

Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan

**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Thursday, 21 September 2006

Like no other conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict carries a powerful symbolic and emotional charge for people throughout the world. The narratives of the two sides — dispossession, prolonged occupation and denial of statehood on one side, terrorism and existential threats on the other — stir the fears and passions of people of many nations. And our continued failure to resolve this conflict calls into question the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Security Council itself.

The events of this summer have reminded us all how dangerous it is to leave the broader Arab-Israeli conflict unresolved and how interconnected the region's problems are. At the same time, the role of the Security Council in bringing about the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah and charting the way towards a sustainable ceasefire through resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#) showed that it can play a vital role in the search for peace in the region. Resolution 1701 (2006) rightly stressed the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the Council's earlier relevant resolutions. To do this, we must make progress on the issue at the heart of the conflict, which is the problem of Israel and Palestine.

Large majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians desire peace. What they desperately need is a bridge to enable them to reach peace from their present sad state of conflict. The bridge to peace must be wide enough to accommodate all who have a legitimate stake in the process, long enough to span the enormous gulf of mistrust that separates the parties and strong enough to withstand the efforts that will inevitably be made to sabotage it.

Yesterday, I stressed to my Quartet partners that the existing bridge to peace is badly in need of repair. Its foundations seem weak, since both parties have failed to take the concrete actions needed to meet their existing obligations. And the destination on the far side — an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and a secure Israel at peace with all its neighbours, including a new Palestinian State — remains distant, ill-defined and, for many, almost unimaginable.

Today we are dealing with a difficult situation in Gaza, where we see closures and a Palestinian Authority that is starved of resources. Palestinian schools, ministries and other institutions are now in sharp decline. Palestinian society is rapidly becoming poorer. If this were to continue and the Palestinian Authority were to collapse, the consequent fragmentation and radicalization of Palestinian society would be a terrible, perhaps irreversible, strategic setback.

Today, Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank living under occupation have neither a State nor a functioning government. Is it any wonder that they look to the international community for protection, for help and for hope? And if this is not forthcoming, the young people of Palestine will, sadly, be attracted by the false promises of those who advocate violence.

For their part, Israelis rightly demand an end to rocket attacks against the towns and kibbutzim of southern Israel, the return of the soldier captured on 25 June and a Palestinian Authority that accepts basic principles of peace and takes credible action to prevent attacks against Israel. Yet in the absence of a political process, which is the only way of bringing about lasting peace, Israelis naturally look to their own military to deal with security threats.

It would be easy for the international community to declare that the parties are not ready for dialogue and that until they are there is little that can be done. But that would be deeply disappointing. It would also be unfair to the parties themselves.

Poll after poll shows that people on both sides understand that there is no military solution to the conflict. These same polls show that people understand that a two-State solution cannot be achieved through unilateral actions by either side. I am convinced that both the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Olmert, and the Palestinian President, Mr. Abbas, understand these realities and are searching for a way forward. I send both of them my strong support, as the Quartet did yesterday.

The Quartet also encouraged efforts to form a Palestinian national unity government, in the hope that the programme of such a government will reflect Quartet principles and facilitate early engagement by the international community. President Abbas's wisdom in pursuing this path must be recognized. So must the efforts of Palestinian Prime Minister Haniyeh.

During the meeting, I also reminded my Quartet partners that the Quartet itself must be more active and effective if confidence in the peace process is to be restored. I am glad to say the Quartet agreed that greater engagement is crucial — on the ground, with the parties and in the region.

But the test will be action. The parties must now rise to their responsibilities; so must the Quartet and our partners in the region; and so must the Security Council. With all the tools at our disposal, let us work together to put in place a credible political process based on dialogue, parallel implementation of obligations, monitoring of performance and clarity as to the end goal. The time has come to rebuild the shattered bridge to peace.