

Message on the Occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

30 November 2000

On behalf of the people of South Africa and the Non-Aligned Movement, I extend warm greetings to all Palestinians on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, whether in Palestine or in the Diaspora.

Allow me first of all to convey the Non-Aligned Movement's deepest sympathy and condolences to the families and friends of victims of the ongoing attacks of the Israeli security forces on Palestinians. We decry the excessive and disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army.

At this occasion last year, we were filled with hope for a future which appeared so promising because of the truly encouraging developments and the positive steps that had been taken to move the peace process forward. It is therefore with sadness that we have to commemorate this important day this year amid violent conflict, a situation far removed from our visions of last year.

As Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to reiterate our common conviction that just and lasting peace can only be achieved through peaceful negotiations. We believe that the first priority on the road towards that aim should be the cessation of violence.

This can be achieved through concrete steps. Firstly, it is of the highest importance that Israeli troops should be withdrawn at least to the positions that they occupied before 28 September, the day of Mr Ariel Sharon's fateful and provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif. Furthermore, the illegal measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, such as the total blockade of the Palestinian territories and the economic embargo placed on Palestine, should be ended forthwith.

We note that, following the 2 November understanding reached between President Arafat and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, President Arafat has made several calls for calm while Prime Minister Barak did not give effect to that agreement, because of the explosion in West Jerusalem the next day. Only when these conditions have been met, can it realistically be expected that President Arafat's calls for calm will be heeded. The international community can make a meaningful contribution to the restoration of calm and the rebuilding of the trust that has been shattered in the past two months. I want to take this opportunity to renew our call for the immediate stationing, in the occupied Palestinian territories, of an international observer force under the auspices of the United Nations. As Israel has no legitimate jurisdiction in the occupied Palestinian territories, the South African Government does not understand why Israel should be allowed to exercise a veto over the deployment of such a force.

It is of the greatest importance and urgency that good faith negotiations between Palestine and Israel should resume, once calm has returned to the region. It has become clear that the Oslo Process, which has carried on for more than seven years prior to the recent outbreak of violence, has had major flaws. These relate directly to the manner in which Palestinians on the street experience the results of the peace process. Although the Oslo Process has brought a visible improvement in inter alia Palestinian infrastructure, by and large it has brought a much more intrusive Israeli security presence into ordinary Palestinian lives by the need to cross interminable checkpoints that have sprung up around every Palestinian urban centre. This could be offset in the past when there was progress in the negotiations and the implementation of agreements. However, this has all dried up and there is no tangible evidence for anyone in the Palestinian streets of a peace dividend any longer.

Now there is just the daily humiliation of enduring Israeli roadblocks and the interminable arrogance and provocation of Israeli settlers in Palestine. It therefore seems improbable that the Oslo Process can simply be resumed without considerable amendment. The South African Government believes that the United Nations, as the organisation entrusted with the safeguarding and promotion of world peace, should play a central role in future negotiations, whatever the context or formula for a resumed peace process.

Major players such as the European states, various Middle Eastern states and others can also make a meaningful contribution to building peace and should be allowed to play a role.

To a considerable degree, future negotiations should be about the modalities for the implementation of the existing international consensus enshrined in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 which call for Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since the 1967 war. The Security Council has also recognised the principle of the self-determination of the Palestinian people and has, conversely, provided for Arab recognition of the right of Israel to exist within secure borders.

"Land for peace" is the only viable option.

To all our Palestinian brothers and sisters, I wish to reiterate that their struggle is for a legitimate cause. In September this year the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirmed the Movement's traditional and long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for the implementation of all UN resolutions on the question of Palestine, in their declaration in the context of the Millennium Assembly. Allow me, therefore, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and particularly on behalf of the Republic of South Africa, to reiterate our commitment to invigorate our support for and solidarity with your legitimate struggle for freedom and equality as a sovereign member of the family of nations.

In effect, it is an affront to all humanity that, while we are dealing with the challenges of and aspirations for the new millennium, our Palestinian brothers and sisters are still hankering for their basic human rights and, as a nation, for the realisation of their right to self-determination. It is inexcusable that, more than fifty years after the United Nations affirmed the right of Palestinians to sovereign statehood and more than thirty years after the United Nations Security Council, in a binding decision, called on Israel to withdraw from all the Arab territories that it had occupied in the war of June 1967, the suffering and humiliation of foreign military occupation still continue.

I thank you.