Statement

by

H.E. Dr. Nawaf Salam
Permanent Representative of Lebanon
to the United Nations

at the
United Nations Security Council

on

The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

New York
Tuesday, March 25, 2008

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 531, New York, NY 10017

Mr. President,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you for your wise stewardship of the council during this month of March, and to extend my deepest appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Panama for his skillful leadership of the Council during the past month.

I also wish to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the statement he has just delivered. Once again, it underscored the tremendous challenges that lie ahead.

Mr. President,

At the Annapolis Conference, all parties committed themselves anew to the Road Map, with the goal of reaching an agreement on statehood for the Palestinian people before the end of the current year. And, what does Phase One of the Road Map, which was endorsed by this august Council, call for? All of you know that it calls upon Israel to "immediately dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001", and "to freeze all settlement activity (including natural growth)".

But, what has happened since Annapolis?

In December 2007, Israel disclosed a plan to build 307 houses in the occupied territories, in Abu Ghuneim Mountain, a vicinity of East Jerusalem which it calls Har Homa. This decision came only a few days after resuming peace talks with the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, at Annapolis.

On February 12, 2008, Israel announced plans to build more than 1100 apartments in occupied East Jerusalem.

On March 17, 2008, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, left no room for doubt about his government's intentions, stating that Israel would not stop building on occupied land in and around Jerusalem.

On this matter, we cannot but command Mr. Robert Serry, the United Nations special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, who, in his briefing to this distinguished body on 26 February 2008, reiterated the principle that "continued settlement activity is illegal anywhere in the occupied territory, and is an obstacle to peace." Mr. Serry underlined the fact that settlement activity is "amongst the biggest factors undermining confidence in the Annapolis process and prospects for a viable Palestinian State."

Mr. President,

We do not intend to disregard the fact that the Road Map, in its same Phase One, calls on the Palestinians "for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere." However, could anyone, in good faith, reasonably imagine that the Palestinians could fully conform to such expectations while Israel continues to subject Gaza to an immoral siege and its civilian population to a deliberate policy of collective punishment? This is not to mention the daily raids and incursions it carries out in both Gaza and the West Bank.

These realities, no matter how painful, should not let despair prevail. The process initiated by the United States at Annapolis must not be left to erode. Hence, we cannot but support the efforts to hold a second international meeting in Moscow to help achieve a comprehensive and just peace based on UN resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, the principle of land for peace, and the provisions of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. President,

Turning to Lebanon, and in particular to its South, it is essential to move from the precarious situation of the cessation of hostilities to that of a permanent ceasefire.

The UNIFIL recently commemorated the 30th anniversary of its presence, a presence initially caused by the massive Israeli invasion of 1978 and continued due to the repeated Israeli aggressions which culminated in the summer 2006 war that lead to UN Security Council resolution 1701. While we express our deep gratitude to UNIFIL and praise its remarkable performance and close cooperation with the Lebanese armed forces, we reiterate on this occasion that Lebanon remains entirely committed to the full implementation of UN resolution 1701 and abides by its obligations under it.

Israel, however, has still to abide by its own obligations under the said resolution.

As a matter of fact, the Secretary-General in his latest report on the implementation of UNSCR 1701 noted that "UNIFIL has observed and reported a significant number of Israeli air violations of Lebanese airspace by aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles on an almost daily basis. On 17 February, UNIFIL recorded 36 air violations." And he rightly concluded that "all Israeli overflights of Lebanon's territory constitute violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701."

As to cluster bombs, the deadly legacy of Israel in the South, which are killing and maiming children, civilians, mine-clearance experts, in addition to contaminating agricultural fields, the situation remains regrettably unchanged in spite of repeated calls on behalf of the international community. Israel claims to have submitted information on strike data, but the Secretary-General in his report qualified them as being "of very limited value."

On the northern part of Ghajar, the SG considered that its continued occupation by Israel "constitutes a continuing violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, resolution 1701 and the blue line." We reiterate here our support for UNIFIL to take over, on an interim basis, the administrative and humanitarian responsibilities on the Lebanese side of Ghajar once the Israeli army would have fully withdrawn.

The continued Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms remains a major threat to the security and stability of South Lebanon, and constitutes a violation of Security Council Resolution 425. On this issue, we urge the SG to start a long due diplomatic process, based on our suggestion in the 7-Point Plan, that this area be placed under provisional UN custodianship after the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces, and until the border demarcation between Lebanon and Syria become possible.

On the question of Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons, we reiterate that these detentions are a breach of the basic rules of international law and that the prisoners should be released immediately and unconditionally. As for the Israeli soldiers abducted on July 12, 2006, the Lebanese government reiterates that it has no knowledge of their status or whereabouts and remains ready to cooperate with UN Secretary-General.

We also reaffirm that the internationally recognized borders of Lebanon in the South are as referred to in the 1949 Armistice Agreement, and as reiterated in OP5 of UNSCR 1701. We continue to welcome UNIFL's help in marking the blue line; however, we regret that Israel is not entirely cooperating with this effort.

I would also like to inform the Council that Lebanese authorities are maintaining a high level of vigilance against the illegal movements of arms and material. In this context, my government reiterates that the control of Lebanon's northern and eastern borders remains a shared responsibility with Syria, as per OP15 of UNSCR 1701.

Mr. President,

As to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon regarding the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and the terrorist acts related to it, we would like to express our appreciation for the sustained efforts of the Secretary-General towards its establishment. We also acknowledge the generous contributions made by member states towards its funding, and reiterate our strong conviction that this tribunal will be a key judicial instrument in putting an end to impunity.

Finally, today March 25, a new president for Lebanon should have been elected. While the presidential elections have one more time been postponed, we cannot but stress the importance, for the stability and security of my country, that these elections be held the soonest in accordance with the terms of the Constitution and pursuant to the Arab Initiative.

Thank you.