



Secretary-General SG/SM/10633

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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN

AT UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, 13 SEPTEMBER 2006

Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, I have just come back from a trip to the Middle East.

My first stop was Brussels, where I worked with the European leaders to generate the force necessary for south Lebanon. And I therefore left Brussels with about 7,000 European troops pledged. From there I went to Lebanon, and Israel, and I think you have seen the report I have put out. But let me say that, throughout my visit, almost every leader I met felt that Lebanon was a wake up call, and we should really focus on stabilizing the situation in Lebanon, and relations between Lebanon and Israel, but not stop there – build on from there to deal with other conflicts in the region – Palestine, the Golan Heights. And of course you also know that since then, the Arab League and other leaders have put forward a proposal to the [Security] Council that there be a ministerial meeting next week, discussing the issue of peace in the Middle East.

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Q: You started out by mentioning the need to revive the entire Middle East peace process. The question of whether there is going to be a ministerial meeting next week remains in question. Is this a meeting you support? And what do you believe the outcome should be? I know we're not allowed second questions, but on the same Mideast issue, could you comment on the meeting that I hear you're planning on Iraq?

SG: I think the Security Council is discussing the meeting. I spoke to the President about it yesterday. He said it's not quite settled yet, but a vast majority of the Council members want it. I don't think the intention -- from what the initiators have told me -- is to come with concrete solutions, but really to discuss the issue and raise awareness as to the urgency of tackling the outstanding peace issues in the region, as well as perhaps asking the Council to think through and come up with a mechanism or commission a report that would make recommendations as to how to proceed in the future.

I think that sort of discussion can be healthy, I don't think we should be worried about that. Of course, if one is going to take concrete action, that will have to be planned properly, and it will take time. But the kind of frank discussions we are going to have should not bother anyone.

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Q: Mr. Secretary. I would like to ask you, in the light of having a non-nuclear Middle East, what have you done, or what would you do, to encourage Israel to join the NPT? A follow-up question is, from your point of view, what is the optimal solution to overcome the existing problem among the parties?

The President: Existing problem?

Q: Existing problems among the parties, that means get rid of the differences, come up with the optimal solution. You know what I mean by optimal solution?

SG: I know that the question of Israel having a nuclear bomb has been at the top of the discussions in the region. Even as we discuss the Iranian issues, sometimes the question is raised: Why are you focusing on Iran but not on Israel? But the fact is that Iran is a member of the NPT. Iran entered into certain commitments and certain understandings with the international community, and it is being asked to live up to them.

I think, as far as the nuclear-free zone region, I think most of the Governments in the region would prefer to see a nuclear-free zone. They would prefer to avoid an arms race, an arms race that becomes more than the acquisition of conventional weapons but even competition to acquire nuclear weapons. So they are following what is happening in the debate on this whole nuclear issue very, very carefully. So the stakes are quite high as to how we handle this problem

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Q: Mr. Secretary-General, as part of the Quartet, do you think that the Quartet reached a dead end with each Roadmap? And in the light of the forthcoming meeting on the issues of the Middle East, do you have any ideas about any creative new mechanisms that could be proposed? Or are we going to start from point one again?

The Secretary General: I think the Roadmap could have been implemented much faster, or we had hoped it would have been implemented much faster. Alas, it has not been. We are going to meet here next week, and we are meeting at a very critical time for the people in Palestine.

[On Monday] I got a call from President Abbas to tell me that they have reached an agreement with Hamas about forming a unity Government. I think this is a very important development. He also went on to say that the programme they have adopted requires all members of the Government to accept the programme of the

PLO and all the agreements they had entered into earlier, and that he felt this decision should satisfy the requirements and the conditions demanded by the international community.

If that is indeed the case, he should really allow the international community and the donor community to move ahead very quickly and provide the assistance that the Palestinian people need, because it is a very desperate and serious situation. Teachers are on strike, people have not been paid for 6 months. We have a temporary mechanism, which allows some money to go in, but to pay for humanitarian services, but not for salaries. It's become a very complex situation that the Quartet will be looking at when we meet next week to review the impact of our own policies and what has happened on the ground.

I was also very encouraged to see that the Israeli courts released 18 parliamentarians who had been in prison. So justice took its course, and it shows what an effective justice system in a democracy can do. I was very relieved to see that these people can go back and resume their work in their parliament.

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