



Press Release

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AT CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE, SECRETARY-GENERAL SPELLS OUT OVERALL

CONTEXT FOR ENDING MIDDLE EAST VIOLENCE

Following is the statement by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, delivered on his behalf by Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Kieran Prendergast:

Welcome to United Nations Headquarters, where the world's peoples meet through their government representatives – but also through citizens' groups and civil society organizations such as yours. If this planet is our global village, the United Nations Organization is where we hold our village meetings – where we discuss issues of shared concern, and try to find solutions.

The situation in the Middle East, and in particular the question of Palestine, have been on the agenda of this Organization since its earliest days. Despite hopes raised by the Madrid peace process and the Oslo accords in the 1990s, renewed tensions and the outbreak of violence over the past few years have threatened to undermine peace and security in the entire Middle East region. The locus of the conflict intersects with global political, strategic and economic interests and stands on major religious and cultural fault-lines. It thus has a potential to envenom relations between people living thousands of miles away, and to derail major international gatherings, including United Nations conferences.

The violence of the past several months has caused great suffering among innocent civilians on both sides. Until last week, there had been six weeks of relative calm in Israel itself, but during the same period in the occupied territory some 54 Palestinians were killed in Israeli military operations. Then, in the space of three days – 17-19 September – we saw a bomb explode in a Palestinian school and two suicide attacks inside Israel, after which the Israel Defence Force once again encircled President Arafat's offices in Ramallah, and carried out major demolitions.

Such sad events only strengthen my conviction, which I expressed to the General Assembly 10 days ago, that the essential objectives of security and humanitarian relief cannot be achieved in isolation. We must return to the search for a just and comprehensive solution, which alone can bring security and prosperity to both peoples, and indeed to the whole region.

The organizers of this Conference have clearly stated that it is meant to garner support for the Palestinian people. This is the mandate the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received from the international community, through the United Nations General Assembly, and has pursued since its establishment in 1975. Indeed, the Palestinian people need the continued support of all of us, in the dire situation that they are in.

Today, Palestinians are still confined to their towns, villages and refugee camps, without a State or a functioning economy of their own. I have expressed my dismay at the excessive use of force, which has caused the deaths of so many Palestinian civilians, including many children. Time and again, I have also strongly condemned the killing of innocent civilians on both sides, irrespective of the provenance and motives of the perpetrators.

Stifling curfews and closures result in mounting economic hardship for the Palestinian population. Recent military operations have caused great damage to the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, and have further weakened the Authority's capacity to provide basic services to its people.

For its part, the United Nations has been providing assistance to the Palestinians for more than half a century. The UNRWA – the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East – is the longest-running relief effort undertaken by the United Nations in any part of the world, and remains a lifeline to more than 3.9 million Palestinians. The United Nations Development Programme, with its Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) likewise has a long history of participation in Palestinian development efforts, while the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and other United Nations bodies have been offering much-needed humanitarian aid. The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority and his team have maintained close contacts with the parties, trying to promote political and security dialogue and to facilitate cooperation on economic and humanitarian issues. Catherine Bertini recently visited the region as my Personal Humanitarian Envoy with the mandate to assess the nature and the scale of the humanitarian crisis facing the civilian population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In spite of all these endeavours, peace seems as far away as ever. To bring it once again within our reach, numerous factors have to be propitious, and pressure has to be brought to bear from many sides. The political leadership of both parties has to be encouraged in the direction of accepting difficult compromises.

A lot has to change in the way people on both sides of the conflict think about themselves, about each other, and about the region. In that respect, joint grass roots

initiatives between Palestinian and Israeli NGOs, as well as Jewish and Arab groups in the United States, Europe and elsewhere, should be encouraged. Moreover, the public all over the world, especially within the most influential countries, has to be informed, so that it can grasp the broader picture and the issues at stake. Humanitarian assistance has to be provided urgently to the suffering Palestinian population.

In all these areas, civil society can play a very important role, as we have seen on numerous occasions in the past. Your commitment, and that of others like you, is enormously important. I encourage you to continue your work in a coordinated and coherent way.

This conference is in support of the Palestinian people. It also acknowledges the Israeli people's longing for peace and coexistence. It points the way out of the impasse for both peoples, which must be to deal with the root cause of the conflict. The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to a State of their own, must be restored to them.

The ultimate shape of a Middle East peace settlement is well known. It was defined long ago in Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and its Israeli-Palestinian components were spelt out even more clearly in resolution 1397: land for peace; an end to occupation; an end to terrorism; two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

Both parties accept this vision. But we can reach it only if we move rapidly and in parallel on all fronts.

The United Nations has been working to find ways of doing that, with its partners in the "Quartet" — that is the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union. As you know, our most recent meeting was held here in this building last Tuesday. We met first among ourselves, then with five Arab ministers, and then with representatives of the two parties — Shimon Peres and Nabil Shaath.

We agreed to continue working with the parties, and with key regional actors, on an implementation road map, which can guide us to a final and comprehensive settlement within three years.

Of course it is essential and urgent to make both peoples more secure, by bringing an immediate end to violence and terror. But we are all in agreement that this has to be done within the context of an overall plan, which must address the political, economic, humanitarian and institutional dimensions of the problem. It must spell out reciprocal steps to be taken by the parties in each of the phases. In short, we need a process that is both performance-driven and hope-driven, because we need both, performance and hope.

The road map will be in three phases. Progress from each phase to the next will be based on the parties' compliance with performance benchmarks, to be monitored and assessed by a mechanism of the Quartet.

The first phase will see a Palestinian security reform, Israeli withdrawals, and support for Palestinian elections to be held in early 2003. There will also be an ad hoc liaison committee meeting in November to review the humanitarian situation and identify priority areas, including the reform process for development assistance in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In the second phase, during 2003, the focus will shift to the option of creating a Palestinian State with provisional borders, and based on a new constitution, as a step on the way to a final and comprehensive settlement.

That final and comprehensive settlement should emerge in the third phase, from 2004 to mid-2005, through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Palestinian reform and political progress are essential, but they must be accompanied by Israeli measures to improve the lives of Palestinians, notably by allowing the resumption of economic activity and the movement of goods, people, and essential services; by easing or lifting curfews and closures; by returning the tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority; and by putting an immediate stop to all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territory.

The Palestinians must work with the United States and regional partners to reform their security services and combat terrorism. Both sides should work to enable the civilian population of the West Bank and Gaza to benefit from normal policing and law and order. Israelis and Palestinians should re-establish security cooperation.

The Quartet is continuing to discuss the timing and modalities for an international conference. It remains committed to the search for a just, lasting, comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, including the Syrian/Israeli and Lebanese/Israeli tracks.

For my part, I pledge to continue to do whatever it takes to help these peace efforts, in cooperation with all regional and international actors — including, of course, civil society actors like you. The determined and coordinated mobilization of global civil society can play a decisive part in bringing the final peace settlement closer.

Once again I welcome you to this Conference and invite you all to lend your moral and practical support to the achievement of this noble goal.

I wish you all success in your deliberations.

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