



Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of the Security Council. We would also like to congratulate Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul of Mauritius for the successful stewardship of the Council last month.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by South Africa on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. As we are deeply concerned at the recent developments we thought it necessary also to share our sentiments with the Security Council.

The tragic cycle of violence that has engulfed the Middle East region since September 2000 has been very damaging to peace and stability. It is a source of deep concern to all. This violence has led to the most tragic loss of hundreds of lives and grievous injuries to thousands. It has derailed the Middle East Peace Process and severely dented the trust and confidence between the parties, without which there cannot be forward movement on negotiated agreements about interim and final status issues. The longer the violence continues, the greater the danger that extremist and radical tendencies will be strengthened to the detriment of prospects for a peaceful resolution. That is why it is essential to exercise the utmost restraint, eschew violence and to shun all kind of acts that could destabilise the peace process.

Mr. President,

The unfortunate situation in occupied Palestinian territory, exacerbated by the incidents of provocation and excessive use of force, underlines the urgent need to restore calm and peace there. India has consistently stood by the Palestinian people. It has actively supported peace initiatives in the Middle East. India is committed to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and the principle of 'Land for Peace'. We support the inalienable and legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a homeland as well as the right of all States of the region, including Israel and Palestine, to exist peacefully within secure and internationally recognised boundaries.

An important issue that has vitiated the atmosphere has been the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied

Palestinian territory. The rapid growth and expansion of settlements, and the establishment of new ones, since the signing of the Oslo accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, undermines mutual confidence as also the credibility of the peace process. We trust that Israel will respect the overwhelming sentiment of the international community for a freeze on all settlement activity.

We remain convinced that, under the leadership of President Arafat, the national aspirations of the Palestinian people, for which they have waged a long struggle, can be realized. We remain vitally interested in peace, development and stability in the region and are ready to assist in whatever way we can.

Mr. President,

We believe that the Mitchell Report and the Tenet Plan are means to enable the transition from the current situation to the negotiating table, where the modalities of ending the Israeli occupation and final status issues must be resolved.

Mr. President,

Violence and terrorism have to be abjured; there can be no justification for these. We believe that given the will and determination, and a commitment to settle disputes peacefully, no odds are insurmountable, no goals too far. A spirit of accommodation and political will must imbue the negotiation process. Ultimately it is the parties themselves that have to shoulder the major responsibility for achieving a permanent and lasting solution. They must harness all their energies to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in vital mutual interest.

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