

Annan, UN bodies pay tribute to Arafat, pledging support for a Palestinian State

11 November 2004 – In messages of condolences and a solemn memorial session, the United Nations today paid tribute to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, stressing his historic acceptance of the principle of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian State and regretting that he did not live to see its realization.

The flag at UN Headquarters in New York was lowered to half mast in mourning. It was also announced that the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Personal Representative to the Palestinian Authority, Terje Roed-Larsen, will represent him at President Arafat's funeral in Cairo.

"By signing the Oslo accords (with Israel) in 1993, he took a giant step towards the realization of this vision," Mr. Annan told a memorial session of the 191-member General Assembly, which began with delegates standing to observe a minute's silence.

"It is tragic that he did not live to see it fulfilled," Mr. Annan added, calling on both Israelis and Palestinians and their friends throughout the world to make even greater efforts to bring about the peaceful realization of the Palestinian right of self-determination.

The Secretary-General pledged full support for the Road Map peace plan sponsored by the UN, European Union, Russia and United States, which calls for a series of parallel and reciprocal steps leading to two States living side-by-side in peace by 2005.

"Though President Arafat did not live to see the attainment of these goals, the world will continue to strive towards them," Mr. Annan declared, also promising a continuation of the 55-year-old UN humanitarian assistance programme "for as long as the Palestinian people need our help."

In an earlier [statement](#) issued by his spokesman, the Secretary-General conveyed his condolences to President Arafat's wife Suha and his young daughter Zahwa, and to the Palestinian people. For nearly four decades, the statement said, Mr. Arafat "expressed and symbolized in his person the national aspirations of the Palestinian people."

Meeting this morning on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 15 members of the Security Council prefaced their remarks by recalling President Arafat. Members hoped that for the Palestinian people the future would bring peace and the fulfilment of their aspirations for an independent, democratic Palestine that is at peace with its neighbours.

At the General Assembly's afternoon memorial session, the chairmen of the various regional groups took the podium to pay homage.

Ambassador Crispin Grey-Johnson of Gambia, speaking on behalf of the African States, said his delegation had been profoundly saddened by the death of Mr. Arafat, who had been the very personification of the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination. He had committed his entire life to the cause of peace and had taken the question of Palestine from being a mere footnote on the international agenda to an issue of international debate and world discourse. He had left his footprints on the sands of time, and the African Group hoped that his spirit and memory would radiate among Palestinians, as well as among all the people of the wider Middle East and beyond.

Speaking on behalf of the Asian nations, Ambassador Rezlan Ishar Jenie of Indonesia said his delegation regretted that Mr. Arafat, the father of the Palestinian movement, had been unable to see the emergence of an independent Palestinian State during his lifetime. His permanent desire was justice and peace for a people only too familiar with the harshness of oppression. And when the ferocity of the campaign against the Palestinian people did not lessen over the years, Mr. Arafat matched it with the intensity of his spirit and undying optimism. For that, he was loved and admired by people all over the world.

Belarusian Ambassador Andrei Dapkiunas, speaking on behalf of the Eastern European States, said it was his sad duty to comment on the death and extraordinary life of President Arafat, who would be remembered as a lifelong symbol of the struggle of the Palestinian people. As a person and as a statesman, he had left

an undeniable imprint, not just on the Middle East but also on the world's international political scene. His delegation conveyed its deepest sympathies to the Palestinian people.

Eduardo Sevilla Somoza, Nicaragua's Ambassador, spoke on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. He said Mr. Arafat had been an historic figure who symbolized the feelings of his people until his very last breath. The Group expressed its most heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian people, and particularly his widow and young daughter. It would also urge the Palestinian people and their leaders to keep alive the search for a free, sovereign and economically viable State dedicated to peace, not only for Palestine, but for the region and the entire world.

Ambassador Don Mackay of New Zealand, speaking on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group, said President Arafat had come to symbolize the Palestinian national movement and the aspirations of the Palestinian people. The Palestinians, and others, respected him as a leader who symbolized their long search for statehood and independence, and led the Palestinians to historic acceptance of the principle of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian State. Now, the Palestinian leadership would have to shoulder the responsibility of carrying the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, and bringing it to fruition.

Sudan's Ambassador, Omar Bashir Mohamed Manis, said on behalf of the Arab States that the late President continued to work on behalf of the Palestinian people to have an independent State, and he sacrificed everything that was precious to him to achieve that ideal. Despite forced imprisonment, he had worked to mobilize efforts with the peace process and took brave decisions with insight to pursue the establishment of an independent state through difficult negotiations. President Arafat's loss was a source of great sadness for all peace-loving nations and people, and for those who cared about the peace process in the Middle East.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, Ambassador Dirk Jan Van Den Berg of the Netherlands said that the Palestinian people had lost a historic leader and a democratically elected President. He commended the Palestinian leadership for their demonstration of dignity and responsibility to maintain the Palestinian institutions at this difficult time. The Palestinian people could count on the undiminished support of the European Union on the path toward a peaceful, durable and just settlement of the conflict.

Ambassador Rastam Mohd Isa of Malaysia, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), said President Arafat would be forever remembered for his immense courage, enormous sacrifice and strong determination in championing and protecting the inalienable right to self-determination of the people of Palestine and their claim to their own sovereign homeland. He had devoted his life to that struggle against all odds for almost four decades, including suffering the indignity of being virtually imprisoned by the Israelis. President Arafat would indelibly remain the icon of the Palestinian struggle against injustices, brutal oppression and subjugation, as well as against the forces that sought to deny the Palestinian people of their dignity, freedom and independence.

Egypt's Deputy Permanent Representative, Aboul Atta, said the pages of history would forever recognize Mr. Arafat as they had recognized Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Ghandi and all those who had struggle to achieve the dream of freedom. Mr. Arafat had also been a dedicated political leader working towards a political settlement that would end bloodshed and halt a conflict that had been clouding the international horizon for decades. The conditions in the region were developing rapidly, and while many were negative, some also gave an indication that Arafat's spirit would live on, that the peace process would be activated and that both sides would return to the negotiating table.

Somaia Barghouti, the observer of Palestine, said Mr. Arafat had left the world and his spirit had returned to his Creator, but part of that spirit would remain with the Palestinian people. He had been a liberator and had struggled to ensure that the Palestinian people were freed from the shackles of oppression and occupation. In addition, Mr. Arafat had left a great universal and national legacy, which represented hope for the future for Palestinians and all people of the world. He lived hoping to make Palestine an independent state and the people would miss his great courage, adherence to principle, clear strategic vision and wise leadership. But they could take solace that Palestine die not stand by itself in the struggle for freedom.

The Deputy Permanent Representative of Turkey, Altay Cengizer, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), said the Muslim world was aggrieved but in a most meaningful way. It joined its Palestinian brothers and sisters in their loss. President Arafat epitomized the rightful struggle of his people. The flame he lit with courage and self-determination, and which had remained unabated for half a century, would continue until Palestinian statehood was achieved. He paid tribute to President Arafat's unforgettable memory and his struggle on the side of justice. He prayed for the late President's soul, for his family and brethren around the world, and saluted his ideal, which would never fade away.

Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said the Palestinian people had lost a leader who, for decades, had been a powerful symbol of their national aspiration, unity and steadfastness, and who devoted most of his life to the struggle against the occupation and for the realization of their inalienable rights. The Committee was hopeful that the Palestinian people would remain united and determined to continue along the road of peace charted by President Arafat.

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