

ROAD MAP REMAINS 'MOST PRACTICAL WAY' TO ACHIEVE ASPIRATIONS OF ISRAELIS, PALESTINIANS, SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

12 March 2014 - Following is today's statement by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the opening of the 2004 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People:

In the wake of yesterday's terrible tragedy in Madrid I would like to reiterate my profound and most heartfelt sympathy to King Juan Carlos I of Spain, to the Government and people of Spain, and to the families and friends of the people who were killed and injured.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in observing a minute of silence in memory of the innocent victims of this tragedy.

The situation between the Palestinians and Israelis remains extremely tense. There has been no discernible progress in peace efforts. The goal of the Palestinians -- an end to the occupation and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine -- is still out of reach. The hope of the Israelis for security is yet to be realized.

Instead, the situation on the ground has once again been shaken by a wave of violence. Israeli incursions into Palestinian cities, arrests, house demolitions, closures and curfews have continued. Targeted assassinations have resumed. Their victims have not only been their intended targets -- tragically, many civilians going about their daily lives in the crowded streets have also been killed.

Over the last few years Palestinian terrorist attacks have claimed many innocent civilian lives in Israel. There is no justification for such crimes. Efforts to achieve a comprehensive ceasefire, which would help prevent such horrific acts, have so far produced no results.

Palestinians are dismayed to see more and more of their land being taken to make way for the expansion of the barrier, the construction of which has generated heated protests, adding to Palestinian anger and desperation.

The death toll since September 2000 continues to climb. It has now reached over 3,000 Palestinians and over 900 Israelis dead. Thousands more have been wounded. Most of those killed have been civilians, many of them children.

The price already paid by both Israelis and Palestinians has been far too high. Let us waste no more time. There is an urgent need for a negotiated settlement to this deadly conflict.

The lack of any tangible progress towards a peaceful settlement has raised the level of hopelessness and despair among ordinary Palestinians and Israelis. Frustrated by the stalemate in the peace process, civil society has begun exploring possible pathways that could stimulate peacemaking and push the process forward. Late last year, the Geneva Initiative and the Ayalon-Nusseibeh statement of principles sent a powerful message that differences could be bridged and that a dialogue was possible.

But only a clear political resolve on the part of the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships will break the impasse and restart the process. Attempts by either side to resolve this drawn-out conflict unilaterally could actually foment more anger and violence. There is no substitute for the two parties sitting down and working out with each other the details of an agreement that both peoples can live with.

The “Road Map”, launched in 2002, was accepted by both parties. It enjoys broad support from the international community. Based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, it remains the most practical way of achieving the aspirations of both sides. In resolution 1515, the Council further bolstered support for the Road Map. The objective of the resolution is clear — two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Today, I call on both parties to take immediate and specific steps to implement the plan without preconditions. I urge the Palestinian Authority to take resolute action to halt terror attacks by militant groups against Israelis. Meanwhile, I urge the Israeli Government to halt further settlement expansion and the construction of the barrier. Israeli Prime Minister Sharon’s announcement of a plan to evacuate the Gaza Strip settlements is encouraging. I look forward to seeing a timetable for that. An evacuation of Gaza strip settlements should be seen as part of a broader process, an interim step that could revitalize stalled peace efforts, consistent with the Road Map.

For its part, the international community should assert itself to help the two sides out of the present deadlock. For their part, representatives of the Quartet must try harder to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met in Rome last December to secure financial assistance for the Palestinian people, who continue to endure a devastating economic and humanitarian crisis. The Special Coordinator and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continue their work, as do other United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund— some of them with limited resources, and

all under extremely difficult conditions. International help is particularly crucial at this time. The United Nations will continue its work, but it needs the international community to give generously.

This Committee has an important role to play in efforts to reach our common goals. I thank you for your continued commitment to peace in the Middle East, and I wish you success in carrying out your mandate.

Link: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sgsm9194.doc.htm>