

**STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST (AGENDA
ITEM 36) BY MR. V.K. NAMBIAR, PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE, AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON DECEMBER
3, 2002**

Mr. President,

It has been over eleven years since the Middle East Peace Process began in Madrid. The Peace Process envisioned direct negotiations, between Israel and the Arab States on the one hand and between Israel and the Palestinians on the other, to be conducted on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425, based on the principle of "Land for Peace". A number of positive developments have followed. These included the establishment of the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Arafat, diplomatic relations between Israel and several others, including some Arab countries, and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Southern Lebanon.

Unfortunately, however, the last two years have represented, in large measure, a negation of the progress achieved since Madrid. In every sense, the region has witnessed regression from the modest success that had been achieved painstakingly over almost a decade. The impasse in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and the resultant frustration, mistrust and violence have led to a dismantling of the multiple mechanisms established to increase cooperation and harmony between the two sides. Over 1,800 Palestinians and 600 Israelis have lost their lives in this short period of time. Despite the best efforts of the main protagonists, as well as other interested parties, the situation in the Middle East has continued to deteriorate.

Mr. President,

It is important for the United Nations General Assembly to reflect upon the reasons why we have reached this precarious juncture today. It is important for us to take stock of where we stand on the complex issue involving Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel has failed to understand the limitations of a uni-dimensional policy, based on a military approach without recourse to a concomitant political approach. Its policy of military blockades, curfews and restrictions imposed on Palestinian areas have resulted in economic deprivation,

dislocation of normal life, loss of freedom and, most important, demoralization of the Palestinian population. This has resulted in the continuing acts of violence and retribution against Israeli forces and civilians.

As a number of United Nations studies have established, the closures in the Palestinian areas have given rise to a grave humanitarian situation that continues to deteriorate. We note that the UN has recently announced a Humanitarian Plan of Action prepared on the basis of a report by the Secretary General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy who visited the region in August 2002. The United Nations bears a major responsibility to provide economic relief and sustenance to the beleaguered Palestinian population. While acknowledging the contribution of the UN and its specialized agencies, we urge them to continue to do all that is necessary in this regard.

As in the case of instances in the past, India reiterates its call to Israel to take immediate steps to lift the closures and blockade and to ease the economic hardship of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Israel must freeze its settlement expansion activity as the first step in the gradual dismantling of settlements in the West Bank and in Gaza. This would be an important confidence-building measure.

At the same time, the almost incessant instances of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, resulting in heavy loss of innocent life would have to end. India has consistently called for an immediate cessation of violence, whether on account of military action or acts of terror against innocent and unarmed civilians. India believes that all acts of violence and terrorism have to be abjured in absolute terms. There can be no moral justification for terrorism on any grounds: political, ideological, religious or any other.

The continuing deterioration of the situation and on-going cycle of violence highlight the need for a political solution. Preoccupation with elections, both in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, is not sufficient reason to lose the momentum on developing a political framework for peace. The Secretary General recently stated that "the road map for achieving a two-state solution within a three-year time frame being developed by the Quartet can play a vital role in breaking the cycle of violence and promoting a peaceful settlement".

India supports the efforts by the Quartet and initiatives such as that of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah adopted by the Arab League Summit in Beirut in March 2002, in resolving this outstanding issue. We share the view with many others that the conflict can only be resolved through negotiations. We call upon all sides to desist from violence as demanded in the recently adopted Security Council resolution 1435.

Mr. President,

India believes in the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side, within secure and peaceful borders, as affirmed by the Security Council resolution 1397(2002). We hope that day will not be too far in coming.

Mr. President,

Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000 in conformity with resolution 425 has, unfortunately, not resulted in the hoped-for lasting peace and tranquility in the area. Regular transgressions of the Blue Line are provocations that need to be addressed by the sides concerned. We believe that the presence of a highly professional United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has contributed greatly to minimizing incidents along this border. We wish to, in this context, commend UNIFIL for its stellar performance in the face of adversity and challenge.

Mr. President,

The current disruptions evident in the Palestinian Peace Process have had an adverse impact on the Syrian track of negotiations. We are hopeful that the circumstances for the resumption of negotiations on the issue of the return of the Syrian Golan would arise in the near future, leading to a comprehensive settlement of all issues in the Middle East.

Thank you, Mr. President.