

**Statement by Mr. Bhuckory on the situation in the Middle East,
including the Palestinian Question – 3 April 2002**

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this public meeting to further discuss the deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

Almost all the speakers who have spoken since this morning agree that there is indeed total despair in the region and that the situation is clearly out of control. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing outrageous Israeli assaults and the reoccupation of Bethlehem, Ramallah and other Palestinian towns. Yet what we fear the most is the turn these events might take in the days ahead. We have said on previous occasions that the military assault by Israel can only be counter-productive. Many other delegations rightly share the same assessment. In a statement made to the National Assembly yesterday, the Foreign Minister of Mauritius commented on the explosive situation in the Middle East and condemned the unprecedented scale of the violence by Israel on the Palestinian Authority and on the Palestinian people. He also condemned the Palestinian suicide bombings.

At the Arab League Summit in Beirut last week, the Arab world extended a hand of friendship to Israel by endorsing the Arab peace initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. These proposals have the potential of showing us a real ray of light at the end of the tunnel. They provide a basis for the two parties to engage in a meaningful dialogue with a view to ending the stalemate. It is regrettable that instead of taking advantage of this opportunity, Prime Minister Sharon has further compromised the prospects for peace in the region. The senseless and miscalculated Israeli actions lead us to wonder whether Prime Minister Sharon has any intention of making peace with the Palestinians.

Mauritius reiterates its condemnation of all acts of terror and suicide bombings, especially against innocent civilians. At the same time, it must be emphasized that the Israeli actions in West Bank cannot be justified. In fact, subjecting President Arafat to the worst form of humiliation, besieging him for months, speaking openly about his exile, reoccupying Palestinian towns, destroying all the infrastructure that the Palestinians have built over

the years and forcing them to bury their dead inhumanely can only further radicalize and infuriate even the moderate Arab world.

The protests and street demonstrations in various capitals are living proof of the grief and anger of the Arab world. This will no doubt cause a backlash on Israel. It will seriously compromise the vision of the Security Council of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side within secure and recognized borders. We fear that the recent hostilities across the blue line are not just a beginning. An Arab world in turmoil would have dire consequences for international peace and security, with eventual disastrous effects on the global economy.

We again emphasize that President Arafat remains the only interlocutor with whom Israel can negotiate peace. We repeat once again that in this difficult situation, he must be strengthened instead of being isolated and marginalized. He is the legitimate leader of the Palestinians. His physical integrity and personal safety must be protected at all costs, and Israel has to unconditionally end the siege on him.

Two weeks ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1397 (2002), and on Saturday last it adopted resolution 1402 (2002). The Council demanded the immediate cessation of all acts of violence and called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian cities. Unfortunately, both these resolutions have been ignored. It is absolutely important for both Palestine and Israel to implement fully these two resolutions and to adhere strictly not only to their letter but also to their spirit.

Before the adoption of resolution 1402 (2002), the Council President clearly stressed the nonsequential nature of the steps outlined in its paragraph 1. It would be intellectually dishonest to claim that a **ceasefire** and an end of suicide attacks should precede any pullout from Palestinian cities, including Ramallah. There is clearly no conditionality for an Israeli pullout from Ramallah and other Palestinian cities.

My delegation is ready to support any draft resolution that would reaffirm the Council's demand for the immediate implementation of all provisions contained in resolution 1402 (2002). It is also time for the Security Council to engage in a meaningful discussion on the dispatch of an international observer force in the area that could restore a climate of trust between the two parties.

There are influential world leaders who should be called upon to act in such a difficult situation, and we call upon them to press for an immediate Israeli withdrawal. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has rightly said that security cannot be dealt with in isolation and that it has to be addressed alongside key political and humanitarian issues. Hence, any proposal to address the security concerns and which fails to include steps towards resolving the core political issues will be doomed to fail. The inalienable right of the Palestinian people to statehood based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) should remain central to any initiative. The Palestinian people will never settle for less, nor should the international community.