

Middle East situation, including the Palestinian question
15 March 2001

Mr. Neewoor (Mauritius):

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We believe that this meeting requested by the Arab League is appropriate and very timely for the following reasons.

First, the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which was halted several months ago as it moved into the final rounds towards a negotiated settlement, remains stalled, with no visible prospect for early resumption.

Secondly, the violence between Palestinians and Israelis, which started in September last year and which has already taken a heavy toll of lives on both sides, particularly among the Palestinians, continues, albeit at a lesser level but with no end in sight, and clouds the prospects for negotiations to start again.

Thirdly, the blockade of the Palestinian territories by Israel is inflicting untold suffering on the Palestinian people, who not only are deprived of their freedom of movement but are also unable to earn their normal livelihood. It also imposes great economic and financial hardship on the Palestinian Authority by denying essential revenues to which it is entitled.

Fourthly, in Israel a new Government under the leadership of Mr. Ariel Sharon was sworn into office last week following the recent elections, and Israel should be in a position again to resume negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

In the atmosphere of the continuing stalemate, more than enough violence has occurred, with the loss of many precious lives. The stalemate must end, and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority must resume without further delay. We believe that the international community should do all it can to encourage the two sides to get back to the task of negotiating a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. The Security Council in particular must assume its responsibility in this regard.

The Security Council had the opportunity to hear Mr. Shimon Peres, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, yesterday afternoon, and we were reassured by his statement that peace is at the centre of the policies of the new Israeli Government. The Council also heard yesterday the Ambassador of the Observer Mission of Palestine, Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, who also reaffirmed the commitment of the Palestinian Authority to peace in the Middle East. According to Mr. Peres, it is high emotions rather than politics that are preventing the peace process from moving forward.

The other reason given in this regard by Mr. Peres is the continuation of violence. Ambassador Al-Kidwa, on the other hand, gave the Council a vivid picture of the frustration of the Palestinian people and their suffering under Israel's occupation and blockade.

We would like to say to both the Israelis and the Palestinians that the two peoples have only one destiny, and that is peaceful coexistence in mutual trust. There is no other option, and to search for one is supremely futile. It has been so in the past; it is so now; and it will be so in the future. The right of the Palestinian people to an independent State is unquestionable, and so is the right of the Israelis to exist as a nation with secure borders. The rest are matters of detail that the two sides must work out at the negotiating table in a spirit of mutual accommodation, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Israel has been insisting that all violence must end before negotiations can resume. In our view, the best and surest way to end the ongoing cycle of violence is to deploy a United Nations observer force in the occupied territories. This was suggested yesterday to Mr. Shimon Peres by several delegations, including Mauritius, in the Security Council. We hope the Israeli Government will respond favourably to this important proposal. The Security Council will shortly consider a draft resolution on the Middle East that must include such a proposal, and my delegation will fully support the adoption of the draft resolution by the Council.

Last but not least, I wish to emphasize that the starting point for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be where the negotiations stood when the two sides last met. It took a long time and enormous patience and skill on both sides for the negotiations to reach that critical point from the early beginnings of the Oslo process. The important gains already achieved must be preserved and should constitute the foundation for future negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.