

Chapter 7

SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS



Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who travelled to the Middle East in October 2000 and met with leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, is looking out at the old city of Jerusalem from his hotel room.

United Nations efforts at reaching a negotiated settlement in the Middle East conflict and securing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, have been guided by, among other things, two Security Council resolutions—resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973). Even when negotiations were held outside the United Nations framework, either bilaterally or with the involvement of regional parties and international partners, these resolutions remained key terms of reference, agreed upon by all parties as the foundation on which just and durable peace could be built.

International Peace Conference, 1973

Under United Nations auspices and the joint chairmanship of the Soviet Union and the United States, an International Peace Conference was convened in December 1973 in Geneva. Egypt, Israel and Jordan were represented in the Conference, but Syria refused to take part. After three meetings, the Conference adjourned indefinitely, but it agreed that work would continue through a Military Working Group.

The Working Group played an important role in reaching agreements on the disengagement of forces between Egypt and Israel in January 1974 and October 1975. It was also involved in the conclusion of a disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria in May 1974. These agreements were carried out with the assistance of two United Nations peacekeeping forces—UNEF II in the Egypt-Israel sector and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Israel-Syria sector.

From 1974 to 1977, efforts were made at various levels to promote a resumption of the negotiating process. The Security Council repeatedly requested the parties to implement resolution 338 (1973). Calls for resuming the Geneva Peace Conference were also made by the General Assembly. Early in 1977, after a visit to the Middle East, the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that fundamental differences between the parties had prevented agreement on the resumption of the Conference. The most immediate difficulty had been the question of the participation by the PLO, which had been rejected by Israel.

The Camp David Accords, 1978

A new element in the Middle East situation was introduced in November 1977, when Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat visited Jerusalem. Subsequently, direct negotiations between Egypt and Israel, with the United States as intermediary, led in September 1978 to the signing of two frameworks for peace

agreements, known as the Camp David Accords. Despite strong opposition from most of the other Arab States and the PLO, the Accords resulted in the signing of a peace treaty between the two countries in March 1979. The treaty led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai in April 1982.

On 1 September 1982, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the evacuation of PLO fighters from Beirut, United States President Ronald Reagan called for self-government by the Palestinians of the occupied Palestinian territory in association with Jordan, saying that such an association offered the best opportunity for “a durable, just and lasting peace”. He also called for a freeze on the establishment of Israeli settlements. His peace initiative was based on the “land for peace” formula reflected in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

That same month, the Twelfth Summit Conference of the League of Arab States at Fez, Morocco, adopted a declaration calling for the withdrawal of Israel from territories occupied in 1967, the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, reaffirmation of the Palestinian right of self-determination and establishment of an independent Palestinian State after a transition period under the control of the United Nations. The Fez Declaration also called for the Security Council to guarantee peace “among all States of the region, including the independent Palestinian State”. Later that year, the General Assembly welcomed the Arab peace plan.

The International Conference on the Question of Palestine, 1981

Meanwhile, the General Assembly, concerned that a just solution to the question of Palestine had not been achieved, decided in 1981 to convene an international conference on the subject. The International Conference on the Question of Palestine took place at the United Nations Office in Geneva from 29 August to 7 September 1983. It was attended by representatives of 137 States—117 as full participants and 20 as Observers—as

well as by the PLO. This initiative did not receive full support: Israel, the United States and some other countries expressed their opposition to holding the Conference.

The Conference adopted by acclamation a Declaration on Palestine and approved a Programme of Action for the Achievement of Palestinian Rights. The Programme recommended measures to be taken by States, United Nations organs and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The Conference considered it essential that an international peace conference on the Middle East be convened under United Nations auspices, with the participation, on an equal footing, of all parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Later in 1983, the General Assembly welcomed the call by the Geneva Conference for an international peace conference on the Middle East. Throughout the 1980s, the Assembly reaffirmed, with increasing support, the call for convening the proposed conference.

In December 1988, the General Assembly, meeting at Geneva to hear a statement by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, expressed unprecedented support for the convening of the proposed peace conference. General Assembly resolution 43/176—adopted by 138 votes to 2, with 2 abstentions—called for the convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East, under the auspices of the United Nations, with the participation of all parties to the conflict, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, on an equal footing, and the five permanent members of the Security Council, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination.

