

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

“Peace is possible – Frameworks for a way forward”

Geneva, 29-30 June

CHAIRMAN’S SUMMARY

The United Nations **International Conference in support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace** was convened at the United Nations Office at Geneva, on 29 and 30 June 2016, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). Experienced peace negotiators, Member States, United Nations entities and civil society discussed lessons learned from past initiatives related to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, assessed recent initiatives promoted by key actors and considered new ideas for a lasting solution to the conflict.

The Conference was attended by 86 Member States, two Observer States, six intergovernmental organizations, eight UN system entities and 32 local and international civil society organizations. Eleven expert speakers addressed the Conference, which was open to the public. Twenty-seven Member States made statements during the opening session and a large number of participants made remarks or raised issues during the interactive discussions.

At the opening session, in a message to the Conference delivered by Michael Møller, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, **Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon** who had just completed his eleventh visit to Israel and Palestine, asked the leadership of both sides to take prompt action to preserve the two-State solution. He reminded them that the Arab Peace Initiative provided a vision of a comprehensive peace. Both Israelis and Palestinians were entitled to live in security. Israel’s settlement enterprise was illegal and constituted a threat to the two-State solution. Violence and incitement were major obstacles too. He urged donors to fulfil their pledges for the reconstruction of Gaza. Reuniting the West Bank and Gaza under a single government based on PLO principles was of critical importance.

The **Representative of the State of Palestine, Nabeel Shaath**, Member of the Fatah Central Committee said, “I know peace is possible”, observing that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was currently in Gaza, witnessing the tragedy. He argued that without a pivotal role of the United Nations and the international community peace would not be possible. He reminded the audience that one State was occupying the land of the other State, clearly demonstrating that the Israeli government was not committed to peace based on the two-State solution. He added that apartheid in South Africa might have continued until today, if it was

not for the international boycott. 23 years had passed since the Oslo agreements with no independent Palestinian State, nor an end to the occupation. He referred to the Iran agreement as an example to be followed with the international community acting together to support peace. Finally, he assured that Palestinians had not given up on the peace process.

The Chair of the **Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People** expressed the view that the almost 60 year-old Israeli occupation was one of the root causes of the instability and violent extremism in the region. He expressed support for the recent international efforts such as the forthcoming Quartet report, the French Initiative and the renewed interest in the Arab Peace Initiative. Settlements and indiscriminate attacks against civilians should cease immediately: both Israelis and Palestinians had a right to live in security. Despite the reduction in violence in recent months, there continued to be a real danger of escalation, as long as East Jerusalem remained occupied, the status quo of the Holy Sites was challenged, and Gaza was blockaded. He called for Palestinian reconciliation and for the international community to make a strong push to end the occupation.

In the **first plenary session**, participants discussed the **lessons learned from the Madrid Peace Conference, and the Oslo agreements** in light of the situation today. Despite initial achievements such as the mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, participants agreed that the breakdown of the process had produced a situation of despair. Whereas in the early 1990's, the United States, the only superpower, used its leverage to bring the parties to the negotiating table, in today's world the peace process should be multilaterally driven, it was postulated. The lesson of the multilateral track negotiations of the 1990s was that they could only support, but not substitute for, bilateral diplomacy. Some raised the subject of sanctions against Israel, whereas a participant questioned whether sanctions were compatible with confidence building. The question of whether some interim agreements could have been renegotiated to improve living conditions for the Palestinians generated a lively debate. While Madrid and Oslo represented a historical breakthrough, they left the end game unclear. The Geneva Initiative sought to fill this gap by formulating a model peace agreement. A majority of Israelis and Palestinians supported the two-State solution but neither public believed it was achievable, which was becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the Israelis and Palestinians saw that the world was serious about the two-State solution they would become serious too. "Do not give up on us", a participant from the region pleaded.

