



Press Release

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CRISIS, SECURITY CRISIS, AND CRISIS IN CONFIDENCE IN MIDDLE EAST MUST BE ADDRESSED SIMULTANEOUSLY, SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS COMMITTEE

Following is the text of a statement made this morning by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the opening of the 2001 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People:

Allow me first to congratulate you on your unanimous re-election to the leadership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The renewal of your mandate reflects the Committee's continuing appreciation of your dedication and that of your country, Senegal, to the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

I would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau, whose steadfast efforts to promote the objectives of the Committee have again been recognized today.

The fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly reaffirmed the mandates of this Committee, and of the Secretariat units that support its work: the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. The Assembly's debate on the question of Palestine underscored the importance that Member States attach to these mandates, and to the role of the United Nations in the search for peace.

We meet today at a particularly sensitive moment. It is not just that, following the events in East Jerusalem last September, the situation on the ground has deteriorated badly, with hundreds dead and thousands injured, the great majority of them Palestinians. Equally worrying has been the unravelling of the progress that had been made between Israelis and Palestinians in overcoming the mistrust and suspicion that had plagued their relationship for decades and in moving forward towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

In the past few months, the international community has made sustained efforts to persuade the two sides to bring about an end to violence, to protect civilians and to resume their negotiations. The broad understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh marked an important step in that direction. Progress was also achieved at Taba, where gaps appear to have been narrowed on core issues such as refugees, Jerusalem, borders and security. I am convinced that the hard work done there will be of lasting value in the ongoing search for a settlement.

We now have a new Israeli Government. Whatever its policies, it will face the daunting task of doing its part to restore and foster a climate in which real progress can be achieved.

The deepening crisis is at once a human tragedy and a source of grave concern for the future. In fact, the parties face several crises at once:

-- first, a security crisis, with a litany of violence, destruction and death;

-- second, an economic and social crisis, with growing unemployment and poverty, border closures, restrictions and measures which deprive the Palestinian Authority of necessary financial resources;

-- and third, a crisis of confidence, with rising fear, despair and anger on the street, and plummeting faith in the peace process.

These crises are linked, and must be addressed simultaneously. The parties must exercise maximum caution and restraint to prevent a further escalation of violence, which could have very serious consequences for the entire region. This is a time for statesmanship and vision, if ever there was one.

Since 1991, Israelis and Palestinians have been engaged in a truly historic effort. The 1993 Oslo accords and subsequent understandings and agreements were milestones. We must not allow these gains to ebb away. I call on the parties to preserve them and to move ahead towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions [242](#) and [338](#).

For the peace process to bear fruit, it must be accompanied by a vigorous and well-coordinated international effort aimed at turning around the dire socio-economic situation faced by millions of Palestinians and their families. The United Nations system continues to provide emergency humanitarian assistance and to help the Palestinians to develop essential infrastructures, strengthen their institutions and improve their day-to-day living conditions.

The recent crisis has had a catastrophic effect on the Palestinian economy, reversing the achievements of several years of recovery and progress. The international community should step in and address this situation as a matter of urgency. In particular, I would call on all UNRWA's contributors to help the Agency continue its vital work. Months of violence have complicated the provision of basic services, materials, food and medicine. Donor assistance is absolutely critical and should be made available without further delay.

The United Nations is supporting the peace process through the efforts of Terje Rød-Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and my Personal Representative to the Palestinian Organization and Palestinian Authority. As you know, one of Mr. Larsen's key responsibilities is to coordinate United Nations assistance to the Palestinian people. UNSCO also heads a newly established Humanitarian Task Force for Emergency Needs to coordinate international assistance. I have asked Mr. Larsen to undertake wide-ranging and urgent consultations with a view to preventing further deterioration in the economic and social conditions of the occupied territories.

The United Nations remains fully committed to supporting the parties through this difficult and traumatic period, and will remain closely engaged in efforts to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. I wish to conclude by renewing my appreciation for the work of this Committee and by expressing my support for its important mandate.

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