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UNITED NATIONS ASIAN AND PACIFIC MEETING ON QUESTION

OF PALESTINE OPENS IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA

Speakers Underscore Urgency of Two-State Solution to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(Received from a UN Information Officer.)

JAKARTA, Indonesia, 8 June – “Our shared challenge is to begin implementing transformative changes on the ground and to create irreversible momentum towards an Israeli-Palestinian agreement,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today in a statement at the opening of the United Nations Asian and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine.

The two-day Meeting will focus on “Strengthening international consensus on the urgency of achieving a two-State solution” and aim to encourage broad international action, including by Asian and Pacific States and societies, in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Meeting is to be followed on 10 June by the United Nations Public Forum in Support of the Palestinian People.

In his message, delivered by Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban said that, in Gaza, there was an urgent need for a durable and fully respected ceasefire, for the prevention of illicit weapons smuggling, for the reopening of the crossings into Gaza and for progress on Palestinian reconciliation. The encouraging progress by the Palestinian Authority towards improving the security situation in the West Bank had been hindered by routine incursions by the Israel Defense Forces. “The time has come for Israel to fundamentally change its policies in this regard, as it has repeatedly promised to do.”

Triyono Wibowo, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, assured the Meeting that his country would continue to work with the United Nations and with Asian and Pacific States and groups in support of the two-State solution. Because a long-protracted process was not in the interest of anyone, he said, “let us work harder on the demands of peace, and worry less about the intricacies of process. Let us help the parties to focus on the gains of peace, and less on the pains of process. The objective is very promising, and it is within reach.”

Fariz Məhdawi, Ambassador of Palestine to Indonesia, read out the statement by Abdel Rahim Malouh, Representative of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), because Mr. Malouh had been denied a travel permit by the Israeli Government.

He said that, following the aggression against Gaza and the election of a right-wing, extremist Israeli Government, the situation on the ground had deteriorated and tensions were rising. Despite and because of that dismal state of affairs, “we must be steadfast in our conviction that our collective action, based on international legality and morality, can and will salvage the prospects for peace”. Without a complete cessation of all settlement activities, Israel’s credibility as a partner for peace would remain in serious doubt and resuming negotiations would be futile.

Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, stressed that statements by the Israeli leadership that the conflict could not be resolved, but only “managed”, and that “economic peace” with the Palestinian was the way to go should be firmly rejected as an attempt to divert attention from the core issue, which was political in nature.

Also delivering statements during the opening session were the representatives of Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Bangladesh, Morocco, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Egypt, Pakistan, India and Panama.

The representative of the League of Arab States also addressed the Meeting.

Opening Remarks

PAUL BADJI ([Senegal](#)), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, welcomed participants by noting that the Meeting was taking place at a time when international public opinion was once again focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's devastating onslaught on Gaza was still on everyone's mind, not least because of the continuing stifling blockade of the enclave. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the expansion of settlements was going on and settler violence against Palestinians was increasing as the construction of the separation wall continued unabated.

He said efforts by the occupying Power to create ever new facts on the ground were in direct violation of Israel's international obligations and threatened to render the two-State solution of the conflict unattainable. For that reason, the Committee had decided to call particular attention to the urgency of achieving a two-State solution. There was no alternative to the creation of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

TRIYONO WIBOWO, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of [Indonesia](#), said the Meeting's theme focused on the two-State solution, which was a critical issue. The Meeting was also a reflection of Indonesia's strong commitment to assisting the people of Palestine to fulfil their right to be an independent nation. After the recent onslaught on the Gaza Strip had been halted, Israel had left behind a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions. By simply refusing to open the crossings into Gaza for humanitarian supplies, Israel had ensured that Palestinians would continue to die and suffer. Palestinians were the perpetual victims of Israeli alienation on their own soil, suffering house demolitions, movement restrictions, unemployment, poverty, poor access to health care and education, and unending violations of their rights.

