
Jerusalem, 15 March 2005 - Secretary-General's press encounter with Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom

FM Shalom: I am happy to welcome Secretary-General Annan to Israel as a real friend of the State of Israel and of the Jewish people.

It is very encouraging to see the Secretary-General here in Jerusalem, especially for attending the opening of the Holocaust Museum of Yad Vashem in Israel.

I think the Secretary-General has shown his commitment by having the Special Session on [January] 24 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps, of course, especially of Auschwitz; the exhibition about Yad Vashem [at the UN] that has been here since the 24 of January, and his arrival today with his wife Nane, the niece of Raoul Wallenberg, the righteous among the nations.

We were discussing the process with the Palestinians and what needs to be done in order to make progress with the Palestinians and to bring more stability in our region, and it includes Lebanon as well.

SG: Thank you very much, Mr. Foreign Minister.

I am also extremely happy to be here with my wife and my team for this important ceremony of Yad Vashem.

I think the Holocaust is not just a Jewish experience, it is an experience of great importance to the whole world and we have all drawn lessons from it. And as I have said earlier, it was the lessons from the Holocaust and World War II that led to the formation of the United Nations. And therefore, it is part of our history and is part of our vision.

We look forward to working together and, as you said, the commemoration in the General Assembly on the 24th of January, in a way, brought us together again: Israel and the United Nations and the whole world. And whilst here I had the chance to talk to you, the Prime Minister, the President, and of course President Abu Mazen and Prime Minister Abu Ala about the peace process and the developments in this region.

I am encouraged by what I have heard and what I have seen. And I can assure you that the international community and we, the members of the Quartet, are determined to work with you and ensure that this peace process leads to the objectives we all are seeking so desperately.

FM: I would like to add that Secretary-General Annan had to make a huge change in his plans in coming here to Israel. And I know that he had some private plans that were scheduled for 15 March and I would like to thank you very much for coming here. And I was very happy when you told me that you had finally taken the decision to come. It shows your friendship with Israel and with the Jewish people as a whole.

Q: Today there are talks in Cairo between the President of the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian organizations. Do you think this oral agreement between Abu Mazen and the terror organizations is enough or do you think it is only the first step towards dismantling the terror organizations?

And the same question to the Foreign Minister [in Hebrew], is this enough? Isn't Israel cutting an indirect deal with Hamas through these talks?

SG: Good to see you again.

Let me say that yesterday I had the chance to discuss this with President Abu Mazen who is looking forward to the meeting today and hopes that they will be able to come to an understanding about ceasefire and non-use of violence. I think this, obviously, in the scheme of things, should be seen as a first step towards the eventual stoppage of that kind of activity, particularly if we are aiming for peace; a peace that leads to two states living side by side in peace and security.

FM: [in Hebrew] The intention to achieve only a calm period instead of a full ceasefire is not acceptable to us. We believe that ceasefire only means giving a chance to extreme forces to reform their terror infrastructure to execute future attacks. There is no doubt that a calm period, being even less than a ceasefire, is not acceptable to the Israeli Government and might lead to a collapse of the whole process. We are in a new period, a period full of hopes, and we do not want to give any extremists the opportunity to shatter this hope. Abu Mazen and the Palestinian leadership need to make a strategic decision to fulfill their obligations under the first part of the roadmap by completely dismantling the terror infrastructure, closing down workshops that produce explosives and arms, closing down the tunnels, halting arm smuggling, prosecuting terrorists and ending incitement.

Q: As a member of the Quartet how does the UN feel about Israel taking unilateral steps on final status issues, such as determining the route of the separation barrier around Jerusalem.

SG: As a member of the Quartet and as part of the group that is working with the parties to find a solution, we have indicated that we encourage all parties to avoid creating facts on the ground that may make a solution difficult.
