

19 July 2007

STATEMENT BY MIDDLE EAST QUARTET

The following statement was issued today by the Quartet (United Nations, Russian Federation, United States and European Union):

The Quartet principals -- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner -- met today in Portugal to discuss the situation in the Middle East. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

The Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to bring about an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to work to lay the foundation for the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as a step towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, consistent with the Road Map and United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The Quartet welcomed President [George W.] Bush's 16 July statement renewing United States commitment to a negotiated two-State solution, and supported President Bush's call for an international meeting in the fall. The Quartet looks forward to consultations as the meeting is prepared. The Quartet agreed that such a meeting should provide diplomatic support for the parties in their bilateral discussions and negotiations in order to move forward on a successful path to a Palestinian State.

The Quartet welcomed the agreement by Tony Blair to be the Quartet Representative and discussed with him the urgent work that lies ahead. Noting the centrality of reform, economic development and institutional capacity-building to the establishment of a stable and prosperous Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians and live in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours, the Quartet urged the parties and all States in the region to work closely with Mr. Blair, and encouraged robust international support for his efforts, including the convening of an ad hoc liaison committee meeting in the fall.

The Quartet expressed support for the Palestinian Authority Government headed by Salam Fayyad, which is committed to the political platform of President [Mahmoud] Abbas that reflects the 30 January 2006 Quartet principles. The Quartet encouraged direct and rapid financial assistance and other aid to the Palestinian Authority Government to help reform, preserve and strengthen vital Palestinian institutions and infrastructure, and to support the rule of law.

The Quartet welcomed the resumption of bilateral talks between Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert and President Abbas, and expressed support for steps taken by the Israeli Government, including the resumption of tax and customs revenue transfers and the

decision to release Palestinian prisoners. The Quartet encouraged continued bilateral dialogue and further cooperation, including on the political horizon, as the necessary framework to move forward. It urged both parties to work without delay to fulfil their previous commitments and to build confidence.

Recognizing the continuing importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet looked forward to the planned visit to Israel by representatives of the Arab League to discuss the Initiative. The Quartet expressed support for continued and expanded dialogue between Israel and the Arab States. It looked forward to an early meeting with the Arab States to follow up on their May meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh.

The Quartet emphasized the need to find ways to sustain Palestinian economic activity and the importance of creating circumstances that would allow for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, particularly in view of the impact of crossings on the Palestinian economy and daily life. The Quartet encouraged both parties to address their Road Map obligations, including an end to settlement expansion and the removal of unauthorized outposts, and an end to violence and terror. The Quartet expressed its deep concern over the humanitarian conditions in Gaza, and agreed on the importance of continued emergency and humanitarian assistance.

The Quartet agreed to continue to consult regularly on developments, and to meet again in September to take stock of developments, hear from Mr. Blair on his strategy for the economic and institutional agenda, and discuss the way ahead.