



**STATEMENT BY MR. A. GOPINATHAN, DEPUTY PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE, ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE
SECURITY COUNCIL ON JULY 21, 2005**

Mr. President,

We thank you for providing the general membership with an opportunity to proffer their views on the situation in the Middle East, by scheduling this open debate of the Security Council. We would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his recent appointment as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

Mr. President,

This meeting of the Security Council comes at a critical time in the Middle East. The Secretary-General had recently noted the prospects of a positive conjuncture in the Middle East peace process when he said, and I quote: "Recent events in the Middle East have raised hopes of a possible resumption of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. We have witnessed the successful completion of Palestinian presidential elections on 9 January 2005, followed by the convening of the Summit at Sharm El Sheikh on 8 February 2005, where Israeli and Palestinian leaders announced a series of commitments to end violence, and to rebuild trust and mutual confidence" Unquote.

Israel's proposed withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank is scheduled to take place next month. The international community is hopeful that the withdrawal would represent a step in the broader process and would be used as a springboard to revitalise the Roadmap. It is essential for the Israeli and Palestinian sides to coordinate the economic, civilian and security aspects of the withdrawal. The withdrawal must take place as scheduled and, in this context, the decision of the Israeli Knesset yesterday to vote down three resolutions aimed at delaying the withdrawal is a welcome development. We hope that the withdrawal will be full and complete and will be followed by negotiations on final status issues.

Unfortunately, recent events, including an escalation in violence, have threatened the hopes for progress that the past few months have represented. The recent suicide bombing in Netanya, Israel, and rockets fired from Gaza were condemnable acts. We call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to prevent such actions. At the same time, Israel's resumed forceful actions in response to these attacks, including targeted killings, could seriously compromise the calm that has prevailed in the past few months. While we recognise Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, we have also cautioned that any such moves should be exercised proportionately and in conformity with international law.

Israel's ongoing construction of the separation wall remains a source of deep concern to the international community. As we have stated in the past, no one could have objections to the construction of the wall in areas coinciding with the green line. Its encroachment on Palestinian land and interests create great hardships for the people affected by its construction and exacerbates the situation. Besides, continued construction of the wall on Palestinian land threatens to prejudge the eventual outcome of the final status negotiations between the parties.

We recall, in this connection, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction by Israel of the wall in the occupied Palestine territory. The Court had opined that the wall is contrary to international law and should be dismantled. We had called on Israel to take full account of the Advisory Opinion, in keeping with the overwhelming international opinion in the matter, with a view to its early implementation.

We once again renew our call to Israel to take note of the recommendations in General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 2 August 2004, based on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. We also call upon the Secretary-General to establish the Register of Damage, as recommended by the same General Assembly resolution, at the earliest.

One of the primary obligations under the Roadmap was the requirement for Israel to halt all settlement activity, including natural growth, and to dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001. We call upon Israel to fulfil its obligations and desist from any further settlement construction activity. This will also serve as an important confidence-building measure.

Mr. President,

At this juncture, it is critical for the international community, in particular the Middle East Quartet, to carefully monitor the situation and to work closely with the parties with a view to encouraging them to fulfil their commitments and obligations. At the same time, it must be ensured that vested interests on both sides are not allowed to

derail the process, thereby once again damaging the real prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Notwithstanding the recent discouraging events, we are confident that a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict would be attainable. We call upon all sides to work together assiduously to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in secure and recognised borders, based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515.

Thank you, Mr. President

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