

**Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan
to the United Nations on the Situation in the Middle East, Security Council, (23
March 2004)**

Mr. President,

The Security Council is meeting today as the Middle East stands at the brink of another grave crisis. The rocket attacks of 22 March have managed to undo in one stroke the achievements of careful international diplomacy over many, many years. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a paraplegic on a wheelchair, is dead – and so are 8 others. The specter of a new cycle of violence haunts Palestinians and Israelis. The peace process is in a mortal danger.

Mr. President,

2. The action by the Israeli armed forces is in complete violation of international law. There can be no justification for targeted assassinations and extrajudicial killings as an instrument of state policy. This is also in direct conflict with Israel's obligations as the occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. We are not convinced that the logic of self-defence can be extended to justify extra-judicial executions.

3. Article 51 of the UN Charter recognizes the right of individual or collective self-defence. But the Security Council is the only judge of the legitimacy of any measures taken under this article. Whatever the Council's evaluation, the Council is not absolved of its responsibility to take measures under the Charter in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

4. We therefore believe that inaction is not an option for the Council. The Council must pronounce itself on the issue. The Council has been criticized in the past for doing too little, too late. The gravity of the situation today can hardly afford indolence on the part of the Security Council.

5. We must ask Israel to disavow its policy of arbitrary assassinations. Those who are suspected of terrorism and other crimes can surely be subjected to the processes of the rule of law in a country which prides itself as a democracy.

Mr. President,

6. The Israeli action is unacceptable also because it represents a dangerous escalation in a very volatile dispute. The world has, understandably, reacted with shock and indignation. Pakistan joins those who have condemned this provocative action and expressed grave concern over its wider ramifications. The world community is justified in fearing that both the Palestinians and the Israelis are less secure today than they were on 21 March.

Mr. President,

7. The prospect of more bloodshed and heightened violence is not the only likely consequence of this illegal action. The fragile peace process in the Middle East has been dealt a severe blow. The Secretary-General has rightly noted that the Sheikh Yassin's assassination "has complicated issues" and that it does not "facilitate the task of peacemakers."

8. The need to halt death and destruction and a cycle of revenge and retaliation cannot be overstated. The killing of innocent civilians, whether in the occupied territories or in Israel, is a tragedy – for the people involved and for the entire region. The parties must act with maximum restraint and responsibility to break the spiral of violence threatening to consume the two peoples. The Security Council must act to rein in those who believe in unilateral and violent solutions and in the process shatter the dreams of a peaceful, normal and free life for their people.

9. We must also do everything within our means to salvage the peace process. We must reassure the Palestinian people that the international community -- and especially the Security Council -- will make every effort to secure the full and equitable implementation of the Quartet's Roadmap. In this context, we must secure assurances from the Government of Israel, and members of the Quartet, that the contemplated unilateral withdrawal from Gaza will constitute a part of a process of full and complete withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Roadmap and relevant resolutions of the Security Council. We must also ensure that the illegal separation wall being built by Israel on the West Bank does not lead to annexation of Palestinian territory and does not prejudice the final settlement.

Mr. President,

10. We need to protect the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The full and faithful implementation of resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515 remains essential for a just, durable and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

11. We must recognize that peace in the Holy Land is an essential component for peace and stability in the wider region of the Middle East. A fair solution of the Palestinian issue would go a long way in fostering greater amity across regions and cultures.
