

Foreword

The United Nations has been seized with the question of Palestine since 1947, when the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II). It provided for the establishment of an Arab State and a Jewish State in Palestine, with a special status for the holy city of Jerusalem. No other problem has engaged the attention of the world Organization as intensively or as extensively. From 1948 there have been wars, destruction, suffering and loss of lives of Palestinians and Israelis alike engaging the United Nations in a continuing search for a solution to the problem. Given the grave dangers that are evident to all, there is a vital need to revive efforts aimed at ensuring a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). However, a precondition for any progress in peace negotiations is cessation of all acts of violence, provocation, incitement and destruction. What is also needed is a clear commitment by all sides to honour all bilateral and international agreements, as well as United Nations resolutions.

In outlining a United Nations strategy for dealing with the conflict in the Middle East, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has laid out the following three separate, yet closely linked, core issues:

First, restoring security from terror and violence for both Israelis and Palestinians;

Secondly, addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories; and

Thirdly, promoting serious and accelerated negotiations towards a settlement.

There is growing recognition that unless the international community assume a direct and effective role on the ground, progress towards a negotiated settlement will not be sustained. In recent

months, the United Nations, the United States of America, the European Union and the Russian Federation have formed what is now known as the Quartet. All four have committed themselves to working with the Israelis and Palestinians, with the Arab Governments and the international community, to restore the hope of all the people in the region.

This book is a primer on the question of Palestine and the role of the United Nations. It sets out to explain some of the intricacies behind the spiral of violence in the Middle East and the legal framework under which a comprehensive, just and lasting peace could be established in the region.

The information contained in the book is up-to-date only as of October 2001. In the succeeding months, the litany of violence in the region further continued, causing more death and destruction. There have also been important diplomatic moves, including the formation of the Quartet. I invite the readers to follow these and other developments on the situation in the Middle East through the United Nations web site on the question of Palestine and its related links, including a comprehensive database, which provides users with full-text documents of the United Nations system relevant to the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East since 1946. The web site also carries news and analysis of developments in the Middle East. You can access the web site at http://www.un.org/partners/civil_society/m-qpales.htm

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