

Annan calls on Israel, Palestinians and international donors to consolidate peace

Press Release, 15 July 2003 – For the latest Middle East peace plan to succeed, Israel should ease security measures to minimize Palestinian suffering, the Palestinian Authority must act decisively to prevent terrorism and the international community must increase its support to halt the Palestinians' downward spiral of social and economic despair, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said today.

"The Quartet and the international community must hold the parties to their commitments and help them to implement the Road Map, until they reach its final goal," Mr. Annan said in a message to a UN Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, convened in Geneva by the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The Road Map plan, launched by the diplomatic quartet of the UN, United States, European Union and Russia, seeks to end the conflict by 2005 with a two-state solution - Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders achieved through parallel and reciprocal steps.

"But as the parties and the international community work towards the goal of a permanent settlement, each and every day the Palestinian people suffer," Mr. Annan said in the message, read by Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). "They live in circumstances of social and economic devastation. During the last few years, not only have many thousands been killed or wounded, but the infrastructure and productive sectors of the Palestinian economy have been virtually destroyed.

"Unemployment and poverty rates have reached unprecedented levels. The capacity of the Palestinian Authority to function has been weakened. A total collapse of the Palestinian economy has only been prevented by the infusion of substantial aid and budgetary support.

"The humanitarian emergency in the occupied Palestinian territory has been exacerbated by the tightening of the stifling regime of closures and curfews, as well as by continued settlement activity and the construction of a separation wall," he added.

He stressed that Israel, too, had a right to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks. "Too many Israelis have been targeted by Palestinian groups," he said. "But Israel's security must be protected using reasonable means within the boundaries of international law."

Noting that UNRWA's "vital assistance to millions of Palestinian refugees is threatened by chronic funding shortages", he appealed to donors to contribute generously.

Although only a permanent political settlement ending the occupation can provide a durable solution to the economic and humanitarian problems of the Palestinians, Mr. Annan said improvement in their daily lives were key building blocks of a sustainable peace process.

"There has never been a more important time for the Palestinian people to see that the international community is supporting their socio-economic recovery and security," he added.

The Seminar Chairman and Chairman of the Committee, Papa Louis Fall, said the situation of the Palestinians was probably the worst it had ever been and conditions continued to deteriorate despite efforts by the Palestinian Authority and international donors and humanitarian organizations which were working against enormous odds in utterly frustrating conditions of the occupation.

In a most serious challenge to international law, Israeli settlements continued to encroach on Palestinian lands through relentless construction and the establishment of outposts, bypass roads and security zones in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Mr. Fall said.

For his part the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, John Dugard, said the wall currently being constructed by Israel in the West Bank was an obstacle to economic prosperity, and an act of annexation which obstructed the prospects of the economic recovery of Palestine. The wall was not a temporary security measure, he said. It was clear that it was intended to be a permanent fixture, with the aim of pushing the border of Israel further into Palestine.

It was time for the Quartet to make it clear that the wall could not change the boundaries between the States, and to discourage Israel from its construction, Mr. Dugard said. The Quartet was tolerating a clear seizure of Palestinian territory in order to gain Israeli support for the Road Map, and this was a form of appeasement.

The Commission's Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, said the right to food in the occupied territories had been seriously violated with a number of households suffering from chronic malnutrition. Because of the prevailing hunger in the territories, the international community was faced with a serious violation of the right to food in the region. But Mr. Ziegler noted that he had been the first Special Rapporteur ever to be welcomed by the Israeli Government.

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