

23 September 2007

**STATEMENT BY MIDDLE EAST QUARTET**

The following statement was issued today by the Quartet ( United Nations, Russian Federation, United States, European Union):

The Quartet principals -- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner -- met today in New York to discuss the situation in the Middle East. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

The Quartet recognized the present opportunity for progress and the robust regional and international desire for peace in the Middle East. The Quartet expressed its strong support for the ongoing bilateral talks between Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert and President [Mahmoud] Abbas, and welcomed the formation of Israeli and Palestinian teams to discuss the core issues that are essential to progress towards their shared goal of a negotiated two-State solution and establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with a secure Israel. The Quartet welcomed parallel steps taken by the parties to build confidence and improve conditions on the ground. The Quartet underscored the need for immediate additional steps to meet previous commitments, including those under the Road Map and the Agreement on Movement and Access, so as to create a positive atmosphere conducive to progress towards a two-State solution.

The Quartet expressed support for the international meeting on Israeli-Palestinian peace called for by President [George W.] Bush in his 16 July statement. Principals discussed the meeting and agreed that it should be substantive and serious, providing support to the parties in their bilateral discussions and negotiations in order to move forward urgently on a successful path to a Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians. The goal of this meeting is to bring together key members of the international community in support of efforts between the Israelis and Palestinians to end their conflict and help bring a final peace in the Middle East. The Quartet expects the meeting to affirm its support for the two-State solution based on a rejection of violence and its support for progress by the parties in their bilateral discussions. The meeting should also review progress that has been made towards building Palestinian institutions and discuss innovative and effective ways to support further Palestinian reform. The Quartet will work for a successful international meeting and for the implementation of its conclusions.

Quartet Representative Tony Blair briefed the Quartet on his meetings and discussions in the region, and discussed the way forward on the development of a

functioning Palestinian economy and the institutions of governance that will form the foundation of a Palestinian State. The Quartet agreed that Mr. Blair should work closely with the Palestinian Authority Government in developing a multi-year agenda for institutional and economic development, and looked forward to strong technical and financial support from the international community in support of these efforts, beginning with the 24 September Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting. In that context, the Quartet called upon all countries that are able to contribute to urgently provide financial support to the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet endorsed an extension of the Temporary International Mechanism until 31 December 2007, and expressed its hope that, during this period, a mechanism would be established to facilitate the transition to direct international assistance to this Palestinian Authority Government.

The Quartet expressed concern over conditions in Gaza. It agreed on the importance of continued emergency and humanitarian assistance without obstruction. The Quartet called for the continued provision of essential services. It expressed its urgent concern over the continued closure of major crossing points given the impact on the Palestinian economy and daily life. The Quartet further noted its grave concern over the continued rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, and recent efforts by Hamas to stifle freedom of speech and the press.

The Quartet discussed its forthcoming meeting with members of the Arab League follow-up committee to consult on next steps on the Arab Peace Initiative and regional support for bilateral talks between the parties.

The Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

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