Statement by Ambassador Shamshad Ahmad, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations on "The Situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian question" at the Security Council, 29 March 2002

Mr. President,

We meet today in pain and grief over what is happening in Palestine. Only three weeks ago, the Security Council had acted with courage and wisdom, reaffirming the vision of a lasting peace in the Middle East. That vision has unfortunately been blurred by the events of the last twenty-four hours demonstrating how fragile and precarious the situation in that region has become.

Mr. President,

2. Only yesterday, the Arab countries gave the entire world a clarion call for peace in the Middle East with justice and dignity – and the best opportunity to move back from the brink of violence and destruction and find a way out of this tragic quagmire. The Beirut Declaration of the Arab League was a message of hope and reconciliation. Today, we are witnessing the response in the form of intransigence and belligerence. The vestiges of hope for peace are being demolished underneath the tracks of tanks. Ramallah’s smog has peace under siege. We are all seeing this on TV screens. The headlines say “Arafat cornered.” Actually, it is peace which has been cornered. The headquarters of an elected leader of a people are being systematically taken apart with violence and bloodshed. Is this the response the Beirut Declaration merits? The spirit of commitment and sincerity shown at Beirut has now been rebuffed amid the chaos of heavy gunfire.

3. The Palestine issue is not confined to Ramallah. The recent incidents in the region are alarming and the loss of innocent lives shocking. But they are linked to a sense of injustice and desperation. After all, we must ask ourselves why would high-school girls, who have a bright future ahead of them opt for desperation and sacrifice? Why are the Palestinians, one after the other, being suicidal? Why are we not trying to listen their cries of anger and anguish? For what reason are other innocent people also losing their lives? Are we so much caught up in the horror of these acts of desperation that we do not think of their underlying causes? Are we so blind that we do not see obvious reason for what is happening? This is not only a matter worthy of serious reflection but also a cause for urgent action.

4. And, Mr. President, this Council must act today if not for its own credibility, at least for preventing the current crises from erupting into a full scale conflict or war. Three weeks ago the Secretary-General had appropriately surmised “we are nearing the edge of an abyss.” Today we are at the edge of that abyss. If nothing is done urgently to reverse the situation, the consequences would be unimaginable.

Mr. President,

5. It is unfortunate that the present deterioration in the situation comes in the very month in which bold new initiatives were made and hopes of peace were being revived. Yesterday’s Beirut Declaration came only two weeks after the historic Security Council resolution 1397 which affirmed the vision of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders. The resolution demanded an immediate cessation of all acts of violence in the region and resumption of the peace process. Resolution 1397 also welcomed the recent peace initiatives including that of Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Abdullah. This is in addition to efforts the Secretary-General himself has been making to move the parties and indeed the international community to move towards the path of peace. He has been acting as the conscience of this world body, if not that of the world itself. It is regrettable that such bold and imaginative initiatives for peace are being thwarted by the roar of tanks.
6. Over the last two years, there has been a pressing need for the resumption of negotiations. This need could not be more urgent now, especially in light of the spiraling and escalating violence which has claimed hundreds of innocent lives. With the peace process derailed and violence spiraling out of control never in the history of the Palestine crisis has the situation been so alarming and the need to respond more critical.

Mr. President,

7. We have debated in this chamber, the issue of Palestine, for well over half a century. It is one of the two unresolved disputes -- the other being the Kashmir issue -- involving the destiny of peoples and their inalienable right of self-determination with serious implications for world peace and security which have been on the agenda of the Security Council all these years. In both cases, there are Security Council resolutions which provide a framework for their implementation and unfortunately, in both cases the resolutions remain on the shelves of this Council unimplemented. While in the case of Kashmir the unimplemented resolutions are decades old, ironically, resolution 1397 was only passed three weeks ago. And yet we have not moved an inch towards its implementation.

8. As these resolutions remain unimplemented, peace in both Kashmir and Palestine also remains as elusive as ever. Violence continues to escalate. Oppression remains unabated. Violence continues to escalate and people, both in Kashmir and Palestine continue to be deprived of their legitimate right of self-determination. While we have waited for this body to act and to implement its own resolutions, the situation has reached alarming proportions.

Mr. President,

9. My Government has expressed its grave concern over the aggressive actions by Israel in surrounding and attacking President Arafat’s Ramallah headquarters. The loss of life and injuries resulting from this action simply cannot be justified. Israel’s re-occupation of Palestinian Authority territories constitutes a serious threat to regional peace and security, and puts into jeopardy the efforts of the international community for the resumption of the peace process.

10. These and other recent Israeli actions are all the more provocative in view of the Arab League Declaration offering Israel peace, security and recognition in exchange for its complete withdrawal from the territories that it occupied in June 1967. Pakistan calls upon the international community, and especially this body which is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security to urge Israel to immediately halt its attack on the Palestinian Authority and resume peace negotiations.

Mr. President,

11. Violence only begets violence. It solves no problem. The present deteriorating situation warrants our urgent attention. The international community must act, and act with determination to prevent the situation from worsening. The prospects of peace in the Middle East will continue to remain bleak without the immediate cessation of all acts of violence, provocation and destruction. The peace process has to be saved.

12. Our objective is not to achieve a ceasefire only. Our objective is actually the attainment of a final peace settlement in the Middle East. And the framework for that settlement already exists — in all the recent peace initiatives, in Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 1397, and in the Beirut Declaration. Those who have the responsibility to maintain international peace, especially the Security Council, must, therefore, act and act now to realize this objective and save what remains of the hopes of a durable peace in the Middle East.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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