

**Statement by Mr. Latona on The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question on 27 February 2005**

Let me start by thanking you, Sir, for organizing this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We have supported the request of the Group of Arab States for convening this open debate not only because the situation in the Middle East is extremely dangerous and alarming, but more importantly, we fear that if nothing is done to diffuse the situation, we might very soon witness a full-scale war in the region.

We fully concur with the views and concerns expressed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his briefing to the Security Council last Thursday. We remain gravely concerned over the continued downward spiral of events. As we meet to discuss the Middle East issue, it is hard to believe how close the two sides were to reaching an agreement a year ago, and how far apart they are today.

Over the past months, the cycle of violence has only gained momentum and vigour. Violence is breeding more violence. Hate and mistrust are now widespread. Since the September 2000 uprising, more than 900 Palestinians and 250 Israelis have been killed. More than 17,000 Palestinians have been injured. Over the past week alone, violence has taken a toll of 60 more lives. A tit-for-tat response has become the daily feature of the Middle East crisis.

We condemn all acts of provocation and violence from the Israeli side. We also condemn all acts of terror from Palestinian fringe groups, which continue to harm the Palestinian cause. We also mourn the victims of all the bloodshed. It appears as if life has lost all its meaning, especially when we hear of reports of a pregnant woman being shot at an Israeli checkpoint. Against this backdrop, we can see no immediate hope of any de-escalation. While the spiral of violence takes wider proportions, more lives are likely to be lost. With so much suffering, we fear the situation may lead to such a point where it will be nearly impossible to bring the parties back to reason.

What is more disturbing is that the Israeli leadership, it would appear, is sparing no effort to destroy the peace process, from harsher economic

blockades to the occupation of Palestinian offices and various extrajudicial killings. With the recent attempt by the Israeli authorities to sideline Chairman Arafat by keeping him under virtual house arrest for almost three months — although there have been some limited steps over the weekend to ease partially the restrictions on his movements — we stand to be convinced that Israel really wants peace and a conclusion of the political process.

The international community has said time and again that there can be no military solution to the Middle East crisis. Yet Israel, under the pretext of defending its population, is resorting only to military action to further oppress the Palestinian people. Israel is demonstrating its power, taking no heed of the call for restraint by the international community. This compound further the feeling of despair among the Palestinians.

A few days ago, Israeli forces attacked Chairman Arafat's compound in Gaza City, killing four of his military aides. However, let there be no doubt that Chairman Arafat is a symbol of the Palestinian struggle, and he remains the only viable interlocutor and partner for peace. Any attempt to physically eliminate this symbol, by design or otherwise, will only set the entire Middle East ablaze, with dire consequences. Therefore, we strongly urge the Israeli authorities to urgently review their policy towards Chairman Arafat and Palestine.

We share fully the assessment of the Secretary-General that the key problems remain occupation, security, economic deprivation and suffering — all of which are interrelated. It is also important to note that the security aspect will not be resolved if it is not addressed alongside the core political issues. No peace will be achieved if one side is not only reluctant to give up anything, but also wants to take all that it can. We have heard reports of Israeli reservists who have refused to serve in the occupied territories. We can only hope that their action will be an eye-opener for the Israeli authorities.

Since late last year, we have seen growing international consensus that a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be achieved only with the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), with the creation of a State of Palestine, which will live in peace with the State of Israel, and with both States enjoying secure and recognized borders. We believe that this growing consensus constitutes a

very important step in the search for peace in the Middle East, and the Security Council has a very important role to play in this regard.

Mauritius supports fully the establishment of a Palestinian State and believes that such a move is the only way forward towards a lasting peace in the Middle East. What the Palestinian people need is a homeland that they can call their own. They cannot be denied this right. In this regard, we believe that the recent proposals of Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia contain numerous merits which should be carefully and seriously considered.

Over the past 18 months, we have seen the deep-rooted feelings of hate and mistrust that the Israelis and Palestinians have for each other. We continue to believe that there is a need for third-party intervention to protect the civilians on the ground and help the two parties implement the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee and the Tenet security plan.

For several months now, many protagonists on the ground have attempted — unfortunately without much success — to end the crisis and relaunch the negotiations. While we call upon them to remain fully engaged and to renew their efforts to break the deadlock, we can afford no longer to see inaction and paralysis on the part of the Security Council over the worsening situation in the Middle East.

We tend to behave as if the Security Council's responsibility under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security simply did not apply to the Middle East crisis. This is totally unacceptable to my delegation, which believes that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with regard to the Middle East issue until it is completely resolved. More important, the Security Council needs to be proactive to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions regarding the Middle East. The time for action is now, before the peace process is completely shattered, making it impossible to put the pieces back together.