PLO's national executive committee meeting, Algiers, 1988

The General Assembly meeting followed closely a significant meeting, in November 1988, of the Palestine National Council

(PNC) in Algiers. Following Jordan's disengagement in July 1988 of all legal and administrative ties with the West Bank, the PNC issued two ground-breaking documents. The first was a "political communiqué", which affirmed the determination of the PNC to reach a comprehensive political settlement on the question of Palestine within the framework of the Charter and the resolutions of the United Nations; the second was the Proclamation of the Independence of the State of Palestine, in which the PNC announced the establishment of the State of Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital, under the provisions of international law, including General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which had provided for the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish State.

The PLO had, with these two documents, in effect recognized the State of Israel. Mr. Arafat affirmed this explicitly during the meeting of the General Assembly in Geneva in December 1988, recognizing "the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security" including the States of Palestine, Israel and other neighbours, according to Security Council resolution 242 (1967).

Several proposals were made in 1989. Israel adopted a peace initiative, which included elections, based on its previous positions; Egypt proposed principles in connection with a possible peace process and any resulting elections in the occupied Palestinian territory; United States Secretary of State James Baker laid out his own response to the Israeli plan, which contained four principles for advancing the Middle East peace process, principles based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which did not admit either to Israeli retention of permanent control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or to an independent Palestinian entity. For its part the Security Council agreed, in a statement made by its President on 20 December 1990, that an international conference, at an appropriate time, should facilitate efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement and a lasting peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Peace Conference on the Middle East, Madrid, 1991

By 1991, global changes such as the end of the cold war and the Gulf war and its aftermath also affected the Middle East situation. The negotiation process resumed in earnest in October 1991, with the convening of the Peace Conference on the Middle East in Madrid under the twin chairmanship of the United States and the Soviet Union (30 October–1 November), which brought together the parties to the conflict for the first time. A representative of the Secretary-General attended the Conference as an observer.

The Conference allowed for Israel's requirement for one-on-one negotiations while discussing for the first time the peace process in the format of an international conference. It created bi-lateral negotiation tracks for Israel and neighbouring Arab States (Lebanon, Jordan and Syria) and the Palestinians, who were included in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. In addition, simultaneous multilateral negotiations began in January 1992 on regional aspects of a variety of issues for all participants and other interested States. Issues included: arms control, regional security, water, environment, economic and regional development, and refugees.

The Secretary-General, reporting on the Madrid Conference, told the Security Council that although it was being conducted outside the United Nations framework, it had the support of all the parties concerned and had as its basis Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), both considered as cornerstones of a comprehensive peace settlement. In a tribute to the Madrid Conference, the Secretary-General described it as "historic".

UN joins multilateral peace talks as a full extraregional participant, 1993

In 1992, the United Nations was invited by the co-sponsors, the Russian Federation (formerly the Soviet Union) and the United States, to take part in the multilateral negotiations as a full

extraregional participant. The Secretary-General in 1993 appointed Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan as his special representative at the Middle East multilateral talks, with the task of coordinating the role of the United Nations in the Working Groups on Arms Control and Regional Security, Water, Environment, Economic and Regional Development, and Refugees.

The General Assembly, while welcoming the turn of events in the Middle East, reiterated its call for convening an International Peace Conference under United Nations auspices, which, it felt, would contribute to the promotion of peace in the region.

By mid-1993, it appeared that the bilateral talks had stalled on a variety of political and security issues. There seemed to be no progress in solving significant questions between the Israelis and, respectively, the Palestinians, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Unbeknown to all but a very few individuals, however, private talks between Israel and the PLO were taking place in Norway.

The "Oslo channel" and the "Washington handshake", 1993

The Oslo channel, originally facilitated by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, at the time a private Norwegian citizen, together with a senior PLO official and an Israeli academic, late in 1992, progressed under the guidance of the late Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Joergen Holst. The Oslo talks were brought to a conclusion late in August 1993, and the news of an Israeli-PLO agreement was broken to an amazed and hopeful world.

On 10 September 1993, Israel and the PLO exchanged letters of mutual recognition. The PLO recognized Israel's right to exist, and Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.

Three days later, on 13 September 1993, at a ceremony at the White House in Washington, D.C., in the presence of United States President Bill Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei V. Kozyrev, Israeli and PLO representatives signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-

Government Arrangements (Oslo Accord). Following the signing, Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat shook hands.

