Français

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY MUST 'DE-LEGITIMIZE TERRORISM'; ISRAEL MUST STOP

SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL

Following is the message of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, delivered on his behalf by Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, to the international media seminar ("Ending Confrontation: Building Peace in the Middle East") in Copenhagen, jointly organized by the Department of Public Information and the Danish Foreign Ministry, 17-18 July:

The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the most enduring diplomatic challenges of our times. The modern State of Israel has known war for most of its 54-year existence. The Palestinian people, on their side, have been in limbo, struggling to find their own path to statehood. In the last two years, the conflict between them has been at its most violent.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict brings together the complexities of military occupation, resistance, terrorism, land and water disputes, ethnic-religious differences, and a clash of cultures whose knowledge of each other is profoundly limited. It touches three major religions and two civilizations. Yet it is also a local conflict fought on an intimate scale where far too many of those killed on a daily basis are innocent civilians. Despite the efforts of many who are doing their best to help bring peace to the region, the situation remains dangerously unstable. Indeed, in the absence of a renewed and sustained political process, events will continue to be driven by those who are doing their best to prevent peace.

Since September 2000, the main focus of international efforts has been to identify a path away from violence and back to negotiations. Unfortunately, these efforts have not brought us closer to a permanent settlement. The political, security and economic dimensions of the problem today are arguably worse than at any time since 1967. A solution is needed which will end the occupation, which will provide ironclad security guarantees for Israel, which will address these issues urgently, in parallel and without preconditions, and which will realize the vision, set out in Security Council resolutio n 1397 , of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders.

Devising such a political solution is a key obligation for the international community. That is what brought the diplomatic grouping known as the Quartet -- comprising the United States, European Union, Russian Federation and the United Nations -- together with key regional parties, in New York yesterday, in an effort to overcome the current deadlock. Of paramount importance is an operational road map for reaching the goal of a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement, as expressed by President Bush in his statements of 4 April and 24 June, and with the three-year time frame that he suggested. Comprehensive peace also requires progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, since the regional dimension is no less important than solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Arab League's Beirut Declaration provides the vision and framework for bringing peace to the entire Middle East.

But, of course, the parties themselves bear the primary responsibility for showing their commitment to peace. A number of steps have been proposed, and the international community should urge both sides to implement them.

The Palestinian Authority should take immediate and specific action to prevent terrorist acts against Israel, and its leadership must do more to de-legitimize terrorism among the public. It is also important that real progress be achieved in rebuilding and reforming Palestinian security and governance structures and institutions. The international community is engaged in intensive consultations with the relevant Palestinian Authority institutions to ensure that the ongoing reform process is transparent, and delivers tangible benefits for the Palestinian people on the ground. Only a democratic Palestinian administration that forswears and actively combats terror will be able to secure just final status arrangements for its people.

The Government of Israel, for its part, must stop all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such activity is a fundamental obstacle to advancing the peace process and is also contrary to international law. Israel should also withdraw from the areas it has reoccupied to positions held before 28 September 2000, resume revenue transfers, and lift the increasingly severe curfews, internal closures and other restrictions on movement that impose such hardships on Palestinians throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Indeed, it must be recognized that the social and economic misery of the Palestinian people is a serious obstacle to achieving lasting peace and security. Living standards among Palestinians have plummeted over the past 18 months -- more than two thirds of the population of the Gaza Strip now live below the poverty line, as do about one half of West Bank residents. Sharply declining living conditions destabilize the political environment and increase the sense of desperation that is so successfully exploited by extremists.

The key to stitching these many strands of grievance and hope into a renewed fabric of peace negotiations lies in simultaneously reducing violence and establishing a clearly defined political horizon for resolving the permanent status issues. But until the parties, working with the international community, can agree on the design of that process, I fear the unremitting violence in the region may well continue. We all have a duty to act, and to strive for a clear understanding of one another's positions – a point of particular importance for you, an audience made up of journalists, scholars, policy-makers and others with no small influence over the course of

the debate. In that spirit, I very much look forward to the contributions this seminar will make.

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