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'PROMOTING A CULTURE OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST'

Statement by

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Introductory Remarks

9 June 1993

1. The question of Palestine has been an enduring one for the United Nations and the international community ever since Great Britain relinquished its mandate over the area in 1947. The failure to fulfil General Assembly resolution 181 - the partition resolution - has resulted in chronic bloodshed and tragedy for all peoples of the region and, above all, for legions of Palestinian refugees, their children and grandchildren.
2. The problem was further complicated by the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 and the occupation by Israel of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights. The war led to the enunciation by the United Nations of a vital principle - the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. This principle, embodied in Security Council resolution 242, has remained for 26 years the guiding concept underpinning international attempts to reach a solution to the Arab/Israel conflict and to the question of Palestine at its core.

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3. The Israeli occupation of Arab territories endures, nevertheless, as does the suffering of dispossessed Palestinian refugees, as do the intolerable conditions faced by those who remain in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights. As for the Israeli people, they now more than ever find themselves confronted with a bloody and debilitating national conundrum.

4. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has repeatedly condemned the rising violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. As recently as late May, he expressed his deep concern, noting in particular "the sharp deterioration of the economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip resulting from Israel's decision, at the end of March, to close off the territories."

5. The Secretary-General's words impel us to turn both our heads and our hearts to the Middle East peace negotiations initiated in Madrid in 1991 and which, this month, may again reconvene in Washington.

6. For me personally the Madrid process of settlement of this conflict is of particular importance. At the end of 1991 I had an opportunity to co-chair the Moscow meeting on the Middle East which created and put into motion the mechanism of multilateral talks. Today, looking back at the past events it is hard not to see that there is no alternative to the solution proposed in Madrid. Despite all the problems and ups and downs in the negotiations only the diplomatic process can lead the participants to the mutually acceptable compromises on the basis of the balance of interests rather than the balance of power. One more observation: multilateral talks should by no means replace bilateral negotiations. On the contrary, multilateral and bilateral contacts should stimulate each other as two different diplomatic tools used to achieve the aim of comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

7. Despite the discouragement of those who may have hoped that the peace talks would quickly bring about a solution, the talks continue to offer enormous promise. The fact that they have persevered, in the face of both predictable and unforeseen challenges, allows me to turn to the theme of our gathering: how to promote a culture for peace in the Middle East. We all know the kind of peace we hope to see in the region: "comprehensive, just, and lasting." The women and men of the negotiating teams - in their roles as politicians and diplomats - will have to try to ensure that a settlement that fulfils these objectives will prevail. But all of us in this room have a moral duty and perhaps the power to help create the adequate environment for such a peace. Policy-makers, generals, journalists, writers and intellectuals; parents, employers, activists and educators - no matter what our roles in our public and personal lives, we can work towards a peace that spreads as broadly and deeply across Arab, Palestinian and Israeli culture as fear, distrust and grief do now. For too long a culture of reciprocal rejection has prevailed in the Middle East. For too long, a pervasive lack of mutual respect and mutual acknowledgement of grievances has kept the peoples of the Middle East apart, locked in armed camps teeming with the most frightening spectres of demonisation and hate. How long can this culture stand-off continue?

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8. If Arab, Israeli and Palestinian societies were homogeneous; if in each society there was not such a brilliant array of diversity of education, political views and temperament - and I include here the Palestinians scattered across the globe - it would be enough for the men and women in Washington to hammer out consensus, present the result to their constituencies and proclaim peace. But this is not the case. There is a powerful pluralism at work in both communities that requires each and every man and woman of goodwill, regardless of their differences, to select, lay and cement a brick in the foundation of peace. To nurture and sustain this new house on the hill, we need a culture that will accept it as just - not only in their minds but in their hearts as well.

9. Is this merely a pipe dream? Are our personal and collective memories of failed past endeavours so painful that we cannot imagine brighter possibilities? Does it make sense to talk about promoting a culture for peace in a region where daily mounting casualties show us there is no peace?

10. I believe a judicious mixture of realism and idealism can inspire the peoples of the Middle East to the necessary acts of faith, and to the necessary small steps and decisions in their daily lives which can influence the readiness of the communities on both sides of the divide to accept the responsibilities of peace.

11. While pessimism and Machiavellian ploys designed to advance tactical national goals may serve the needs of international politics at some times and in some places, let me, in all frankness, say that this forum is neither the time nor the place. I recognize that some of the distinguished panellists here with us today have substantive roles in the Middle East peace negotiations, or in the formulation of national policy. Nevertheless, I urge us all to enter into the discussions of the next three days as individual women and men of goodwill. Perhaps, in the give and take of our dialogue, we can create in this room that "judicious mixture" I mentioned a moment ago.

12. Let us talk and discuss, argue, agree, disagree and compromise, and in the end, return, each of us to our audiences - whether our leadership, or electorate, or students, or friends, families and neighbours - and with them start to create a climate which nourishes the Middle East peace process and which, when the day comes, embraces wholeheartedly the golden opportunities of a settlement.

13. The United Nations has an abiding and steadfast commitment to assisting, however possible, in the resolution of the question of Palestine. This can be seen not only in the numerous resolutions passed by the General Assembly and the Security Council but also, for example, in the dogged efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees every day, on the ground, in the towns, villages and camps of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and across the Middle East; in the vigilance of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization - the United Nations's first peace-keeping deployment - and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Forces on the Golan; and, not least, in these "encounters" of the United Nations Department of Public Information.