In the **second plenary session**, participants explored the **emerging approaches to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict** emphasizing the importance of the French Initiative in restarting negotiations, the need for "carrots and sticks" for Israel, the importance of Palestinian unity, the centrality of the Arab Peace Initiative and the possible enlargement of the Quartet to include additional actors. It was acknowledged that as the two-State solution became the agreed paradigm, its implementation became increasingly problematic. This analysis had led to the launch of the French Initiative which was praised as an attempt to resume negotiations. The Quartet, it was argued, had failed to bring together the "power of the US, the money of the EU and the legitimacy of the UN," its decision-making weakened

by rules of unanimity and by domestic US politics. The Quartet failed to monitor the Roadmap implementation or to hold Israel accountable for settlements. Some of Quartet actions, such as the conditions imposed on aid following the Hamas electoral victory, exacerbated Palestinian divisions and ran counter to democratic principles. Expanding the Quartet to include key regional and European players could be helpful, but was likely to be resisted by the current members. The forthcoming report would hopefully offer some constructive criticism and identify obstacles to peace and possibly provide a basis for a Security Council resolution to push the peace process forward.

It was recalled that a 2001 Saudi initiative later became the Arab Peace Initiative (API) and was endorsed by the OIC, and was updated in 2013 to allow for land swaps. Some Israelis were willing to support the Initiative, though it was never accepted by the Government. The API provided an end game, in a way which did not threaten Israel's future and security, with necessary regional legitimacy and backing for decisions to be made by both sides. There was a call for the API to be endorsed by the Security Council and in the context of the French Initiative, and for individual countries to pledge to implement it.

In the **final plenary session**, experts and participants discussed **ideas for the future**. International mediators should not “jump into empty pools,” said a former UN Under-Secretary-General: the conditions for mediation are not ripe until the parties have reached a conclusion that the costs of conflict outweigh the costs of an agreement. Poorly timed mediation efforts can do more harm than good, as can having multiple competing mediators. It was clear also that the parties should also bring about change internally. As the Israeli Government was unlikely to transform itself, younger generations of Israelis were those who could effect change. Arab Israelis should be more involved as peace would not be possible without taking them into account. A participant proposed rebuilding the organizational structure of the peace camp in Israel, promoting the economic development of the West Bank and Gaza, having the Knesset endorse the two-State solution, moving along the Roadmap, gaining the support of traditional and religious elements in both societies for peace process, and entering a dialogue about the two-State solution with settlers to isolate the extremists and sway the undecideds. Israelis acknowledged that the Palestinians held “the key to the Arab world” while Palestinians warned against current attempts to break the Arab unified position regarding Palestine.

Civil society could help move forward the peace process through protection against violence, monitoring human rights, monitoring of implementation of agreement between Israel and Palestine, advocacy, promoting inter-group social cohesion and facilitating dialogue. Challenges for civil society engagement in such a context were the political stalemate, the lack of political will, non-implementation of former agreements and the context of increased violence. A clear strategy by the international community on civil society involvement in peace processes was also lacking. Inclusive processes which prioritized key groups such as women stood a better chance of success, as the Colombia example demonstrated.

In closing remarks, the **Chairman of the CEIRPP, Ambassador Fodé Seck** underlined the role of civil society in building an environment conducive to peace. He called for the international community to redouble efforts so that finally Israelis and Palestinians could live in peace.

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča stated that despite setbacks over the years, most people on both sides still supported the idea of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side. Understandably, the failure to reach a lasting and sustainable peace has led to frustration and a loss of hope for Palestinians and Israelis alike. He assured that the United Nations stood ready to support any measure or initiative that aims to avoid a further deterioration of the situation on the ground and to reinvigorate the peace process. He expressed hope that the forthcoming Quartet report would encourage the parties to start taking positive steps to demonstrate their commitment to, and create the conditions for, an eventual return to negotiations for a lasting sustainable peace.

The **Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Ambassador Riyad Mansour** stressed that the Palestinian people were tired of the empty promises of the international community and tired of the occupation; the French Initiative and the revival of Arab Peace Initiative provided some hope. But he warned that there was no more time left. Regretting that the Quartet report had been delayed, he said that if it did not recommend practical steps to end the occupation then the Quartet would fail in being relevant. If it did, it would provide an important contribution and would help and complement the French Initiative.

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****Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the Conference. A detailed report will be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights in due course.*