Reiterating his country's condemnation of Israel's policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he stressed that, in order to achieve a solution to the conflict, it was important to hold Israel accountable for its crimes against humanity. There could not be two sets of international law, one for Israel and another for the community of nations. It was the responsibility of the international community to find a way to ensure that Israel honoured its obligations under international law. Israel's willingness to disregard Security Council resolutions, alongside its consistent use of disproportionate military action, must be of great concern to all.

He called on the international community to maintain the necessary commitment towards a resolution of the Palestinian question. At the Ministerial Meeting of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) last year, countries in Asia and Africa had devised a programme to provide training for Palestinian diplomats, Government officials and entrepreneurs to build Palestinian institutions. The Cairo International Conference held in March in support of the reconstruction of Gaza was another positive indication of the international community's commitments to the search for answers to the question of Palestine.

Indonesia would continue to work with the United Nations and Asian and Pacific States and groups in support of the two-State solution, he said, pointing out that a long-protracted process was not in the interest of anyone. "Let us work harder on the demands of peace, and worry less about the intricacies of process. Let us help the parties to focus on the gains of peace, and less on the pains of process. The objective is very promising, and it is within reach."

NOELEEN HEYZER, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), delivered United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message to the Meeting, noting that the event was taking place in the context of renewed international efforts to rejuvenate the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace based on the two-State solution and the implementation of prior commitments by both sides. United States President Obama's commitment to that endeavour was encouraging and the Secretary-General supported the Russian Federation's initiative to convene an international conference in Moscow. He also welcomed efforts by Arab and Muslim countries to advance the Arab Peace Initiative and looked forward to a meeting of the Quartet in the near future.

She said that, since there had been almost no progress on implementing Security Council resolution 1850 (2008) on the political process, or resolution 1860 (2009) on the Gaza crisis, there was an urgent need for a durable and fully respected ceasefire, the prevention of illicit weapons smuggling, the reopening of the crossings and for progress on Palestinian reconciliation. Israel must allow into Gaza fuel, funds and materials that were urgently required for recovery efforts and long-term development initiatives.

Noting that the encouraging progress by the Palestinian Authority towards institution-building and improving the security situation in the West bank had been hindered by routine incursions by the Israel Defense Forces, he said: "The time has come for Israel to fundamentally change its policies in this regard, as it has repeatedly promised to do." There must be a full settlement freeze in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including from natural growth. "Furthermore, I am extremely worried about intensifying Israeli actions to alter the status of East Jerusalem."

She concluded: "Our shared challenge is to begin implementing transformative changes on the ground and to create irreversible momentum towards an Israeli-Palestinian agreement." The objective was clear: an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. "Resolving this conflict is fundamental to the secure future of Israelis, Palestinians, the region and the world."

Statements

Committee' Chairman BADJI ([Senegal](#)) said the Palestinian people's basic right to their own State within the 1967 borders, and East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the rights of refugees to return, resonated deeply with countries that had had to go through painful struggles on their own path to national independence. Denial of that right, solemnly promised more than 60 years ago, could not fail but to cause resentment, which stoked the flames of extremism and violence worldwide.

A certain sense of conflict fatigue had taken hold within the international community, he said. Months after the bloody conflict in Gaza and billions of dollars in assistance pledges later, reconstruction aid remained hostage to politics. Opening all the Gaza crossings was a top priority. At the same time, ongoing efforts to heal the intra-Palestinian divisions, facilitated by Egypt, were yet to bring about the desired reconciliation. Any action to alter the status of East Jerusalem was detrimental to the peace process, contravened Security Council resolutions and constituted a violation of international law.

He said that statements by the Israel leadership that the conflict could not be resolved but only "managed" and that "economic peace" with the Palestinians was the way to go should be firmly rejected as an attempt to divert attention from the core issue, which was political in nature. Another worrying development concerned the "wholesale" violation of international humanitarian law, especially during the recent Gaza conflict. The Committee would convene a meeting on 22 and 23 July at the United Nations Office at Geneva to deal with that aspect and look at the results of international investigations into the events in Gaza.