The Accord stated, among other things:

- * The aim of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations was to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, the elected Council for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).
- * The issues of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbours, were deferred to the permanent status negotiations phase, which should start no later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period.

The General Assembly expressed full support for the Declaration and also stressed the need for the United Nations to play an active role in the peace process. It also urged Member States and the United Nations system to provide greater economic and technical assistance to the Palestinians.

Donors meet in Washington, D.C., 1993

The Secretary-General, welcoming the positive developments in the region and underscoring the need for advancing the socioeconomic needs of the Palestinian people, formed a High Level Task Force on the Socio-Economic Development of the Gaza Strip and Jericho. It was asked to identify how the United Nations could expand its programme of assistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Task Force, which completed its work on 23 September 1993, highlighted the need to implement projects that would quickly make a visible improvement in the daily lives of Palestinians.

On 1 October 1993, over 40 donor countries and institutions, including the United Nations, participated at the Conference to Support Middle East Peace (Washington, D.C.)

and pledged \$2.4 billion over the next five years to finance social and economic development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In order to enhance the presence and involvement of the United Nations system during the transition process and to strengthen United Nations inter-agency cooperation, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator (UNSCO) in the occupied territories was established in June 1994, to be headed by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen. He was succeeded by Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan from 1996 to 1999.

UNSCO's mandate was manifold:

- * Provide overall guidance to and facilitate coordination among United Nations programmes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- * Represent the United Nations at donor coordination meetings and assist the Palestinian Authority and donors in coordinating international donor assistance.
- * Maintain contact with the many NGOs operational in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- * Support the implementation of the Declaration of Principles at the request of the parties.
- * Represent the Secretary-General at multilateral working groups set up under the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Accords.

In September 1999, UNSCO's mandate was reconfigured, and Mr. Roed-Larsen was reappointed as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. In addition to making appropriate preparation within the United Nations for enhancing United Nations development assistance in support of the peace process, the new Special Coordinator represented the Secretary-General with the concerned parties and the international community in all matters related to continuing United Nations support to all tracks of the peace process.

Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, 1995

On 4 May 1994, the Palestinians and Israelis concluded an agreement in Cairo for the first phase of implementation of the Declaration of Principles. On that date, the interim period formally began. Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the newly created Palestinian Authority, returned to Gaza in July to take charge of the new administration.

Important progress was made during 1995, when the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was signed on 28 September in Washington, D.C. The agreement provided for the dissolution of the Israeli civil Administration and the withdrawal of the Israeli military Government, with a scheduled transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Interim-Self-Governing Authority. The new agreement also contained modalities for participation in the elections by the Palestinians of the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and included provision for international observation of the election process. These agreements represented a significant step forward in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles.

One of the main features of the accord was the division of the West Bank in the following three areas, each with varying degrees of Israeli and Palestinian responsibility:

- * Area A consists of the seven major Palestinian towns, Jenin, Kalkiliya, Tulkarm, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron, in which Palestinians will have complete authority for civilian security.
- * In area B, which comprises all other Palestinian population centres (except for some refugee camps), Israel will retain “overriding security responsibility”.
- * In area C, which includes all settlements, military bases and areas, and state lands, Israel will retain sole security authority.

Rabin’s assassination, 1995

In a tragic blow to the peace process, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated on 4 November 1995 in Tel Aviv. The Secretary-General condemned the assassination. The General Assembly in a special meeting held on 5 November paid tribute to the slain Israeli leader.

In January 1996, the newly installed Palestinian Authority held its first democratic election to choose an 88-member Palestinian Council (PC). Yasser Arafat, chairman of PLO, was elected Chairman of the Palestinian Executive Authority (PA).

The peace process suffered severe setbacks in February and March 1996 when successive acts of terrorism, for which the military wing of Hamas claimed responsibility, killed about 55 Israelis and wounded another 100 or so. These acts were strongly condemned by the Security Council, which said the clear purpose of these “vile acts” was to undermine Middle East peace efforts. On 13 March 1996, the Secretary-General joined nine heads of State and nine heads of government at a Summit of Peacemakers in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to oppose acts of violence in the Middle East. In a joint statement, the leaders extended support to the continuation of the negotiating process, and to reinforce it politically and economically.

