

STATEMENT BY MS. CHOKILA IYER, FOREIGN SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ON
AGENDA ITEM 42 : THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE PLENARY OF THE 56TH SESSION
OF THE GA ON NOVEMBER 30, 2001

Mr. President,

We are gathered here once again to discuss the situation in the Middle East, a region of great importance and concern to the entire international community.

The relationship between India and the Arab world has been fashioned by history in the larger canvas of the meeting between the Indian and Arab civilisations. It covers almost every important aspect of human endeavour – cultural, social, religious and political. The Arab world played an important role transmitting and interpreting Indian thought and culture to the Western world. On our part, we were closely involved with the Arab world's interaction with the Orient. The impact of the Arabic and Islamic world on India itself has been profound and far-reaching, giving rise to a composite culture that is rich in its diversity and enduring in its essential unity. These geographic, economic and social factors have created a unique affinity between India and the Arab world. When we speak on the Middle East, therefore, we speak of a region we consider as our extended neighbourhood, and about countries with which our relations are particularly close and deep.

Mr. President,

We had hoped that the withdrawal of Israel from Southern Lebanon last year and the deployment of UNIFIL in the vacated areas would be a good portent, leading on to progress on other tracks, and that prospects for lasting peace and tranquillity in the region would be finally within reach. Unfortunately, the situation since then has belied the optimism of the international community. There have been occasional outbreaks of firing across the Blue Line, though we feel that the presence of UNIFIL has been helpful. As a measure of India's commitment to peace in the region, we have contributed a battalion to UNIFIL; the present Force Commander is an Indian General.

We regret very much that, since September last year, the Middle East peace process seems to have stalled. There is a stalemate in peace negotiations on all tracks. India believes that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be established on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of "Land for Peace". In India's view, the status of Jerusalem, as per the Madrid and Oslo Process, is one of the Final Status Issues, and is yet to be resolved. India supports a resumption of negotiations on all tracks of the Middle East Peace Process to complete the circle of peace in West Asia.

Even before the developments of September 11, the sense of frustration in the Arab world has never been so high. The second intifada is the manifestation of the mood of despair among the Palestinian people. These developments make it imperative to address the core problems of the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian issue. The requirement for peace and stability in the region has now become even more acute. The international community cannot fail in its obligations. At the same time, the parties concerned must reaffirm their commitment to resolve their differences peacefully and through sustained negotiations. There is no military solution to this conflict; violence must be abjured. This is the only way to achieve lasting peace in the region