

PEACE, END TO OCCUPATION, SECURITY FOR ISRAELIS ALL POSSIBLE, SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIANS

STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIANS

Following is the message of Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November 2003:

I join with those from around the world who today express the deepest solidarity with the Palestinian people in their continued suffering. They remain stateless and oppressed. In expressing solidarity with them, I do not ignore the suffering of the people of Israel. They remain insecure and terrorized. The terrible events of the past three years, and the dire situation on the ground today, should be proof to all that the more each side harms the other, the more it wounds itself, and the more it jeopardizes chances for a peaceful settlement.

Israeli actions -- such as extrajudicial killings, use of heavy weapons against civilians, demolition of houses, continued expansion of settlements, and the building of a barrier that cuts deep into Palestinian territory -- have enhanced misery and feelings of helplessness among Palestinians. They have undermined efforts to curb violence and fuelled hatred and anger towards Israel. They have pushed back the day when Israel will live without fear within secure and recognized borders.

Palestinian suicide bombings, on the other hand, have indiscriminately killed innocent Israeli civilians in acts of wanton and deliberate terrorism. These heinous acts can have no justification and must be consistently and unreservedly condemned. They have destroyed efforts at building bridges of reconciliation and trust between the two peoples. They have pushed back the day when Palestinians will live in peace and security within their own State.

The violence over the past three years has claimed thousands of lives. The majority of them have been Palestinians, but there have also been many Israelis. Many of those killed have been children. However, there is no military solution to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. The only solution lies in a political process -- one that results in a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

Recent initiatives of civil society have made that point with courage and clarity. I refer, in particular, to the Geneva initiative in which Palestinians and Israelis negotiated and agreed to a detailed plan to comprehensively resolve the conflict, and to the Ayalon-Nusseibeh statement of principles. These efforts show the capacity of Palestinians and Israelis to act with reason and restraint, and to agree on terms to live side-by-side in peace. They have caught the imagination of both peoples. They should inspire in all the burning conviction that a settlement can be achieved.

The efforts of civil society are, however, no substitute for official action. The Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority have made solemn commitments, and they must act to meet them, rather than waiting for the other to act first. Recently, there has been a period of relative calm, and there have been indications that we may begin to see steps in the right direction. The Government of Israel has declared its readiness to carry out its Road Map obligations. A new cabinet of the Palestinian Authority is in place with the declared intention of taking steps to establish law and order, control violence and combat terrorism. There is hope that the two Prime Ministers may meet soon, and of another ceasefire. These tender shoots must be nourished. At the same time, the parties must be judged not by their stated intentions but by their actions on the ground.

The international community needs to be prepared to take bold action itself. I welcome the endorsement of the Quartet's Road Map by the Security Council in Resolution 1515. It provides a strong platform for the Quartet and other members of the international community to assist the parties to implement the Road Map, and to hold them to their obligations and commitments under it. As I have stated to the Quartet, I believe these efforts should be bolstered by an international presence on the ground.

Meanwhile, great efforts are needed to address the humanitarian emergency and economic devastation experienced by the Palestinian people. Abject poverty, unemployment, children out of school, and a strong overall sense of frustration and despair -- all these are part of the day-to-day life of Palestinians under occupation. So too is the hardship caused by the severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, closures and curfews, roadblocks and checkpoints, and the construction of the separation barrier about which I have just reported to the General Assembly. The Palestinian Authority's institutions and its capacity to work with its people have been seriously undercut since September 2000.

The international donor community needs to contribute generously in this time of great need. And the Government of Israel must allow the fullest access by humanitarian convoys and relief missions to the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Under difficult conditions, the United Nations provides a wide-range of assistance to the Palestinian people, through the work of OCHA, WFP, UNDP, UNICEF and other agencies. In spite of a funding crisis, UNRWA continues to play a vitally important role in addressing the critical needs of Palestinian refugees. In the framework of the Quartet, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, who is also my Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, remains intensively engaged with all parties to support the political process and coordinate international assistance.

For my part, I pledge to continue to work with all parties for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and the principle of land for peace.

As we express today our solidarity with the Palestinian people, let us also reaffirm our conviction that peace is possible, that we can achieve an end to occupation for Palestinians and security for Israelis. Let us also remember that the parties hurt their own cause by harming the other or by waiting for the other to act first. And let us resolve not to rest until the Palestinian people finally obtain what is rightfully theirs -- the exercise of their inalienable rights in a sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

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