



INDIA
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STATEMENT

BY

H.E. MR. E. AHAMED
Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs
Government of India

on

Agenda Item: 17 & 18
"The Situation in the Middle East" & "Question of Palestine"

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Mr President,

I thank you for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that requires our collective attention to an extent that almost nothing else does: the Question of Palestine, set in the larger context of the situation in the Middle East. This discussion is particularly appropriately timed, as it follows the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people yesterday, and the international conference hosted at Annapolis earlier this week.

Mr President,

India has traditionally followed with close concern the developments in this volatile region. Our delegation has perused with attention the reports of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Middle East and on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine. We have watched with concern as border restrictions, economic sanctions and a restrictive access regime had brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of collapse. We have viewed with alarm the continued vicious circle of attacks, reprisal and counter-attacks, the worsening humanitarian and security situation in Gaza following developments in June this year, as well as the continued violence inflicted on innocent civilians. Moreover, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, and the relentless construction of the separation wall threaten to create new facts on the ground and fresh grievances in an old conflict. The unresolved issues of last year's summer war in Lebanon, and the long-pending question of the occupation of the Syrian Golan add to a sense of frustration and desperation. All these issues have the potential of exacting an immediate and a long-term impact on the lives of the people, potentially contributing more fuel to an already combustible situation.

It is for this reason that India has consistently urged all concerned to eschew violence and exercise restraint at each of the all-too-frequent instances when violence has broken out, exacerbating sufferings and misery in the region. It is in the interest of the entire international community that a comprehensive and peaceful solution is found at the earliest to the problems besetting the Middle East.

Mr President,

For India, commitment to the Palestinian cause has been a bedrock of its foreign policy since even before our independence. India's

solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was inspired by its own freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. In the early years of independent India, this policy was consolidated under the leadership of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In November 1947, India voted against the partition of Palestine at the UN General Assembly. As early as in 1975, India recognised the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. In 1988, it recognised Palestinian statehood and in 1996 India opened its Representative Office to the State of Palestine.

I had the singular honour of having had a most memorable meeting with late President Yasser Arafat in September 2004, at Ramallah, at which I had the opportunity to express India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause. In fact, India's empathy with the Palestinian cause and its friendship with the people of Palestine constitutes an integral and time-tested part of our foreign policy. I salute the indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people and reaffirm India's consistent, principled and unwavering support to their cause and their just struggle for a sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

Mr. President,

It is widely recognized that the Middle East conflict is essentially political in nature and therefore cannot be resolved by force. India has consistently called upon all parties in the region to fully cooperate with the efforts of the international community in this regard. We have supported the resumption of direct negotiations between the leaders of Palestine and Israel and the establishment through peaceful negotiations of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, living side by side and in the shadow of peace with the State of Israel. We have supported the Quartet Road-Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. We have also called for comprehensive peace and stability in the region and supported the early resumption of dialogue on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. These issues must equally be addressed in order to attain a comprehensive and durable peace in the region.

Mr. President,

It is against this backdrop that India welcomes the Joint Understanding reached by the President of Palestine and the Prime Minister of Israel earlier this week at Annapolis. In particular, India welcomes the direct dialogue between the leaders of Palestine and

Israel and looks forward to an early and peaceful resolution of all issues between the two states and peoples. It is also satisfying that the Middle East Peace Process will address the remaining issues on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks; we believe that the Arab Peace Initiative re-launched at the Arab Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in March this year provides a constructive framework to achieve such a comprehensive peace. We hope that post-Annapolis developments will proceed down a path that will enable a negotiated solution of the core issues, leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, living side by side and in peaceful co-existence with the State of Israel.

Mr. President,

Given the complexity of this task, unprecedented determination, goodwill and capacity to offer and accept compromises and concessions are needed on all sides. It is here that the members of the international community have a collective duty to help in creating a favourable environment within which the principals can take forward the negotiations. India is ready to play a supportive role in this collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Thank you, Mr. President.