The Committee viewed with "cautious optimism" the recent steps by the Obama Administration, which signalled a renewed engagement in the region and especially regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said. The new Administration seemed to be more willing to hold Israel publicly accountable, in particular with regard to settlements. The Meeting should consider ways in which Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society could be supportive in moving the peace process forward.

He said the Meeting might wish to consider how States of Asia and the Pacific could effectively contribute to resolving the conflict through their actions in national and intergovernmental mechanisms. The Meeting's objective was to encourage broad international action, including by Asian and Pacific States and societies, in support of a negotiated solution to the conflict based on a shared vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

FARIZ MEHDAMI, Ambassador of [Palestine](#) to Indonesia, read out the statement of Abdel Rahim Malouh, Representative of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, because the Israeli Government had denied Mr. Malouh a

travel permit.

He said the urgency of ending the tragedy and injustice imposed on Palestine and its people could not be overstated, but despite their suffering, the Palestinian people remained resilient in their struggle to realize their inalienable human rights, including their rights to self-determination and return. Following the aggression against Gaza and the election of a right-wing, extremist Israeli Government, the situation on the ground had deteriorated and tensions were rising. Despite and because of that dismal state of affairs, "we must be steadfast in our conviction that our collective action, based on international legality and morality, can and will salvage the prospects for peace".

The international community must find the political will necessary for real progress towards peace, justice, respect for human rights and the promotion of stability and security in the region and beyond, he continued. Immediate efforts must be undertaken to bring about changes, both politically and physically on the ground, to make the two-State solution for peace a reality. That, of course required a change in Israel's behaviour to bring it into compliance with international law and with its commitments under the Road Map and previous agreements.

He said the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza must end immediately. Israel must also cease its raids and arrest operations in the West Bank, as well as its illegal settlement colonization campaign, including in East Jerusalem, where the colonization drive was most intense and had already caused isolation from the rest of the Territory. "Without a complete cessation of all settlement activities, Israel's credibility as a partner for peace will remain in serious doubt and the resumption of negotiations will be futile." Israel must also stop construction of the wall and halt settler terrorism.

The international community, including the Security Council, must uphold its responsibility and concretely act to compel the occupying Power to comply with its legal obligations, he continued. If confronted with continued defiance, it must take practical measures to advance the overall goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

JORGE LEON ([Cuba](#)), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, expressed regret for the lack of progress, despite increased international efforts to address the major issues and follow up core positions regarding the question of Palestine. There was a need for intensified and coordinated efforts by the international community to promote a genuine peace process and ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, which were of key importance to a peaceful solution.

He called on the international community, including the Security Council, to ensure serious follow-up investigations of all crimes and violations committed by Israel in Gaza, and reaffirmed the obligations of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions with regard to sanctions. The Non-Aligned Movement condemned Israel's inhuman and unlawful blockade of Gaza and demanded that it allow the immediate and sustained opening of all crossings. It also called for intensified efforts by the international community, in particular the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet, to address the current political and humanitarian crisis.

Reiterating the Movement's deep concern about the extensive physical, economic and social devastation caused by the Israeli settlements, the wall and checkpoints, he said the illegal colonization campaign was gravely undermining the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and jeopardizing achievement of the two-State solution. The Non-Aligned Movement was gravely concerned about the situation in and around East Jerusalem, where Israel's intense colonization campaign was clearly aimed at illegally altering the city's character and legal status. It stressed the incompatibility of peace process negotiations with such colonization activities and reaffirmed the many Security Council and General Assembly resolutions demanding a cessation of those practices, which were deemed to be null and void and with no legal validity whatsoever.

ANISUL HAQUE ([Bangladesh](#)) said his country supported the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to an independent State of their own with East Jerusalem as its capital, to be established without delay. It was the world's wish that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples live side by side in tranquillity as they had done for centuries past. Palestine was the holy land from which three great religions had emanated, and it was a pity that, today, that very land was torn by strife. However, there was sufficient consensus among the Governments and peoples of the world to help the Israeli regime accept the bare minimum of the just rights of the Palestinians.

