



**STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE, ON THE SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST AT THE
SECURITY COUNCIL ON JULY 21, 2006**

Mr. President,

We thank you for scheduling this meeting. Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor during your Presidency, allow me to congratulate you on your skilful and capable handling of it. I wish to also take this opportunity to felicitate the Ambassador of Denmark for her Presidency of the Council in the previous month.

Mr. President,

India is seriously concerned about the escalating tension in West Asia as a result of developments, in the Gaza Strip and on the Israel-Lebanese border, which have the potential to inflame the region further and widen the conflict.

India condemned the abduction of two Israeli soldiers on 12 July 2006 and has called for their immediate release. We have equally strongly condemned the excessive and disproportionate military retaliation by Israel which has targeted civilian infrastructure, including Beirut airport and resulted in the killing and suffering of innocent civilians, including women and children. The responsibility to protect women and children in armed conflict has to be real and not theoretical. At least one Indian national has been killed and several injured in the bombings that are taking place in Lebanon. There can be no justification for the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, which merits condemnation and is contrary to international law.

We call upon all parties concerned to eschew violence, de-escalate the situation, and return to the path of negotiations. It is our firm conviction that lasting peace and security in the region, which is in the interest of not only the countries of the region but of the whole

world, can be achieved only through peaceful dialogue and not through the use of force.

In his briefing to the Security Council yesterday, the Secretary-General called for a ceasefire to prevent further loss of life, provide humanitarian access and give diplomacy a chance to work. In addition, the Secretary-General elaborated the elements of a plan, suggested by the UN Mission to the region, which he said must form the political basis of any lasting ceasefire. We believe that the international community can no longer remain silent in the face of the severe escalation in the conflict, in which civilian populations have been affected, a humanitarian crisis is looming and a spill-over of the conflict beyond the region is a distinct possibility. The Secretary-General's plan offers a firm basis for discussions in the Security Council on how the issue has to be addressed. An immediate and comprehensive ceasefire would be predicated on the return of the captured Israeli soldiers, extension of the authority of the Government of Lebanon over all of its territory and immediate measures to provide relief and rehabilitation to the people of Lebanon and therefore a withdrawal of Israeli forces. Thereby the Security Council would fulfil its Charter responsibility.

As a major troop contributor to both the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), India is concerned about the conditions under which UN peacekeepers in the conflict zone are required to perform their duties. The Secretary-General, in his update yesterday on UNIFIL, stated that UNIFIL had no freedom of movement, which precluded it from even providing humanitarian escorts for displaced people, was experiencing difficulties in receiving essential supplies and was exposed to considerable risk from the ongoing exchange of fire. These are a cause for serious concern. Unilateral restrictions on UNIFIL have to be removed, and the UN's mandate and the sanctity of its personnel have to be respected.

Mr. President,

There is equal concern about the situation in the Gaza Strip. On June 12, India condemned the killing of innocent civilians, including women and children, by the Israeli Defence Forces in an unprovoked attack on June 9. India also condemned the incident at the Kerem Shalom crossing near Gaza on June 25, which provoked the threat of massive retaliatory measures by Israel.

India is seriously concerned at the hardships and sufferings of the Palestinian people as a result of the evolving situation in Gaza and the West Bank. A situation that, I may add, has been exacerbated by Israel's destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, including roads, bridges and power plants. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has assessed that nearly half the population in the Gaza Strip is currently without electricity, and that this situation could persist for up to nine months. This reduced capacity is affecting the provision of water, with daily access for families being cut by up to 50% in some parts of the Gaza Strip. India condemns the wholly unjustified arrest and continuing incarceration of Ministers of the Palestinian National Authority and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. There can be no justification whatsoever for taking such action against the duly elected representatives of the Palestinian people. We call upon Israel to release them immediately and unconditionally.

The international community needs to call for an immediate halt to hostilities on all sides, counsel utmost restraint, especially in the excessive use of force, and urge a return to dialogue. We also reiterate our call for all parties to renounce violence and resolve their differences through peaceful means. Israel must halt its offensive, withdraw its forces from their positions inside Gaza and release all political figures and other Palestinians. At the same time, the Palestinian leadership should make every effort to facilitate the release of the Israeli soldier and prevent any escalation of the conflict through rocket attacks against Israel and other extremist actions by militants.

In response to a request from the Palestinian authorities, and in keeping with India's traditional and consistent policy of extending sympathy and support to the people of Palestine, the Government of India has decided to give immediate humanitarian assistance worth Rupees 100 million to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate the difficult situation in which the Palestinian people find themselves. This is in addition to the approximately Rupees 700 million of assistance pledged last year during the visit of President Abbas to India. The assistance will be primarily in the form of life-saving drugs and medical supplies requested by the Palestinian authorities.

We support the Secretary-General's call for an immediate cessation of indiscriminate and disproportionate violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a reopening of the closed crossing points. It is unfortunate that President Abbas was held incommunicado in Gaza for the last three weeks and not allowed to meet anyone. The international

community needs to support a peace track for Gaza and President's Abbas' call for a proper dialogue with the Government of Israel.

It is our firm belief that a negotiated outcome of the long-standing conflict is the only way to ensure long-term peace, security and stability of the region, leading to the establishment of a viable, united and sovereign State of Palestine living in peaceful coexistence and harmony with the State of Israel.

Mr. President,

It is vital that the international community act to put an immediate end to the hostilities and to ensure that the conflict does not widen to engulf the entire region. We support the role of the regional powers in finding a solution to the crisis as solutions imposed through unilateral measures may not prove enduring. A comprehensive solution to the situation in West Asia, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, offers the best way forward. Our commitment to the Palestinian cause was articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and other leaders. What Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the great founders of the Non Aligned Movement, wrote in a letter of 11 July 1947 to Albert Einstein remains relevant: "I do not myself see how this problem can be resolved by violence and conflict on one side or the other. Even if such violence and conflict achieve certain ends for the moment, they must necessarily be temporary. I do earnestly hope that some kind of agreement might be arrived at between the Arabs and the Jews. I do not think even an outside power can impose its will for long or enforce some new arrangements against the will of the parties concerned".

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