



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, AT THE 10TH
EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON
NOVEMBER 17, 2006

Your Excellency, Madame President,

I thank you for convening this resumed Emergency Session of the General Assembly on a matter of grave and abiding concern to the international community—the situation in the Middle East, in particular, the core reason for instability in this region: the question of Palestine.

Madame President,

We share the deep concern voiced by many delegations at the deteriorating situation in Gaza, and the recent tragic and terrible loss of life in the region. We also share the deep sense of sorrow at the tragic tale of death, destruction, injury and misery that has been visited upon so many families, as tragedy continues to unfold over the past few months. The loss of 19 lives on November 8 at Beit Hanoun is set in the depressing context of a wider tragedy in the Middle East.

Madame President,

While we join other delegations in conveying our heartfelt condolences to all bereaved families at the losses they have suffered, we believe some form of action is essential to avoid further tragedies. We have noted the announcement by the Government of Israel of an inquiry into this incident. We hope that its results will be publicized, and that action will be taken swiftly against those responsible. We also note that the draft resolution that is before us calls for a fact-finding mission to the region. We hope that the mission returns not only with a reconstruction of the events of that tragic morning, but also with suggestions to avert the repetition of similar tragedies. These recent incidents only reinforce our conviction that moral courage of a very high order is needed to break the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence.

Madame President,

It was not long ago that the situation in the Middle East looked more promising. Just last year, we had welcomed the implementation by Israel of its disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. At that time, India described this as a significant first step that, we hoped, would culminate in a mutually acceptable, negotiated settlement in accordance with the Roadmap and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We had also hoped that democratic elections in the Palestinian areas and the formation of a new governing coalition in Israel would stimulate a welcome resumption of the peace process, just as we hoped that all concerned would show flexibility to produce compromises that are essential to transcend rigid positions.

Tragically, the outcome is the opposite. We have watched with growing alarm as the reluctance of the international community to deal with the newly-elected Palestinian government has led to both an almost-complete suspension of international assistance, as well as the withholding of Palestine's share of taxes and revenues. The resultant near-total collapse of the Palestinian economy fuels an already volatile situation, particularly among disaffected youth. Renewed rocket attacks and suicide bombings in Israel have led to civilian casualties. The abduction of an Israeli soldier led to a disproportionate and unjustifiable massive military retaliation, besides the detention of elected Palestinian representatives and Cabinet ministers. No dialogue is possible in such circumstances. The use of force and the evisceration of countervailing power can only deepen the crisis by deepening the sense of loss.

We all agree that violence will produce no durable solution—this can only come from meaningful, sincere and result-oriented dialogue; a dialogue aimed at finding a way forward. India has always advocated a peaceful settlement from the very beginning. To give just one example, Jawaharlal Nehru in a note on Palestine, recorded as early as April 4, 1948, envisaged a federation in Palestine with fully autonomous Israeli and Palestinian units. It is in this context that we have consistently urged a resumption of direct dialogue, based on the Quartet Principles. Towards this end, we have joined the vast majority of countries who consistently affirm their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution, accepted by the two principals, that would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, existing side-by-side with Israel in peace and security. We have regularly reaffirmed that the Roadmap, as endorsed by Security Council resolution 1515, remains the fundamental framework to resolve this bitter conflict. We support the call of Secretary-General to consider innovative ways by all sides in order to fully implement the Roadmap which would lead, without delay, to a solution to this conflict, based on relevant UN resolutions, including Security Council resolutions. A source of anxiety is that continuing to sow dragon teeth would make a viable state extremely difficult, besides creating bitterness for generations. Some simple and moving words of Edward Said, written in New York on January 10, 1992, remain pertinent: "If Israelis and Palestinians can have any decent future, it must be a common one, not based on the nullification of one by the other".

Madame President,

We cannot but be deeply concerned by the humanitarian cost that is often overshadowed by the larger, more gruesome headlines that violence begets. The spiral of chaos and violence has long-term implications for stability of the entire region. We call for adoption of urgent measures, to improve the humanitarian and economic conditions of the Palestinian people. In this context, we welcome the announcement two months ago by Quartet Principals, of the continuation and extension of the Temporary International Mechanism, to provide a channel for the donor community to extend assistance directly to the Palestinian people.

We have launched our own modest efforts to help avert a larger humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Apart from earlier announcements of assistance, including a grant of US\$15 million announced during President Abbas' visit to India last May, we have recently delivered the first tranche of medicines and medical supplies that formed part of an announced humanitarian assistance package worth US \$ 2 million.

In conclusion, Madame President, we hope that the Quartet and all relevant regional players will work to de-escalate the situation, end the cycle of violence and counter-violence, and avert the humanitarian crisis which presently faces us.

I thank you.

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