in peace with Israel on the conditions set out in the Saudi proposal, as adopted by the Arab League Summit. In addition, the Council, for the first time ever, has affirmed its support for a vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

This historic step forward must not be allowed to be obscured by the events of recent days. At this most difficult of junctures, there is a need for vision, courage and statesmanship - from both sides as well as from the international community.

This Council has a heavy responsibility to do its part to halt the downward spiral, and I urge you to do your utmost to ensure the implementation of resolutions 1397 and 1402.

Thank you.