

Quartet Statement

The following statement was issued today by the Middle East Quartet (United Nations, European Union, Russian Federation, and the United States):

Representatives of the Quartet - U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union Javier Solana, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner - met today in New York to discuss the situation in the Middle East. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

The Quartet reaffirmed its support for the bilateral and comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and commended the parties for their serious and continuous efforts since the Annapolis Conference. The Quartet recognized that a meaningful and results-oriented process is underway and called upon the parties to continue to make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008. It noted the significance of this process and the importance of confidentiality in order to preserve its integrity. The Quartet underlined its commitment to the irreversibility of the negotiations; to the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, living in peace and security alongside Israel; and to an end to the conflict. The Quartet expressed its desire to see the continuation of the solid negotiating structure, involving substantive discussions on all issues, including core issues without exception, in order to ensure the fulfillment of the Annapolis goals. The Quartet reiterated its previous call for all Palestinians to commit themselves to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations. Restoring Palestinian unity based on the PLO commitments would be an important factor in this process.

The Quartet emphasized the need for a renewed focus on improvements in the situation on the ground and stated that visible and tangible progress must accompany the negotiations. The Quartet commended the Palestinian Authority for the encouraging results of its efforts to reform the security sector, to confront militias and terrorism, and to enforce the rule of law in areas subject to its security control. The Quartet commended recent measures by the Israeli government to lift restrictions on access and movement and encouraged further steps to ease conditions for Palestinian civilian life and the economy. The Quartet called on the parties to re-double their cooperative efforts on security to ensure that both Israelis and Palestinians live in peace and safety. In particular, the Quartet urged the parties to continue cooperation in order to expand the success observed in Jenin to other major centers in the West Bank and called on the international community, including regional partners, to support these efforts with targeted and coordinated assistance and through the continued efforts of Quartet Representative Blair. The Quartet called for speedy implementation of the outcome of the Berlin conference and invited all donors to fulfill the pledges made at the Paris conference in line with the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. It welcomed the September 22 statement of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and recalled the importance of equitable burden-sharing.

The Quartet discussed the status of the parties' obligations under the Roadmap as an integral part of Annapolis follow-up. The Quartet expressed deep concern about increasing settlement activity, which has a damaging impact on the negotiating environment and is an impediment to economic recovery, and called on Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001. In this regard, the Quartet reiterated that the parties must avoid actions that undermine confidence and could prejudice the outcome of the negotiations. Quartet Principals condemned the recent rise in settler violence against Palestinian civilians, urging the enforcement of the rule of law without discrimination or exception. The Quartet also condemned acts of terrorism against Israelis, including any rocket attacks emanating from the Palestinian territories, and stressed the need for further Palestinian efforts to fight terrorism and dismantle the infrastructure of terror, as well as foster an atmosphere of tolerance.

The Quartet commended Egypt for its endeavor to overcome Palestinian divisions and to reunite Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza under the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The Quartet welcomed the continuing calm between Gaza and southern Israel, which has largely persisted for over three months and expressed its hope that this calm will result in further relief for the civilian population of Gaza, including the regular opening of the crossings for both humanitarian and commercial flows, and sustained peace on Israel's southern border. The Quartet stated its expectation that movement of persons and goods will be normalized in the coming months, as foreseen in the Agreement on Movement and Access, and expressed its strong support for the immediate resumption of stalled UN and other donor projects in Gaza. This will facilitate economic activity, reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance, and restore links between Gaza and the West Bank. The Quartet welcomed the offer by the EU to resume its monitoring mission at the Rafah crossing point. The Quartet called for the immediate and unconditional release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit.

The Quartet welcomed efforts toward comprehensive regional peace and stability, including Turkey's facilitation of indirect Israeli-Syrian negotiations. It expressed hope for an intensification of these talks with the goal of achieving peace in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference. The Quartet noted the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a major element in moving the process forward and re-affirmed its support for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, and 1515.

The Quartet expressed its intention to work closely with the parties in the important period ahead. The Quartet agreed that the spring of 2009 could be an appropriate time for an international meeting in Moscow.

The Quartet noted with appreciation the parties' suggestion to brief the Quartet on their ongoing negotiation process, with due regard for the confidential and bilateral nature of the discussions. The Quartet expressed its interest in coordinating such a meeting for a mutually accepted time.

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