



**UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nikolay Mladenov's
Remarks at the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States**

Cairo, 7 March 2017

Your Excellencies, Honorable Ministers,

Your Excellency Secretary General of the League of Arab States,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian Question.

I applaud your unfaltering commitment to supporting the Palestinian people in their rightful quest to put an end to a half-century of occupation and establish an independent state of their own.

Their cause is your cause. It is our cause. It is the cause of peace.

Today, as the region faces challenges that require all moderate forces to work together against the common threat of extremism and terror, cooperation is needed more than ever.

In 2002 and 2007, you extended your hand through the Arab Peace Initiative, recognizing that there cannot be sustainable peace between Israelis and Arabs without Palestinian statehood.

True peace will remain elusive without the recognition that both Palestinians and Israelis have legitimate national aspirations that can only be realized in two states that live in peace, security and mutual recognition.

That is why today is not the time to give up on the two-state solution, which is indeed under grave threat. A threat defined not so much by statements, but by policies and actions that aim to undermine it on a daily basis.

Israel's settlement enterprise, violence, and the absence of visionary leadership continue to define the conflict.

Excellencies,

Sadly, today the situation on the ground is grim. Anger and frustration among Palestinians are growing. The adoption of the so-called "Regularisation Law", which contravenes international law; legislative attempts to annex parts of the West Bank; a rise in the demolition of Palestinian structures and the situation in Gaza — all these developments eat away at the two-state solution, destroy hope and strengthen the hand of extremists on all sides.

Since the beginning of the year significant settlement moves have been made in the occupied West Bank. These have included tenders for around 800 units and the advancement of plans for over 3,300 units, some of which have reached the final approval stage. Construction has also been advanced in East Jerusalem.

(As delivered)

I want to reiterate the UN position that settlement activities are illegal under international law and once again call on Israel to stop all such activities.

I am concerned, too, by continuing violence. So-called “lone wolf” attacks continue, though greatly reduced as compared to 2016. Clashes between Israeli Security Forces and Palestinians also continue and the UN has repeatedly warned Israel that the use of force must be calibrated.

And regrettably for the last decade Gaza remains under the control of Hamas, beyond the reach of the Palestinian government.

After three brutal conflicts, Israel's crippling closures and the decade-long political divide, two million Palestinians are trapped in a humanitarian tragedy in Gaza. Much work remains as 50,000 Palestinians live in temporary shelters. The UN needs some USD 160 million for the reconstruction of nearly 4,000 totally destroyed homes. Addressing chronic challenges, such as unemployment and access to basic services of water and energy, must remain a priority.

I also take the opportunity to draw attention to the USD 115 million shortfall in UNRWA's core budget for 2017. This affects the Agency's key services of healthcare, education and social services for vulnerable Palestine refugees throughout the region.

Meanwhile, a decade of closures on Gaza, of rocket fire towards Israel, and multiple conflicts, have convinced many that there is no hope for peace.

I reiterate that the illicit arms build-up, militant activity and provocations, which risk renewed escalation and further suffering, must be terminated.

Excellencies,

These negative trends entrench a dangerous one-state reality of perpetual occupation and conflict. They must be urgently reversed.

We need a new approach to restore hope and create a political horizon, and your role as the League of Arab States in this process can be critical.

In December, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2334 that reiterated some of the key obstacles to achieving a negotiated two-state solution.

Later in January, at the Paris Conference, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to the two-state solution and to the need for follow up and international engagement.

I welcome Arab League engagement to further these objectives.

However, the obligations of the occupying power come first.

Israel must demonstrate its commitment to the two-state solution by ceasing illegal settlement activities and by implementing policy shifts consistent with prior agreements that increase Palestinian civil authority.

Palestine, too, must continue its state-building investment and tackle the challenges of violence and unity.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the Palestinian government, civil society and the business community for finalising an ambitious National Policy Agenda. Translating that vision into reality is critical to strengthening the foundations for a future Palestinian state and the UN stands ready to support it.

Mr Secretary General,

(As delivered)

Your Excellencies,

The bloody history of this conflict has offered us many lessons. Some we have learnt. Many we have not.

One such lesson is that opportunities to advance peace are rare and must be seized.

Another is that the necessary compromises will always be difficult.

A third is that resolutions and communiqués alone are not enough.

What is required is action. Action by the leaders themselves. Action by the international community and the region.

In closing, let me thank you once again for the opportunity to address the Council and express — on behalf of Secretary-General Guterres and all of us at the United Nations — our wish to continue working ever more closely with you, as the League of Arab States has a crucial role in this regard.

The United Nations will continue to stand with the Palestinian people and all those who work for peace and for a just and fair resolution to this conflict.

I wish you success.

I wish Palestine success.

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