

Middle East diplomatic Quartet hails positive developments on road to peace – Annan

Press Release, 22 June 2003 – Members of the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East – the United Nations, United States, Russian Federation and European Union – today hailed positive developments in the peace process and urged further efforts by both Israel and the Palestinian authorities to consolidate the gains achieved so far, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in a statement issued on behalf of the group.

The Quartet meeting, held at the Dead Sea in Jordan, was attended also by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, High Representative for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and the European Commissioner for External Affairs Chris Patten.

In its statement, the Quartet hailed the appointment of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and the “strong start he and his Government have made in difficult circumstances,” as well as the acceptance by both sides of the Road Map which envisages, in 2005, two States – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and security.

The statement also welcomed “the very positive message and personal commitment of President [George W. Bush] and his decision to place a mission on the ground charged with helping the parties to move toward peace, through establishment of a credible and effective structure led by the United States, in close cooperation with the Quartet, to coordinate, monitor, and promote implementation of the parties’ commitments and responsibilities, as laid out in the Road Map.”

Quartet members deplored and condemned the “brutal terror attacks” against Israeli citizens carried out by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade since the Road Map’s presentation, and called calls for an “immediate, comprehensive end to all violence.”

The statement stressed that “all Palestinian individuals and groups must end acts of terror against all Israelis, anywhere,” and called on the Palestinian authorities to take “all possible steps” to halt immediately the activities of individuals and groups planning and conducting attacks on Israelis. States were also called on to assist Palestinian efforts to restructure and consolidate all security services under Prime Minister Abbas.

“The Quartet welcomes the discussions between Israel and Palestinian authorities over transfer of security responsibility in Gaza and Bethlehem,” Mr. Annan noted, calling on both sides to agree on arrangements and timetables to achieve this.

At the same time, the statement voiced the Quartet’s “deep concern” over Israeli military actions that result in the killing of innocent Palestinian and other civilians. “Such actions do not enhance security and undermine trust and prospects for cooperation,” the statement noted. “While the Quartet recognizes Israel’s right to self-defence in the face of terrorist attacks against its citizens, it calls on the Government of Israel to respect international humanitarian law and to exert maximum efforts to avoid such civilian casualties.”

Israel was also called on to make all possible efforts to support Palestinian authorities and ease the plight of the Palestinian people through immediate actions. “The Quartet strongly urges Israel to facilitate movement of people and goods, as well as access by international humanitarian organizations,” Mr. Annan said.

In addition, the Quartet recalled its position that "settlements activity must stop" and welcomed first steps on the ground to remove unauthorized outposts.

"The Quartet reaffirms its commitment to a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, including progress toward peace between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon," Mr. Annan said. Recalling milestone agreements constituting the basis for action, he said the Quartet looks forward to continuing to work together in close consultation on these issues with the parties.

At a press conference held today with Mr. Powell, Mr. Annan added, in his capacity as Secretary-General that in keeping with the approach laid out in the Road Map the principle of parallelism should be maintained. He also called on the Israelis not to use "disproportionate force" in civilian areas, carry out house demolitions or engage in extra-judicial killings. Simultaneously, he said, the Palestinian Authority "must not spare any effort to bring to an end all acts of terror against Israelis anywhere."

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