

**Statement by Ambassador Koonjul on the situation in the Middle East,
including the Palestinian question on 19 April 2002**

I would like to start by expressing our deepest condolences to our good friend Ambassador Yehuda Lancry, the Permanent Representative of Israel, for the untimely demise of his niece, who lost her life in a terrorist attack last week. Such untimely deaths bring home once again how important it is to stop the cycle of violence, which seems to have become the order of the day in the region. Neither side in this conflict will be able to advance its cause through violence and military assault; such acts can bring only destruction, loss and suffering to both sides.

At the end of the Security Council debate on the situation in the Middle East that took place on 9 April, the Permanent Representative of Israel expressed dismay at the statement made by Mauritius during the debate, claiming that it was one-sided. It is obvious that my good friend had not taken into account the specific context in which the statement was made. Our colleague is certainly aware of our unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, as well as of suicide bombings; we have expressed that position in many statements, both here and elsewhere.

The statement we made on 9 April came at a time when the entire international community was calling upon Israel to stop its military assaults in the occupied Palestinian territories; when Israel was turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the pressing calls made by the Security Council and the international community as a whole for withdrawal from the Palestinian cities; and when violations of international humanitarian law by Israel were taking place in defiance of the calls of the international community.

On 10 April, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Hansen, said that “the situation in the Jenin refugee camp is fast turning into a catastrophe”. UNRWA press reports indicated that Israeli tanks and bulldozers were intensifying their demolition of shelters in the Jenin camp and that bulldozers were “shaving off” shelters. Humanitarian workers were being denied access to the refugee camps and were prevented from

providing basic necessities — food, water and medicine — to those in need. Ambulances were being shot at and doctors killed. In other words, Israel continued to flout Council resolutions 1402 (2002) and 1403 (2002).

Let me also recall that the heads of the major international humanitarian agencies have expressed their deep dismay and outrage at the military actions in the occupied Palestinian territories and the consequences of such actions in exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. They also noted increasing and worrying incidences of flagrant disrespect for international law and the security of humanitarian personnel. Even the Secretary-General, in his address to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, stated that in the Middle East international norms of human rights and humanitarian law were being violated on a massive scale. He also added that targeting civilians and the disproportionate use of force beyond legitimate military objectives are a violation of international humanitarian law and must be rejected.

In Madrid the Secretary-General stated that “respect for international humanitarian law and the humanitarian organizations is the most basic requirement for any nation that lays claim to democracy and membership of the international community.”

Given the human tragedy that was unfolding in the Palestinian refugee camps, especially in Jenin, where women and children were falling victim to indiscriminate attacks by the Israeli Defence Forces, the position of Mauritius can certainly be well understood.

Mauritius is a law-abiding country which believes strongly in the sanctity of international institutions and has the greatest respect for international law and for the decisions of the Security Council. This is the principled position that guides us and will continue to guide our decisions and our statements for the rest of our tenure in the Security Council.

Today, with Israel only partially easing restrictions on access to the Jenin refugee camp, we are already hearing reports of the horrific scale of the devastation perpetrated by Israel in that area. The Special Coordinator of the United Nations for the Middle East, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, stated yesterday that the scene in Jenin was “horrifying beyond belief, as if there had been an earthquake there”. This, sadly, reminds us of the devastation of 11 September, which occurred closer to us. It is still unclear how many

innocent Palestinians were killed in Jenin. It would be worth finding out from the Israeli authorities how many innocent Palestinian civilians had to be sacrificed in the process of targeting the suspected terrorist elements in Jenin.

Mauritius believes that there should be a full-scale international investigation of the events that took place there. Furthermore, Israel should cooperate with the fact-finding mission that Ms. Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, intends to lead to the occupied Palestinian territories.

While we await the investigation, the humanitarian situation in Jenin should be addressed immediately. Israel should immediately lift the curfew on Jenin, and it should cooperate fully with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which are trying to rescue the civilians who remain trapped in the rubble and to alleviate the sufferings of those left in the area.

While we understand Israel's preoccupation with eliminating terrorist elements, it has clearly made no distinction between those who are engaged in terror and innocent Palestinian civilians. The deliberate and systematic humiliation of the Palestinian people and their leader will result only in the creation of many more militants and extremists, as was stated by the representative of Ireland during our most recent debate. Besieging Chairman Arafat, as has been done for four months now, can only add to the growing anger of the Palestinians and to that of the Arab world. It is unwise and a clear miscalculation to sideline him, as he remains, as even foreign Minister Peres has admitted, the only avenue for any peace negotiation with Palestine.

We call upon Israel once again immediately to withdraw from all the Palestinian cities and immediately to implement Security Council resolutions 1402 (2002) and 1403 (2002).

We condemn the siege on the Church of the Nativity just as much as we condemn the use of the Church as a sanctuary by militants.

Secretary of State Powell, to whom the Council gave its full support through its resolution 1403 (2002), is now back from his mission in the

Middle East. While he may have made some progress towards a path to peace, it is clear that the main objective of resolutions 1402 (2002) and 1403 (2002) concerning a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian cities has not been achieved, nor has the siege on Chairman Arafat ended, despite the statement he made last week denouncing all acts of terrorism. We welcome that statement, and we urge the Palestinians fully to abide by it.

It is time for us carefully to examine what needs to be done to ensure a complete Israeli withdrawal, as called for in Security Council resolutions 1402 (2002) and 1403 (2002). We need to reflect on what further action should be taken by the Security Council to pull the two parties out of the cycle of self-destruction and to bring them to the negotiating table, thereby leading to a political settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and the vision envisaged in resolution 1397 (2002).

In this context, the proposal outlined by the Secretary-General before the Council yesterday to put together a robust and credible multinational force to assist the parties in ending the violence appears to be not only timely but the only solution to this crisis. We share the view of the Secretary-General that left alone; the parties will not be able to extricate themselves from the current impasse.

We therefore call on all the members of the Council, as well as on the international community, to give careful consideration to this proposal, in order to avert any further aggravation of the situation, which could lead to full-scale disaster in the region.

The Middle East peace process is going through a very difficult time, and the credibility of the Security Council is being affected. It is very important that we all work together in the interest of international peace and security.