

**Statement by Amb. Koonjul on The situation in the Middle East,
including the Palestinian question – 13 June 2002**

The Council is again meeting today to discuss the situation in the Middle East, as a result of the latest incursions by Israel in the occupied territories, particularly in Ramallah, the very seat of the Palestinian leadership. Just like the unending cycle of violence that has plagued the Middle East, it seems that the Council itself is getting drawn in a logic of action and reaction without being able to do anything concrete that will end the violence and bring a lasting solution to the Middle East problem. Indeed, in the last few months the Council has met on numerous occasions, each time because the situation on the ground had become so grave and serious that the spillover effects could have had tremendous consequences both to the peace process and to stability in the region. On some occasions, the Council has even adopted what could be termed as important resolutions, but each one of them has remained a dead letter and has been completely ignored by the party concerned.

The question that we should be asking ourselves today is whether the Council can continue in this logic without being able to ensure that its resolutions and recommendations are fully enforced. Or is it time for it to stop being reactive and seriously to address the root cause of the problem and come up with appropriate solutions? By taking this approach my delegation does not mean to undermine what is currently taking place in the occupied Palestinian territory or in Israel. We believe that the situation is indeed very serious, and we condemn the latest incursions by Israeli forces into Ramallah. We consider those incursions totally inadmissible. We equally condemn the attacks perpetrated on Israeli civilians by the suicide bombers. We believe that such actions on both sides are counterproductive and will only make the resumption of dialogue and negotiations between the two parties more difficult.

We are also extremely sympathetic with regard to the plight of the Palestinians, who are subjected to atrocities of all kinds during such incursions. As an expression of support to, and solidarity with Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian people, a delegation of the Non-Aligned Movement led by the South African Foreign Minister, Ms. Zuma, and comprising, among others, the Foreign Minister of Mauritius, visited Ramallah earlier this month. Ambassador Kumalo of South Africa provided the Council with a report of that visit earlier, and we would like to associate ourselves fully with his statement.

Peace cannot be achieved in the Middle East until there is genuine commitment by the parties involved to take forward the various plans and initiatives that have recently been proposed. Along with the commitment of the two parties, there is also an important role for the international community to play in order to bring both sides to the negotiating table.

On the Palestinian side, the announcement by Chairman Arafat that major reforms would be undertaken within the Authority and that presidential elections would be held by the end of this year or early next year is a major step forward. We welcome such a development and we urge the international community to give its full support and assistance in order to enable Chairman Arafat to concretize those reforms.

On the Israeli side, we urge Prime Minister Sharon to reciprocate the steps announced by Chairman Arafat and to take concrete action on the ground to demonstrate his willingness to make peace. In that regard, automatic retaliations involving Israeli forces after each terrorist attack will not help the ongoing peace process. Nor will the continuation of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. In the last 18 months of Mr. Sharon's premiership, there has been a 40 per cent increase in such settlements. This seriously undermines the confidence-building measures which are so crucial for resumption of constructive dialogue and negotiations.

It is also important that Israel refrain from attacking the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian Authority, especially if it wants the Authority to effectively clamp down on suicide bombers. It is illogical to conceive of a situation where a weakened and

dismantled Authority can exercise control over such elements. In fact, each time there has been an attack on Chairman Arafat's headquarters, suicide attacks have followed.

As regards the international community, while we support the efforts of Washington and the "quartet", it is essential that their combined efforts be aimed at bringing a ray of hope, so that the Palestinian people can expect to have a homeland of their own. The creation of a Palestinian State with boundaries which will ensure the security of the Israeli State seems to be the only outcome which can bring peace and stability to the region. It is therefore important that the efforts of the international community be focused on that outcome.

It is equally important that the international community help rebuild the Palestinian infrastructure, which has been almost completely destroyed by violence on the ground and by indiscriminate and disproportionate Israeli military action. Likewise, the Palestinian security structure needs to be rebuilt in order for it to be effectively in control of the situation on the ground.

The whole world is eagerly looking towards the Middle East peace conference announced by the "quartet" last month. We believe that the conference should seriously consider the proposal of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, which was endorsed by Arab leaders at the Beirut Summit. Let us ensure that the conference not fail and, more importantly, that it not fail the people of the Middle East.