



# Press Release

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Français

## **SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS TO RETURN TO PATH OF PEACE**

Following is the text of a statement made today in Amman, Jordan, by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the summit meeting of the League of Arab States:

It is an honour to join you. Let me express my gratitude to His Majesty King Abdullah for his hospitality, wise leadership and strong support of the United Nations.

I would also like to pay tribute to Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, a long-standing friend of the United Nations, who has rendered great service to the Arab cause and to his country.

The current cycle of violence between Palestinians and Israelis has seen hundreds killed and thousands wounded, the great majority of them Palestinians. Poverty and unemployment have skyrocketed. Blockades and closures have paralyzed the Palestinian economy, isolated the West Bank and Gaza, and prevented the delivery of medicine, food and fuel. Collective punishment has cast a pall of anger and despair over the already-tense occupied territories. Israelis, too, have seen high hopes turn to fear.

The crisis is of grave concern to us all, especially given the historic gains that had been made and the hopes that had been raised. I am also concerned that, amid the tensions and the rhetoric, a key point is often lost. The international community and the Arab world have every right to criticize Israel for its continued occupation of Palestinian and Syrian territory, and for its excessively harsh response to the intifada. But these points could be made more effectively if many Israelis did not believe that their existence was under threat. Israel has a right, enshrined in numerous United Nations resolutions, to exist in safety within internationally recognized borders.

So I again urge both sides to return to the path of peace. There is no solution to be found in violence, and no sense in postponing the day when the parties return to the table. Now more than ever, what we need is movement towards an agreement that responds both to the legitimate desire of the Palestinians for national independence, and to the legitimate claims of the Israelis to recognition and security -- a comprehensive, just and lasting agreement on the basis set out so long ago in Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and on the principle of land for peace.

The situation in Iraq also continues to cause serious concern. I deeply regret the continuing suffering of the Iraqi people, and share the hopes of everyone here that sanctions can be lifted sooner rather than later.

As I said at the Organization of the Islamic Conference Summit in Doha, I am fully conscious of the widespread perception that there is a double standard when it comes to implementing United Nations resolutions. And I believe that the humanitarian situation in Iraq poses a moral dilemma to the United Nations, which has always stood with the vulnerable and sought to alleviate their suffering.

But I also believe that the Iraqi leadership will achieve more through cooperation with the international community, including its neighbours, than through confrontation. It is my duty as Secretary-General to remind all States of their commitments under the Charter and the obligation to comply with Security Council resolutions. I appeal to Iraq to review its position with a view to cooperating with the international community.

As you know, last month I held talks with a high-level Iraqi delegation, marking the start of a process that I hope will lead to a way out of the impasse. We agreed to continue the dialogue, and I look forward to the next round.

Last September, at the Millennium Summit in New York, you joined other leaders in pledging to make this world more peaceful, democratic and just. Your people want to see that vow realized -- and your young people in particular. Nearly half the population of the Arab world is under the age of 18. They need education and jobs. They want to engage with the world and with each other, secure in their freedoms and human rights. Everything possible should be done to liberate their energies.

Your challenge is to help your region share in the new century's promise. Like other regions, the Arab world is struggling with the diverse demands of development, with the tension between heritage and modernization, and with the search for peace, justice and freedom. The Arab League has a crucial role to play, and the United Nations will continue to be your partner.

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