



ICELAND

Open Debate in the UN Security Council

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Statement by H.E. Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson,

Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Mr. President

First of all allow me to thank Chile for convening this open debate. We are seeing a period of exceptional instability in the Middle East. The vicious conflict in Syria has become the epicenter. The intractability of certain conflicts in the region makes it all the more important to look for places where progress can be made. The long-standing conflict between the Palestinian people and Israel should be possible to solve. Indeed, a solution has been on the table for many years – the two-state solution. There are viable parties on both sides who can make the deal.

But both sides need to commit in word and deed to the two-state solution – and they must refrain from actions which undermine the viability of the only solution which will bring peace.

Expansion of Israeli settlements and the expropriation of land in Palestine continues – this is a clear breach of international law. We join others in calling on Israel to stop all settlement activity. In particular we urge Israel to reverse the decision on forced resettlement of Bedouins on the West Bank.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains dire, with recent news of people dying from exposure. The situation must be improved urgently by constructive cooperation between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian authorities. The blockade must be lifted immediately and Gaza needs to be allowed to function as a normal economy. At the same time security concerns for both sides must be addressed.

It is important that the Palestinian authorities take on real governmental responsibility for Gaza. Militant action from Gaza is unacceptable and will lead to further suffering and away from a negotiated solution.

Iceland recognized the State of Palestine in 2011. We welcome the recent recognition by our fellow Nordics, Sweden. This signal, added to that of many other member states of the UN, encompasses the vision of a State based on the 1967 borders. Iceland is pleased to see that the State of Palestine has ratified several international agreements.

In particular, the decision of the State of Palestine to accede to the Rome Statute should be applauded. As long-time supporters of the International Criminal Court, Iceland encourages all UN member states to put themselves under the jurisdiction of this Court, whose purpose is to help end impunity for crimes deemed especially serious by the international community.

Iceland also welcomes the State of Palestine to UNCLOS - the Convention on the Law of the Sea, which continues to be of utmost importance to Iceland and will undoubtedly come to benefit Palestine as a coastal state.

Mr. President,

The time has long come to negotiate all final status issues. The failure of the Security Council to provide a timeline which might assist in bringing about a solution is disappointing. There is consensus on the urgency. This is a conflict which can be solved. But for this to happen the Security Council needs to be more proactive.

Thank you, Mr. President