14. We believe this encounter, in particular, represents a solid step forward, thanks to the expertise and good intentions each of you will bring to bear on our discussions. Let us do our utmost to open a new door for a brighter Middle East future.

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Concluding Remarks

15. I have been very pleased that the spirit of the discussions of the last two and a half days have been so clearly a cooperative one and, I would say, positive one. None of the participants, in particular, none of the distinguished members of this panel, have raised any serious procedural matters. A team spirit has prevailed. You are all to be thanked, panellists and journalists alike. You made my task easy.

16. This encounter has been much more than a media event. The discussions which we are just about to conclude have proven to be closely connected to ongoing diplomatic processes related to the Middle East conflict. And may I quote the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who said "while the negotiations are taking place outside the United Nations, they still enjoy the support of all the parties concerned and are based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338; long recognized as a cornerstone of a comprehensive settlement." Both the Secretary-General and the General Assembly have strongly thrown their support behind the Madrid peace process which is one of the most important attempts of the international community at solving the Middle East conflict. While we all expect with great anticipation and hope for the resumption very shortly of the talks in Washington, we can also say that we have in fact established, here in London, a kind of parallel track, something we could call "constructive parallelism" with multidisciplinary components, including political, academic and media elements.

17. The meeting, for me, has been a timely one, taking place at a juncture in history when the world is no longer bipolar. Nor is today's world monopolar, rather it is multipolar. Many attempts throughout history, from Alexander the Great to the Pax Americana, Pax Sovietica and other unilateral efforts at hegemony have been made at instituting one kind of universal dominion or another. Today, however, after the failure of all these attempts, we can perhaps say that we have entered an era where the greatest promise seems to point towards a kind of "Pax United Nations," a kind of universal peace, in the sense that Emmanuel Kant intended in his famous essay "Project for a perpetual peace". Multilateralism is not utopia, but a reality today and multilateralism provides a unique chance for all the country, large and small, to play an active, constructive role in common actions to keep peace in the turbulent times in which we live. The question has been raised "What kind of peace exists"? From theory and practice we could make the distinction between the two kinds of peace - negative peace, which is characterized only by the absence of the use of force; and positive peace, which is characterized not only by the absence of violence, but by the development of close cooperation, not only between the governments but between the peoples in the area. This positive peace is the aim of the United Nations, is the aim of the efforts which are being undertaken today. We in the United Nations, as a result of the Secretary-General's "Agenda for Peace", have both the strategy and the tools to reach this kind of positive peace. The multilateral potential of the approach which is being tried out here at this encounter, should be placed in this context and is, I believe, very important. The interplay between media and diplomacy which we have witnessed over the past three days and which represents a collective approach towards problem solving at the international level is, in my opinion, the first instance of its kind.

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18. This London encounter has proven to be by no means a replica of previous such meetings which the United Nations Department of Public Information sponsored in Lisbon and in Helsinki. This encounter has developed from the best of the past encounters and taken a substantial step forward. Up until now we have been working hard at identifying the problems relating to the question of Palestine. With this meeting we have started to address the problems and to propose a way out of the conflict, a way towards a culture for peace.

19. Allow me to expand for a moment on the guiding concept of our discussions during the last several days, precisely the concept of a culture for peace. To promote a culture for peace is to nurture a comprehensive, society-wide system of values, beliefs and attitudes, the interplay and impact of which in and on the civil society would lead citizens of the Middle East, Arabs, Israelis, Palestinians - to putting a premium on peace, to desiring peace, to seeking peace and to standing for peace. The theme of this encounter and its underlying objectives are an attempt to try to begin to encourage new kinds of reactions, on the ground, new kinds of "instincts". We wanted to undertake these efforts in a partnership with the mass media, a partnership aimed at helping to create a world that is both just and stable. This represents an innovation in multilateral diplomacy which I believe has significance well beyond the Middle East. It is an integrated approach which I believe the United Nations intends to use in other regions of the world where there is complex and bitter strife. In his "Agenda for Peace" the Secretary-General calls precisely for this kind of approach in multilateral diplomacy, stressing the importance of three priority areas: peace, development and democratization. This encounter is a perfect example of that integrated approach, an example of preventive diplomacy. On your behalf, and in my own name, I wish to congratulate the organizers in the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) for a well done job. Let me assure you that I will not fail to bring to the attention of the Secretary-General the importance of what we have accomplished in London.

20. I believe we have seen a glimpse during our discussions of what could be achieved if there was the political will to take hard decisions in risky times, of what could be achieved when there is a courageous dynamism which is focused on creating peace.

21. Today, in this post Cold War world there is a new kind of global balance. It is no longer the traditional balance of power, but a balance of interests - if you like, an equation of interests whose solution is compromise. The Middle East has suffered extraordinarily as a result of the Cold War. In some ways, the Middle East has been perhaps the most affected region in the world. The United Nations, of course, played its role during this time with the many resolutions passed which pertain to the question of Palestine, with the many peace-keeping operations and rehabilitation programmes such as with United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). But perhaps we are on the road to showing how the Middle East can come through this crisis, and through its suffering, could acquire the status of an example - a positive one. If the Middle East arrives at a successful solution, this will have far reaching ramifications for other troubled areas around the world.

22. On this note, ladies and gentlemen, let me then conclude and simply wish you all a happy journey back home, and wish the peoples of the Middle East better peaceful times.

