
Security Council members consult intensively on formal response to latest upsurge of Middle East violence

23 September – Working until midnight, the Security Council today held intensive consultations on how to respond to the latest clashes in the Middle East, considering various proposals behind closed doors in an effort to achieve agreement among the body's 15 members.

The Council's negotiations were held in the afternoon, early evening and late night on a day which also saw a public debate involving representatives of several dozen countries who offered their views on the situation in the region, including the question of Palestine.

The meeting was convened in response to a letter from the Permanent Observer for Palestine, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group, requesting that the Council consider "the continued escalation of the Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority in total disregard of the resolutions of the Security Council."

The Arab Group also asked that the Council "consider the adoption of the necessary immediate measures to ensure an end to the current tragic situation and the implementation of the Security Council resolutions."

Addressing the Council, the Observer for Palestine, Nasser Al-Kidwa, said the reoccupation of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah showed that there were no limits on Israel's criminal activity through State terrorism. Meanwhile, the international community was unable to act, as a result of the position of one of the Council's permanent members. He called on the Council to adopt a resolution demanding that Israel withdraw immediately from Mr.

Arafat's headquarters. He added that a return to the peace process would require a comprehensive approach to political, economic and security dimensions, along with a declaration of the form of a final settlement. That approach should be enhanced by the presence of international observers or a multinational force.

Yehuda Lancry of Israel said it was no coincidence that terrorist attacks had wreaked carnage in Tel Aviv when security precautions had been relaxed. This affirmed what Israel had always stated – that the Israeli military was the only barrier between Palestinian terrorists and their Israeli victims. Unfortunately, with every step forward, terrorism forced Israel to take another step backward. Terror was making the conflict entrenched. He said the Palestinian leadership must end the financial, logistical and moral support it provided to terrorist organizations, and must dismantle the infrastructure on which those terrorists depended. Such steps were essential to reaching the only enduring solution to the conflict in the region leading to two States living side by side in peace and security.

In the debate that followed, many participants echoed the statement made at the outset by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who decried the recent upsurge in violence, which he pointed out marked a step backwards from efforts by the diplomatic Quartet – the UN, European Union, Russian Federation and United States – to achieve a final settlement. Numerous delegates, while denouncing terrorism, called for an immediate end to the Israeli siege of President Arafat's compound and stressed the need for the Council to ensure that its resolutions on the situation in the Middle East are implemented.

While largely backing of those views, Ambassador John Negroponte of the United States said Washington would not support the adoption of a one-sided text that failed to condemn acts of terror and the groups that perpetrated them, and failed to call for the dismantling of the networks that threatened all people in the Middle East.