

**Statement by Amb. Koonjul on the The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question – 23 September 2002**

The Council is meeting today to discuss once again the situation in the Middle East following the escalation of the violence in the past few days. We have seen such violence before, but today, if the current situation is not brought under control, we run the risk of completely compromising the peace process, and we even face the possibility of wide-scale conflict.

Mauritius condemns all violence, be it in the form of reprehensible terrorist attacks and suicide bombings or in the form of the unchecked and disproportionate use of military force. Mauritius condemns, in the strongest terms, the continued siege and the systematic destruction of Chairman Arafat's compound in total defiance of resolution 1402 (2002), and we demand an immediate end to the blockade as well as the withdrawal of the Israeli Defence Forces from Ramallah.

We fully understand and support Israel's need to provide security to its people, and we deplore and condemn the attacks on its civilians. What we cannot understand is the unwarranted and unjustified siege on the Palestinian Authority, which still represents the only authority with which any peace agreement can be contemplated. The surgical destruction of the buildings around Chairman Arafat's compound aimed at isolating and humiliating him, constitutes a serious act of provocation that, in the mildest terms, not only is most unhelpful and will not stop the cycle of violence, but in fact will lead to more uncontrolled violence and more terrorist attacks. Mauritius recognizes Chairman Arafat as the elected and legitimate leader of the Palestinian people; subjugating the latter will only incite hatred and violence and will therefore serve only the motives of the extremist groups.

Mauritius is convinced that Israel's legitimate concerns will be met only through cooperation and dialogue, rather than by destroying the Palestinian Authority. The continued siege on the Palestinian headquarters will also seriously undermine and slow the reform process, the importance of which we all underscore. The need to build a new and efficient Palestinian security capability on a sound basis of unified command, transparency and accountability should be the number-one priority. We call on Israel to review its conduct and strategy in dealing with the Palestinian

Authority. Israel must realize that an improvement in the security situation can come about only if the Palestinian security institutions are not undermined and if they are allowed to operate freely and effectively.

A few months before the January elections, it is all the more important that all necessary precautions be taken to create an atmosphere conducive to the organization of those elections, in respect of which we call on all parties to ensure that they are free and fair and that nothing is done that could potentially predetermine their outcome.

As long as we do not address the root cause of the Middle East problem, we will not be able to find a long-term, durable solution. The problem of occupation and the need for the Palestinians to have their own homeland must be seriously considered. While we fully support the vision of the two States living in peace with secure borders, it is imperative that that vision be given some material shape.

In that respect, we support the efforts of the Quartet for a solution to the Middle East crisis based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), as well as the road map outlined at its meeting last week. We equally support the Quartet's vision of a three-phase plan of action for achieving a two-State solution. But we believe that the first priority after the elections of January 2003 should be a declaration of statehood for the Palestinians, with provisional borders. Such a step will be the single most effective confidence-building measure, which, in our view, will go a long way in curbing the violence, as the people of Palestine will thus be given a real ray of hope.

In order to make that happen, however, there must be strong commitments on both sides to achieve those goals. Israel should immediately stop the siege of the Palestinian Authority, withdraw its forces from the occupied areas and return to positions held prior to September 2000. It should also stop the illegal settlements. We call on the Palestinians, on their side, to honour their commitment to renounce violence and terrorist attacks.

The chilling briefing by Mr. Roed-Larsen on the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories last Friday highlighted the need for urgent action by the international community. It is important that we take a fresh look at the recommendations contained in the Bertini report and that

we harness all efforts towards the alleviation of the sufferings of the innocent Palestinians. The statistics showing 50 per cent of the population living on food hand-outs, a 50-per-cent unemployment rate, 70-per-cent poverty levels and an acute shortage in the food supply should not go unheeded. We call on the international community to assist the Palestinian people by implementing without delay the recommendations of Ms. Bertini, the Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General. We also call on Israel to lift the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people and to continue releasing funds — collected as tax revenues — that are due to the Palestinians, in order to relieve their economic hardships.

Six weeks of calm in the Middle East has not helped in making any significant headway in the peace process. It proves that a sequential approach is not going to work. Mauritius therefore supports the strategy outlined by the Secretary-General for a parallel approach, rather than a sequential one, to deal with the Middle East situation in a comprehensive manner. The diplomatic and political process should continue, along with discussions on the security and economic dimensions.

Mauritius believes that the Council must send a clear message to both sides that violence will not help to bring peace; it must be stopped, and negotiations must continue. At a time when so much importance is being given to the need for Members to respect and comply with all Security Council resolutions, it is essential that the centrality and the credibility of the Council be made to be unreservedly and indiscriminately respected by one and all.