Prior to the Israeli election in May 1996, negotiations on the permanent status agreement between the parties were formally launched. However, no progress had been made when violence erupted following the new Israeli Government’s decision to open an old tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque. After the Security Council on 27 September 1996 called for immediate cessation and reversal of acts that aggravated the situation, negotiations on permanent status were resumed in October 1996.

Earlier, on 4 September, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Mr. Yasser Arafat for the first time at Erez crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip. At the request of both sides, the United Nations and Norway had facilitated the talks between the parties. The meeting, which was facili-

tated by the United Nations and Norway at the request of both parties, had been preceded by intensive contacts and mediation to finalize a framework agreement on the future of negotiations. It was reported that the two leaders agreed that outstanding issues like the redeployment in Hebron, the closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian airport would be discussed in joint steering committees.

The Hebron Protocol, 1997

In January 1997, Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed the Hebron Protocol concerning the redeployment of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in Hebron. The Protocol also created a timetable for further redeployment of IDF in the West Bank and for the resumption of the permanent status negotiations. The same year in March, Israel approved a plan for the first redeployment in the West Bank.

The next two years saw very little progress in the peace process. Increasingly concerned at the deteriorating situation, the General Assembly reconvened its tenth emergency special session on 17 March 1998 to discuss “illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territory”. The session was first convened in April 1997 and met twice in resumed sessions in July and November of that year. The Assembly expressed its concern at the persistent violations by Israel of the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (the Fourth Geneva Convention) and reiterated its call to the High Contracting Parties to the Convention to convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

The Conference on the Fourth Geneva Convention, 1999

The General Assembly increasingly urged the consideration of measures for international protection of Palestinian civilians. It

has continued to keep the situation under review and at its tenth emergency special session called for the convening, on 15 July 1999, of a conference on measures to enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention.

That meeting, for which the Assembly had set a target date not later than February 1998, was not convened. Following Switzerland’s suggestion to initiate a dialogue on implementing the Convention, a closed meeting between Israel and the PLO was convened in Geneva in June 1998. In October 1998, a meeting of experts of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention took place. Despite these consultations, a consensus on holding the conference could not be reached. (When that conference finally took place in Geneva on 15 July 1999, it lasted for only one day. In a statement issued at the end of the conference, the participating High Contracting Parties reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Conference adjourned on the understanding that it would convene again in the light of consultations on the development of the humanitarian situation in the field.)

The Wye River Memorandum, 1998

The peace process showed new signs of life in late 1998. After eight days of talks at Wye River, Maryland, United States, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Wye River Memorandum in Washington, D.C., on 23 October 1998. The agreement, signed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and President Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority, in the presence of President Bill Clinton of the United States and King Hussain of Jordan, outlined the following elements:

- * Israel would withdraw its troops from 13 per cent of West Bank land and transfer 14.2 per cent of West Bank land from joint Israeli-Palestinian control (Area B) to Palestinian control (Area A).
- * Both sides would immediately resume permanent status negotiations.

- * The Palestinian Authority would take actions to combat terrorism.

The Secretary-General described the Wye River Memorandum as a promising development. The General Assembly, in a resolution adopted on 2 December 1998, also voiced its full support for the peace process and expressed hope that the Memorandum would be fully implemented. The agreement was further supplemented in 1999 with the signing of an interim agreement leading to further redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank, agreements on prisoners, the opening of safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, and resumption of negotiations on permanent status issues.

On 30 November 1998, representatives from some 50 countries pledged at a meeting in Washington, D.C., more than \$3 billion to build infrastructure and increase economic development in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

After a new Israeli Government headed by Ehud Barak took over in May 1999, hopes for continued negotiations were renewed. On 4 September 1999, Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on the Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. This was followed by partial release of Palestinian prisoners, opening of the southern safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and further redeployment of Israeli troops from areas of the West Bank.

The Camp David talks, 2000

In July 2000, United States President Bill Clinton invited the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority for peace talks at Camp David, Maryland. The summit ended inconclusively, with the two sides unable to reach an agreement on the final status issues. Both sides, however, renewed their commitment to continue negotiations with a view to concluding an agreement as soon as possible.

With peace talks stymied, the situation on the ground quickly deteriorated.

