

Thank you, Mr. President.

This is an important, potentially historic moment in the Middle East. The United States remains committed to a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has produced so much suffering over so many years. Bilateral dialogue between the parties is central to achieving meaningful progress towards that end, and we strongly support the ongoing talks between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, and welcome their recent decision to form teams to address core issues.

Secretary Rice traveled to the region September 19-20 to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders and build on the progress they are achieving through their talks. The international community must do its part, and provide political support to the efforts of the parties, and financial support to the Palestinian Authority government under President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, which represents a true partner for peace. We look forward to discussing these issues at the Quartet meeting on September 23, and the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in New York on September 24.

Addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires a balanced and forward-looking approach that aims not to cast aspersions but to encourage the kind of reconciliation that will improve the lives of all those in the region. It also requires encouragement for the forces of moderation in a region where extremism has done so much harm. As President Bush said on July 16, "Arab nations should also take an active part in promoting peace negotiations." They

should end the fiction that Israel does not exist and stop the incitement of hatred in their official media.

The Human Rights Council has the opportunity to play its own part in the current effort and demonstrate that it can do more than criticize Israel. We believe that it also has the responsibility -- if it is truly to promote the human rights of all those who live in the region -- to pursue just such a balanced and forward-looking approach. The Council has so far failed to act constructively, in accordance with its mandate, to promote and protect human rights so as to end the suffering on both sides. It is vital that it begin now to carry out this solemn responsibility.