MOHAMED MAJDI ([Morocco](#)) said resuming the negotiations and restarting the Middle East peace process had become the most urgent issues in the world. The international community should make greater efforts to end the critical situation and implement international resolutions on restoring peace and security in the region. Morocco would continue to work for the achievement of lasting peace based on the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace, and in support of Palestinian unity. Utmost attention should be paid to implementation of the Road Map, Security Council resolutions and other agreements. The special status of Jerusalem must be respected.

PRASITH SAIYASITH ([Lao People's Democratic Republic](#)) said the continued occupation of Palestine was the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. Lasting peace would not exist unless Palestinian statehood was realized. The two-State solution was the only sustainable one to the long-lasting conflict. At the current politically delicate juncture, the priority for both sides remained, as much as ever, pursuit of that solution. Both parties must strive for a peaceful dialogue and meaningful political negotiations, with indispensable international support. However, the key to a solution was in the hands of the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The realization of a two-State solution required that Israel first freeze its settlement activities, withdraw from the West Bank and restore freedom of movement of Palestinians, he said. Action on the ground, together with a genuine readiness to negotiate on all core issues, including Jerusalem, borders and refugees, based on Israel's existing promises, would be the true test of its commitment to a two-State solution. On the Palestinian side, steadfast commitments and sacrifices were needed in reconciliation efforts to heal divisions and achieve the unification of the Palestinian political factions.

MOHAMED HASSAN SHABBO, [League of Arab States](#), said the situation had changed following the barbaric assault on Gaza, and actions towards establishing a two-State solution should start immediately. The Arab world had reaffirmed its commitment to peace on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative and in accordance with the Road Map and the two-State solution. The Palestinian factions should reconcile their differences and streamline their positions for future negotiations.

The new Government in Israel had started by sending negative messages about the peace process and setting conditions for negotiations, he said. Concerted efforts to extend settlements and to change the character of Jerusalem had begun. The new United States Administration had committed itself to changing its focus and content vis-à-vis the problems in the Middle East. Hopefully, the Quartet, the United States and the forthcoming meeting in Moscow would galvanize the will to come to a final solution of the problem, as well as support for the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution.

AHMED EL KEWAISNY ([Egypt](#)), expressed concern at the slow pace of efforts to reach a comprehensive and just peace. The occupying Power continued to blockade Gaza, as well as its settlement activities in the West Bank and attempts to change the character of Jerusalem, all of which ruined Palestinian hopes for stability and stoked the volatile situation in the region. Because the division among the Palestinians had led to difficulties in restoring their rights, Egypt was sponsoring a dialogue between Palestinian factions to heal the rift. The occupying Power must lift its blockade of Gaza and start a serious negotiation process based on the land for peace principle and with reference to all relevant Security Council resolutions.

AKHTAR ALI SULEHRI ([Pakistan](#)) said the plight of the Palestinian people represented a human tragedy that had gone on for too long, noting that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza lived in a limbo. A just solution to the crisis must include a viable Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-State solution. Pakistan supported all peace efforts based on relevant Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. It strongly condemned Israeli

efforts to change the character of Jerusalem, including excavation activities near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in disregard of international law.

MUKTESH PARDESHI ([India](#)) stressed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was political in nature and could not be resolved by force. Israeli actions in Gaza had not enhanced the political process and India was disappointed that the Annapolis process had not led to a breakthrough. India supported all tracks of the peace process on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions. It had consistently supported the Palestinian people in their quest for a viable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel – a goal which could only be achieved by peaceful means. India called for an end to settlement activities and for a sustained easing of movement restrictions.

RAUL ANTONIO ESKILSEN ARIAS ([Panama](#)) said his country supported peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the basis of two democratic States, living in peace and security, and the establishment of an economically viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders. All Palestinian political groups must come to an agreement in order to create a strong and united Government. Israel must stop the illegal wall construction and settlement activities in the West Bank. It should also allow commercial activities in Gaza. Rocket attacks against Israel, as well as punitive Israeli incursions into Palestinian territories, must stop.

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