



**STATEMENT BY MR V.K. NAMBIAR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE ON SITUATION IN THE
MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON
SEPTEMBER 23, 2002**

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of the Security Council during a month charged with a full agenda coinciding as it is with the General Assembly and the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks. We thank you also for convening this emergency open meeting of the Council on the situation in the Middle East which allows us to take stock of the recent developments in this region.

Mr. President,

Although in the month leading up to September 17, 56 Palestinians and 5 Israelis lost their lives, the last six weeks from 4th August to 18th September have been unique in that they represented the longest period without a suicide bombing or major Israeli military activity since September 2000. Six weeks of relative quiet in the Middle East had given rise to hopes for the possibility of progress in addressing the conflict raging in the region. The decision of the Quartet, in its meeting of September 17, to come up with a three-phase roadmap for achieving a two-state solution within three years as well as the Quartet's meetings with the Foreign Ministers of countries in the region, were positive signs. Unfortunately, recent developments, including the two suicide attacks inside Israel, the bomb

blast in a Palestinian school and subsequent Israeli action in Ramallah have worked to negate all efforts towards reconciliation.

The reoccupation of the headquarters of the President of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah on September 19, 2002 and wanton destruction of property around the President's headquarters by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) serve no constructive purpose. Israeli forces have also reacted strongly to spontaneous Palestinian protests against Israeli actions in President Arafat's compound leading to the deaths of more Palestinians and injuries to several others. The incursions of the IDF into Palestinian-controlled areas of Gaza and the re-imposition of curfews and closures in all Palestinian cities, with the exception of Bethlehem, have taken the region back to the situation six weeks ago and set back the political process.

Mr. President,

My Government strongly deplores Israeli retaliatory measures against President Arafat and believes them to be counter-productive. We believe that far from contributing to Israel's security they can only jeopardize efforts towards peace. President Arafat remains the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and any attack against him would seriously undermine

ongoing efforts to find a solution to the conflict. We call upon the Israeli Government to completely withdraw their forces from President Arafat's compound forthwith and work with the Palestinian Authority in deescalating the situation.

The extent of the continuing humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza strip has been highlighted by the Secretary General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy Ms. Catherine Bertini who visited the region last August and, more recently, by the release of the report of the UN Special Coordinator (UNSCO) for the Middle East on "the impact of closure and other mobility restrictions on Palestinian productive activities". The UNSCO report shows that the Palestinian economy is in severe depression, with only international aid stemming a possible total breakdown. According to the report, unemployment in the Occupied Territories is around 50%, poverty levels have reached 70% in Gaza and 55% in the West Bank; while income losses are estimated at \$ 7.6 million a day, a total loss of \$ 3.3 billion since October 2000. The Secretary General has reported that despite high-level Israeli assurances of increased cooperation with the aid agencies, there have been only marginal improvements on the ground.

We urge the Government of Israel to do all that is possible to alleviate the social and economic plight of the Palestinian population by lifting closures and blockades, allowing

unhindered access to humanitarian supplies and by releasing the balance finances due to the Palestinian Authority.

The resurgence of violence threatens to derail efforts at peace as do the military measures of the IDF. The resumption of suicide bombings by militant groups are an act of random violence designed to torpedo the progress by the parties concerned to arrive at conciliatory measures. We condemn the suicide bombings and violence against innocent civilians. It is our belief that no situation, however difficult, would justify acts of violence against innocent civilians be they Israeli or Palestinian or any other people of the earth we cohabit.

Mr. President,

Another cross-road has been reached requiring another debate in the Security Council on the Middle East issue. The answer lies in persevering with efforts by all concerned towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict and in not allowing vested interests to derail a process designed to bring peace, security and economic well being to an entire generation of people in the region. India joins the international community in calling for continued forward movement in realizing the vision of two states living side-by-side within secure and recognised boundaries based on UN resolutions 242, 338 and 1397.

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