

**Statement by Amb. Koonjul on the situation in the Middle-East,  
including the Palestinian Question – 27 July 2002**

Mauritius condemns in the most serious terms the recent attack perpetrated by Israeli forces on civilian targets in Palestine. Mauritius has on various occasions condemned the use of excessive and disproportionate force by Israel on unarmed Palestinians and innocent civilians. Mauritius has equally condemned all acts of terror on the part of Palestinian suicide bombers. But we have always pointed out that retaliatory measures by Israel were unlikely to put an end to suicide bombings. On the contrary, they would incite further reactions and embroil the region in a spiral of violence. Yesterday's attack in the area of Yarmuk in the northern Gaza Strip claimed the lives of 15 Palestinians — the majority of whom are innocent civilians, including infants and children — and wounded more than 150 civilians. There has been unanimous condemnation of this attack around the world, and even by the President and Cabinet ministers of the Israeli Government. Mauritius would like to present its condolences to the families of the innocent civilians killed in the attack.

Mauritius believes that the use of F-16 aircraft to launch missiles against civilian targets cannot be tolerated. A matter of still greater concern is the fact that the attack took place at a time when security officials from both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides were working very seriously to curb violence and restore cooperative security arrangements. It also came at a time when Hamas leaders had declared that Hamas was going to put an end to all terrorist acts. In the circumstances, the Israeli action is not at all conducive to peace and reconciliation. In fact, it has the potential of creating more anger, more frustration and, hence, more violence among the Palestinians. Mauritius looks forward to the investigation that has been announced by the representative of Israel on this air strike, and we hope that it will focus on why an F-16 warplane was allowed to drop a bomb in a crowded residential area. We believe that Israel must take full responsibility for this heinous act and take remedial measures.

While Mauritius understands Israel's concerns with respect to terrorist acts perpetrated against its civilians, we must emphasize that, as a State and under international humanitarian law, Israel has the responsibility to take

necessary measures to avoid the loss of innocent civilians lives in any action against terrorism. Indeed, we believe that Israel must commit itself to ensuring that such acts are not repeated.

Not later than last week, the Security Council welcomed the positive efforts of the “quartet” and the international community to look for a just and durable solution to the Middle East problem. The plan, which includes the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side within secure boundaries, presented a road map for a definitive solution to the Middle East problem. That is very likely to suffer a serious setback unless renewed commitment is made by both parties to genuine and constructive dialogue, culminating in the fulfilment of the objective, with the assistance of the international community.

For this to happen, Israel must immediately withdraw to the pre-September position and ease internal closures to allow people to enjoy their rights and freedom of movement. It is unacceptable that more than 800,000 Palestinians have been kept under continuous curfew for more than a month now. We call on Israel to stop all new settlement activity and to refrain from constructing the new security fence. We equally call on Israel to put an end to its attempt to prevent Palestinian militants from entering the West Bank, as such collective punitive measures are neither legitimate nor acceptable.

On the Palestinian side, we call upon the militants to put an end to all terrorist attacks, especially those targeting Israeli civilians. More importantly, we appeal to the Palestinians not to take any retaliatory measures following the Israeli attack. Both sides must exercise extreme restraint if peace is to be achieved.

I would like to conclude my statement by making a special appeal to the international community to provide, as a matter of extreme urgency, all assistance needed in order to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation faced by the Palestinians. The damage to infrastructure, combined with a collapse of economic activities, has placed the Palestinian population in the most severe situation, to the extent that even the Israeli Prime Minister has recognized the need for them to be given humanitarian assistance. We hope that at the conclusion of this meeting, we will be able to adopt a decision along those lines.