

Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, 9 November 2008 - Statement issued by the Quartet - Remarks by Secretary-General at Joint Press Conference Following the Quartet Meeting

[The Secretary-General began the press conference by reading the joint statement issued by the Quartet.]

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, a salam alei kum.

Given the landmark nature of today's meeting, which is the first time the parties have briefed the Quartet, I will read today's Quartet statement in full.

QUARTET STATEMENT, NOVEMBER 9, 2008

Representatives of the Quartet—U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union Javier Solana, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner—met today, and heard from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni at their request. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

President Abbas and Minister Livni briefed the Quartet on Palestinian-Israeli negotiating efforts since the November 27, 2007 international conference in Annapolis, Maryland that formally launched bilateral negotiations to bring an end to the conflict by achieving the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Palestinian and Israeli representatives reaffirmed their commitment, as stated in the Annapolis "Joint Understanding" to vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues, without exception, as specified in previous agreements.

The parties' representatives affirmed that, over the last year, they have engaged in direct, sustained, and intensive bilateral negotiations, based on a joint work plan that included the establishment of more than ten committees. They described how the parties have been actively engaged not only on core issues but on an array of other topics necessary to turn the two-state solution into a reality. Without minimizing the gaps and obstacles that remain, the representatives of the parties shared their assessment that the present negotiations are substantial and promising and they have succeeded in putting in place a solid negotiating structure for continued progress in the future.

President Abbas and Foreign Minister Livni stated the parties had reached a number of mutual understandings on the principles governing their negotiating process. These include:

- The need for continuous, uninterrupted, direct, bilateral negotiations;
- The principle that nothing would be considered agreed until everything is agreed;
- The need to reach a comprehensive agreement addressing all issues, as agreed at Annapolis, rather than just announce agreement on selected items in isolation.

The parties' representatives also confirmed that, as stated in the Annapolis Joint Understanding, the parties remained committed to implementation of their respective obligations under the Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and to the agreed mechanism for monitoring and judging Roadmap implementation and that, unless otherwise agreed by the parties, implementation of the future peace treaty will be subject to implementation of the Roadmap, as judged by the United States.

In addition to describing the structure of the negotiations and indicating areas in which progress has been achieved, President Abbas and Minister Livni expressed gratitude for international support provided during the last year and requested continued support from the Quartet and all members of the international community. First, they asked that the international community support the parties' sustained efforts in the framework of the Annapolis process and that it respect the agreed principles for their negotiations as described to the Quartet. Second, they asked that all States promote an environment conducive to peace, non-violence, and the two-state solution. In this regard, they urged political and economic assistance, especially in relation to institutional and security reform, capacity building, economic development and the fulfillment of pledges, to the legitimate Palestinian government which has accepted the Quartet principles and respects the PLO commitments. They asked the international community to redouble efforts to confront and deny support for extremism, incitement, terrorism, and intolerance. Finally, the representatives stressed that, absent the joint request of the parties, third parties should not intervene in the bilateral negotiations. At the same time, they confirmed that international support and assistance will be vital once an agreement is reached, and that they intend to jointly consult members of the international community on this issue at the appropriate time.

The Quartet expressed its appreciation for the description by the parties of their joint efforts, which confirmed the seriousness of the Annapolis process and underscored the determination of the parties to reach a comprehensive agreement. The Quartet reiterated its commitment to supporting the parties' efforts, underlined its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations, pledged to respect the bilateral and confidential nature of the negotiations, and called on all states to adhere to these same commitments. The Quartet endorsed the goals set out by the parties and called on all states to lend their diplomatic and political support to that end, including by encouraging and recognizing progress to date.

The Quartet renewed its call on relevant states and international organizations to assist in the development of the Palestinian economy, to maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority, and to contribute to the Palestinian institution-building program in preparation for statehood, as decided during the Paris, Bethlehem, and Berlin Conferences. The Quartet cited Jenin as an example of the success of reforms instituted by the Palestinian government and of cooperation between the two sides, made possible in the context of the Annapolis process. The Quartet further welcomed the recent deployment of Palestinian security services in the Hebron governorate as a sign of the progress that has resulted from increased security cooperation. The Quartet emphasized its determination to continue to work with Israel and the Palestinian government to facilitate access and movement and an improvement in conditions on the ground in order to address urgent humanitarian needs, foster economic activity, and improve the atmosphere for the negotiations. The Quartet reiterated its call to the parties to fully implement their obligations under phase one of the Roadmap, including in relation to freezing settlement activity and the dismantlement of the infrastructure of terrorism.

The Quartet emphasized the importance of continuity of the peace process. The Quartet agreed that the spring of 2009 could be an appropriate time for an international meeting in Moscow.

The Quartet reaffirmed its previous statements, including the September 26, 2008, statement issued in New York. Further, welcoming the recent calls for a broader peace, the Quartet offered its support for the expansion of ongoing diplomatic efforts toward regional peace, noted the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, and reaffirmed its commitment to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515.

REMARKS BY SECRETARY-GENERAL AT JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING THE QUARTET MEETING

Q: Do you think that the Quartet can play a role in alleviating the sufferings of Palestinians in Gaza? Thank you.

SG: Thank you very much. As the Secretary-General, I have broad responsibility and a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance to all the people around the world who are in need of such assistance. Particularly, I am deeply distressed about the plight of the civilian population in Gaza. Through the work of several United Nations agencies, including UNRWA [the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East], the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, the United Nations is standing by the people of Gaza and helping them in these difficult times. The Quartet has also made clear its support for a more constructive strategy for Gaza. I have been discussing this matter with Israeli government leaders – Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert and Foreign Minister [Tzipi] Livni – on many occasions and today I am also going to discuss this matter about the closure of crossings, roadblocks and also settlement issues and the demolition of houses. All these activities are not desirable for the ongoing peace process.

The creation of an atmosphere conducive to the ongoing peace process would be extremely important. The calm brokered by Egypt needs to be respected. I am concerned about the recent violence and call for it to stop immediately. The Palestinian factions must also work together for their national unity and reconciliation, and they must be able to overcome their division. I urge them to work constructively with the parties concerned and the international community, and in this regard I stand ready not only to participate and facilitate the political process but also most importantly to facilitate the ongoing humanitarian assistance to these people.

Q: This is addressed to Mr. Ban Ki-moon. You talked a lot about commitment; however, we understand that the Arab side and the Palestinian side have urged a lot about a mechanism to make this possible and the Annapolis process and also the roadmap. How can you do that without a clear mechanism that is supported by the UN, the international community, to see that actually what has been approved by the parties can be implemented? For example the Palestinians talked seriously about the settlement activity, about the current invasions.

You never talked about a mechanism to implement this; is there a mechanism?

SG: I think the most important mechanism is the Quartet, composed of all principals together with Quartet representative Tony Blair. We have been meeting on a regular basis, and we have all other European-sponsored mechanisms, and we have General [Jim] Jones and [Lieutenant General William] Fraser, who have been maintaining these mechanisms to follow and monitor. And through this ongoing progress of the Quartet, as well as by making some meetings with the parties more institutionalized in the future, I think you can be sure of this continuing monitoring and support for bilateral negotiations of the two parties. Thank you.