The "Al-Aqsa intifada", 2000-2001

At the end of September 2000, a new wave of protests and violence began in the occupied Palestinian territory after the leader of the opposition in Israel (later Prime Minister), Ariel Sharon, visited the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem on 28 September. At least 50 persons were reported killed and some 1,500 injured, most of them Palestinians, as a result of five days of continuing clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. In the first week of October, at least another six Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in sporadic incidents of violence in Jerusalem and other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory.

This new wave of violence soon came to be known as the "Al-Aqsa intifada", named after the mosque at the centre of the Palestinian protest.

The Security Council, alarmed at the dramatic escalation, condemned, by resolution 1322 (2000), the latest wave of violence in the Middle East and the excessive use of force against the Palestinians. It also urged Israel to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention and called for an immediate resumption of peace talks. The Palestinian Rights Committee, which met in October to review the situation, reiterated its position that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine, until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were fully realized.

To explore urgent means to end the cycle of violence and to revive the peace process, the Secretary-General visited the region in October 2000 and met with leaders of Israel and the Palestine Authority as well as with other leaders of the region. He also attended a summit meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 16 and 17 October 2000, jointly chaired by President Mubarak of Egypt and President Clinton of the United States. The summit

produced understandings in three vital areas: security cooperation and other measures to end the confrontation, a committee of fact-finding to inquire into the recent tragic events and how to prevent their recurrence, and renewing the peace process.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his November 2000 report on the situation in the Middle East, noted that by then more than 230 people had been killed and many others suffered injuries. “The tragic situation has made abundantly clear to all sides that the cause of peace can only be damaged by excessive use of force, indiscriminate violence or terror”, the Secretary-General said.

The General Assembly, in a resolution adopted on 1 December 2000, expressed full support for the peace process. It expressed hope that the process would lead to the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It also stressed the need for commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the need for the immediate and scrupulous implementation of the agreements reached between the parties, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank.

The parties met again, in Taba, Egypt, in January 2001. Although considerable progress was reported to have been made, the parties were unable to conclude an agreement before negotiations had to end owing to imminent Israeli elections for both the Prime Minister and Parliament.

In February 2001, a new Government headed by Ariel Sharon took over in Israel, declaring its willingness to continue negotiations while indicating that it would not to be bound by previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Violence continued unabated in the occupied Palestinian territory. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, addressing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on 1 March 2001, described the crisis as “a human tragedy and a source of grave concern for the future”.

The parties, in his words, faced several crises at once:

- * First, a security crisis, with a litany of violence, destruction and death;
- * Second, an economic and social crisis, with growing unemployment and poverty, border closures, restrictions and measures which deprive the Palestinian Authority of necessary financial resources;
- * Third, a crisis of confidence, with rising fear, despair and anger in the street and plummeting faith in the peace process.

The United Nations Security Council met in March 2001 to consider suggestions for establishing a UN observer presence in the occupied Palestinian territory to provide protection for Palestinian civilians. When a draft proposing the Council's readiness to set up such a mechanism was put to vote on 27 March 2001, nine countries voted in favour and one against, with four abstentions.

In the succeeding months, violence continued, with unprecedented numbers of deaths and injuries on both sides. In a hopeful sign, a fact-finding report was released by the Sharm El-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee (“the Mitchell Committee”) on 21 May. The five-member international committee, headed by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, had been appointed by U.S. President Clinton following the summit in Sharm El-Sheikh. The report, among other things, called for:

- * An immediate ceasefire;
- * A freeze on Jewish settlement construction;
- * Denunciation of terrorism;
- * Resumption of peace talks.

Welcoming the Mitchell report the same day, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said it should allow the parties to take steps for a ceasefire, confidence-building measures and, eventually, a return to the table. “I hope this opportunity will not be wasted, and that they [the parties] will seize it as a moment to step back from the precipice and try and end the violence in the region”, the Secretary-General said.

Members of the United Nations Security Council also voiced their full support for Secretary-General Kofi Annan's efforts to resume dialogue among the parties to the Middle East conflict and expressed their backing for the Mitchell report. In a statement, made after a closed-door briefing by the Secretary-General on 22 May 2001, the Council President said the members welcomed the publication of the Mitchell Committee report and the positive reactions to the report from the parties. The Council members appealed to the parties to give serious consideration to the committee's recommendations, and called on them immediately to begin the steps required to implement those recommendations, including on confidence-building measures.