

Annan calls on Israel, Palestinians to promptly implement Road Map peace plan

13 September 2004 - Voicing alarm at the humanitarian crisis created by Israeli activity in occupied Palestinian territory and strongly condemning the terrorism of Palestinian suicide bombers against Israeli civilians, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan today called for prompt implementation of the so-called Road Map peace plan.

"Otherwise, both sides will face the grim reality of a never-ending stalemate and continued violence," he told the UN International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian people at UN Headquarters in New York. Both Palestinian and Israeli non-government organizations (NGOs) are taking part in the two-day meeting.

In a message delivered by Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Kieran Prendergast, Mr. Annan stressed that a solution was spelled in the Road Map sponsored by the UN, European Union, Russia and United States, which calls for parallel and reciprocal steps by both sides leading to two States living in peace by the end of 2005.

He called the scope of the humanitarian crisis in occupied Palestinian territory "deeply disturbing," with the toll of killed and wounded escalating, house demolitions, curfews and closures having "a particularly devastating effect" on women, children and the elderly, and more than half of all Palestinians now living below the poverty line.

"I urge the Government of Israel to dismantle outposts established since March 2001, immediately freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth of settlements, and stop the construction of the barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory," he added.

"At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that some Palestinian groups continue to carry out suicide bombings and other attacks that kill Israeli civilians, fuel hatred and fear, and only serve to interfere with the national aspirations of the Palestinian people," he said. "We must all strongly and consistently condemn such terrorism, wherever and whenever it occurs. No cause can justify it.

"I urge the Palestinian Authority to take the long-awaited steps aimed at restructuring and consolidating Palestinian security services in order to confront groups that engage in terror, and to move forward along the road of reform," he added.

Mr. Annan pointed to the "unique dimensions" NGOs can bring to peaceful transition in conflict-affected parts of the world through their field experience and first-hand knowledge, praising the so-called Geneva and Nusseibeh-Ayalon initiatives in which non-governmental Israelis and Palestinians drew up a blueprint for peace.

"Such endeavours, although unofficial, offer fresh ideas for give-and-take that could be considered by official negotiators," he said. More importantly, they re-energize those discouraged and weary by proving that there are Israelis and Palestinians who are ready to make

compromises, and who believe that the peace and security of generations to come are well worth the price of compromise.

But, he cautioned, a peace settlement can only be reached through official political negotiation resulting in an agreement between the parties. And he appealed to the donor community to give generously to UN agencies "that remain actively involved on the ground during this time of great need."

Source: UN News Service