

ISRAEL'S GAZA WITHDRAWAL COULD BE BRIDGE TOWARDS RESUMING MEANINGFUL PEACE PROCESS, SAYS SECRETARY- GENERAL TO CAPE TOWN MEETING

29 June 2004: I send my greetings to all who have come to Cape Town to participate in this important meeting organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I also take this opportunity to extend my warmest greetings to the people of South Africa, whose peaceful efforts to transform their country into a non-racial, multi-party democracy and to heal the divisions of the past should be a source of hope for all peoples still locked in unresolved conflict.

Israelis and Palestinians continue to yearn for a life of peace, prosperity and harmony. Regrettably, the conflict between them has intensified. Violence and counter-violence, extrajudicial killings and suicide bombings, have continued at an alarming pace. Israeli army incursions and the widespread demolition of houses, most recently in the Rafah area, have caused great misery and torment for the Palestinian people.

In May, the Security Council adopted resolution 1544 calling on Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law and in particular its obligations not to demolish Palestinian homes. The resolution also called on both parties immediately to implement their obligations under the Quartet's Road Map. Both parties have accepted the Road Map, which envisions two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders.

I appeal to the parties to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map and international law. Israel should cease its practice of extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, and other practices which violate its obligations as an occupying power to protect the civilian population. The Palestinian Authority should take decisive action to halt all acts of terrorism against Israeli civilians. It should also take steps to reform Palestinian security forces and empower the position of Prime Minister.

The construction of the barrier in the West Bank continues to be a cause of great concern as well. The project has resulted in the confiscation of Palestinian land and restrictions on the

freedom of movement of people and goods. It also runs contrary to the spirit of the Road Map, as it threatens the future establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State.

The international community stands ready to assist the parties in realizing their aspirations for peace. On 4 May, the Quartet met in New York. The communiqué issued at the meeting reaffirmed a number of important principles. The Quartet stressed that a final settlement of the conflict should be negotiated between the parties themselves. It should be arrived at on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, the terms of the Madrid peace process, the principle of land for peace, previous agreements, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit, and it should be consistent with the Road Map.

The Quartet believes that the declared intention of the Government of Israel to withdraw from all Gaza settlements and parts of the West Bank could provide a rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East. Withdrawal from Gaza might even be used as a bridge back towards resuming a meaningful peace process — if it is complete, if it is done in consultation with the Palestinian Authority, and if it is carried out as part of the Quartet's Roadmap. It must also lead clearly to an end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

The United Nations, together with international donors and civil society, is determined to continue its work to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people and alleviate the humanitarian situation that has worsened so dramatically during more than three years of strife and movement restrictions. UNRWA's support for the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is ever more crucial, particularly when over 60 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. Around 1.1 million depend on the Agency for food aid, up from less than 130,000 in September 2000. I therefore reiterate my call to the donor community to fully meet the urgent requirements identified by UNRWA and other United Nations agencies to address humanitarian needs in the occupied Palestinian territory.

I extend my best wishes to this gathering taking place in southern Africa. I hope that the vision, energy and experience of the eminent personalities and participants at this Meeting will generate fresh ideas and open up unexplored avenues, aimed at building understanding and peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Allow me also to extend my gratitude to the Committee for its tireless work towards peace in the Middle East.

Link: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sgsm9395.doc.htm>