



Press Release

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Statement of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on behalf of the visiting mission

Mr. Chairman,

I was very pleased, together with my two colleagues, to have the opportunity a short time ago to meet with you and members of the extended Bureau and to present to you what we call a status report of the visiting mission established pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/1. You authorized that this interim report would be circulated to Members of the Commission and of course I appreciate that members of the Commission have not had an opportunity to read and assess the factual report as it is circulated. But we felt that it would be appropriate to make a brief statement to the Commission introducing the report to you for your consideration. I speak on behalf of my two colleagues because they agreed that one statement would be appropriate since we are together as a visiting mission.

The rapid deterioration of the situation, during the second week of this session of the Commission, created a very grave emergency from a human rights and humanitarian point of view. On 2 April I reported to the Commission on the acute situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and on suicide bombings in Israel that had developed since 27 March.

The Commission responded to the critical situation by its initiative in establishing a visiting mission. It was important for the voice of the Commission on Human Rights to be heard and for the Commission to endeavour to brief itself on what was taking place on the ground.

The Mission, itself, in which I am joined by Felipe Gonzalez and Cyril Ramaphosa, was constituted rapidly after the adoption of the resolution by the Commission and we were ready to travel to the area forthwith. And indeed remain ready to travel to the area.

As you will be aware the Mission has not been able, in terms of the resolution to, "travel immediately to the area and return expeditiously to submit its findings and recommendations to the current session of the Commission on Human Rights".

Since the resolution was adopted, the violence on the ground has worsened. There are other developments: the Madrid statement by the Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Secretary of State of the United States and the High Representative for European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy, has given a new impetus to put an end to violence. This morning I have learnt that ICRC monitors have been permitted to enter the Jenin refugee camp, the location of serious fighting and an unknown number of casualties.

Efforts are now under way to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground and to re-launch a peace process. As you know US Secretary of State Colin Powell is continuing his mission to the area. It will be essential for the peace process to be based on human rights foundations.

There have been, and remain, serious problems of human rights violations to be addressed. There have been two further suicide bombings that killed and injured Israeli civilians since the visiting mission was constituted. In addition extraordinary military measures have been taken by the Israeli Defence Force in West Bank towns and cities which have left hundreds dead, thousands displaced and which has created enormous physical damage. The unresolved stand off in Bethlehem and the virtual destruction of Jenin are of deep concern to us all.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Commission, the tragic killings of Palestinians and Israelis must be brought to an end. A process must be considered and instituted to account for the death and destruction that has taken place. Our mission can play a preliminary role in that regard. The international community cannot permit the indiscriminate killings of Israeli civilians or the wanton killings of Palestinian civilians and the destruction of the civilian infrastructure to support life. It cannot be right to wage war on civilian populations. The international community has a responsibility to protect, which it must discharge.

As the United Nations Secretary-General told this Commission on Human Rights on Friday last, the United Nations cannot be neutral in the face of great moral challenges.

He made a call on the leaders of both sides to make an immediate declaration of their commitment to respect basic norms of human rights and humanitarian law. I fully support the proposal or the call of the Secretary General, as do the other members of the visiting mission, and I shall be following up with a letter to both Prime Minister Sharon and Chairman Arafat. The Commission may wish to consider extending its support to the Secretary General's call as well.

And yet Chairman, Members of the Commission there is always a prospect for peace even in the worst situations. In this context I welcome the statement of President Arafat condemning last Friday's suicide bombing and all civilian killings. I also note the decision of the Israeli High Court to direct that bodies of those killed in Jenin be handed over to Palestinians for burial.

Let us recall that the foundation of international order and of security in our times must be full respect for the fundamental norms of human rights and humanitarian law. We can never allow this to be forgotten. Force should never triumph over justice. In the long run, justice must prevail. But there is also a necessity for some patience in order to achieve an objective. I am aware that since the interim report was submitted to the Bureau that you Chairman received a further letter from the Israeli Ambassador, Ambassador Levy. He copied that letter to me and it concludes with the assurance to you, Chairman, that the visit is still under active review by the authorities in Jerusalem. I know that the text of that letter has been submitted to the extended Bureau and I am sure that, along with the interim status report, that letter will also be considered.

I can only say in conclusion how much I appreciate the very supportive and patient and committed role that my two colleagues have played in preparing for this mission. Mr. Felipe Gonzales has returned to Geneva today, to be present in the Bureau first of all, and before this Commission. We stand ready to play our role as a visiting mission as soon as this can be furthered. And we do greatly appreciate the broad support which we have received from this Commission and which I believe it is vital that we continue to receive if this mission is to fulfil its serious human rights purposes.

Thank you Chairman.

Related documents:

- [UNCHR adopts resolution](#)
- [E/CN.4/RES/2002/1](#)
- [High Commissioner's statement](#)
- [UNCHR press release \(dated 08.04.02\)](#)
- [UNCHR press release \(dated 09.04.02\)](#)
- [UNHCHR status report](#)
- [UNCHR press release \(dated 17.04.02\)](#)