



**STATEMENT BY MR. A. GOPINATHAN, ACTING PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON APRIL 18, 2002**

Mr. President,

We thank you for convening this emergency session to discuss the ever-deteriorating situation in the Occupied Territories to which, most regrettably, no immediate end seems to be in sight.

In the past few weeks, the Council has adopted three resolutions and one presidential statement. But to no avail. The crisis continues unabated. In fact, with each passing day, it is worsening. And its reverberations are being felt in the region and beyond, the consequences of which could be unimaginable.

The continued military action of Israel, notwithstanding the Security Council resolutions as well as the calls and appeals by the international community to cease these operations and withdraw, are a cause of acute concern to all of us. As recent events have demonstrated, it has neither enhanced Israel's security nor served the cause of peace. If anything, it has only put more impediments to the collective quest for a lasting peace in the Middle East. The continued military operations by Israel or acts of retaliatory violence serve no purpose except causing loss of life, mostly of innocent civilians, including women and children, and making the divide between the peoples of Israel and Palestine even sharper. Immediate cessation of military operations and withdrawal by Israel and cease-fire are, therefore, the most urgent steps. These brook no delay as the price is being paid by the innocent on both sides, quite needlessly.

Violence witnessed in Israel and Jerusalem through horrific suicide bombings carried out by Palestinian militants against civilians cannot be justified on any ground and should end forthwith. In this context we have noted the 13th April statement, in Arabic, by President Arafat condemning acts of terrorism in all its manifestations.

Mr. President,

From all accounts, some parts of the Occupied Territories face serious humanitarian crisis over which Secretary General Kofi Annan and the international community have all expressed their deep distress and anguish. The Commissioner General

of UNRWA, Peter Hansen, and the Special Coordinator of Secretary General, Terje Roed-Larsen, have termed the situation in the Jenin refugee camp as “horrific”. We believe that there can be no justification for causing such acute crisis, not even the right of self-defence. Innocent civilian lives are sacrosanct, no matter where or whose. Due respect for international humanitarian law should be the norm of conduct. Humanitarian agencies should be allowed full access in compliance with international humanitarian principles.

Mr. President,

With each passing day we are moving inexorably away from the vision of Israel and Palestine living peacefully as two States, side by side, within secure and recognised boundaries. We therefore call for an immediate end to violence and the resumption of dialogue. Peace can only be crafted on the negotiating table and not on the treads of tanks. Resolutions 1397, 1402 and 1403 provide the road-map. The required will must be demonstrated to move on the path charted in these resolutions.

India’s support for the Palestinian cause has been consistent, strong and unwavering. We have stood and continue to stand by the Palestinian people in their struggle to achieve their legitimate national rights which are the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. India is in constant contact with several Arab countries on this issue. We stand ready to do whatever we can to bring peace to the region.

We support the Madrid Joint Statement of 10th April by the Quartet. Much hopes had been pinned on the efforts of the Quartet as well as those undertaken bilaterally. But we are still to see any meaningful progress on the urgently required steps. However, the international community cannot give up. On the contrary, efforts have to be redoubled.

Mr. President,

In a recent communication to President Arafat, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee reiterated that India considers him as a symbol of the aspirations and struggle of Palestinian people. As we have stressed in our earlier statements, we are concerned at the restrictions imposed on President Arafat who is the democratically-elected leader of the Palestinian people. For the international community as well as the Palestinian people, President Arafat is the embodiment of Palestinian nationhood. Now, and in the future, President Arafat has an important role to play. We fully share the international community’s concern about his health and well-being. India’s leadership has conveyed to Israel that by isolating President Arafat, it was compounding difficulties rather than lessening them, making the task of peace that much more difficult.

Mr. President,

In line with the Quartet statement of 10th April, we believe that Israel must immediately halt its military operations, bring about an immediate and meaningful cease-fire, withdraw immediately in full, including from Ramallah and from President Arafat’s

headquarters, allow full and unimpeded humanitarian access, and refrain from the excessive use of force and ensure protection of civilians.

A number of ideas have been proposed. We urge you Mr. President to work closely with the leadership of Palestine and Israel to craft workable solutions to steer the region out of the present imbroglio and to realise our collective vision for a lasting peace.

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