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**Rome, 26 July 2006 - Secretary-General's remarks to the International Conference on Lebanon**

THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REMARKS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LEBANON

Rome, 26 July 2006

Excellencies, Dear Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The death and destruction we have witnessed in the past two weeks, including yesterday's tragic killing of UN peacekeepers, compels this conference to send a strong message, and to speak with one voice. We must say, to the people of Lebanon, to the people of Israel, to people throughout the wider Middle East, that we will do our utmost to help them find a path towards peace.

The situation remains horrendous and dangerous. We need action on three fronts.

First and most urgent, we need an immediate cessation of the hostilities that began on 12 July with Hezbollah's reckless attack across the Blue Line and the abduction of two Israeli soldiers.

We need a cessation of hostilities because we face a grave humanitarian crisis. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, has just visited Lebanon, and reports that some 800,000 people are being affected in one way or another, whether through displacement, injury, trauma or other fallout.

Meanwhile, rockets continue to fall on Israeli cities, taking lives and instilling deep fear among hundreds of thousands of people. Some 400 Lebanese have been killed, and many thousands wounded. Several dozen Israelis have been killed, and hundreds wounded.

May I ask now that we all stand and observe a minute of silence for those who have died in this conflict. As we honor the dead, we must wonder how many more will fall in the weeks to come. And we must be clear, there remains great potential for further escalation.

Therefore I call on Hezbollah to stop its deliberate targeting of Israeli population centres.

And I call on Israel to end its bombardments, blockades and ground operations. A temporary cessation of hostilities would offer crucial hours and days for essential humanitarian tasks, including the distribution of relief aid and the evacuation of non-combatants and the wounded. A key stipulation for such a halt in fighting would be that the parties must not, I repeat, must not take advantage of such a pause to conduct offensive operations, redeploy or resupply.

An international force has a vital role to play in this scenario. Such a force should be seen as a bridge. In the short term, it would help with humanitarian operations, and support the Government of Lebanon in dealing with the emergency and in providing security to the Lebanese people. But over the longer term, it would also assist the Government in implementing the Taef agreement and Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1680, in particular by helping the Government to extend its authority - including a monopoly on the use of force -- throughout the country, strengthen the Lebanese Army, and disarm all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. Such a force could only operate with the consent of the Government of Lebanon and based on the consent of the Lebanese parties on its scope and mandate.

Second, we need a political framework so that a cessation of hostilities can be transformed into a longer-term process of enduring peace. Such a framework should address several issues, including captives, delineation of Lebanon's borders and a mechanism for monitoring and guaranteeing its implementation. I know that many of you attending this conference have your own ideas on how to bring about peace. We must bring our best ideas together into a coherent, achievable package that all parties can endorse. As we do so, we absolutely must avoid falling into the sequencing trap, in which each side establishes its own fixed notion of what must happen, in what order. To get out of today's crisis, implementation must proceed in parallel. And for solutions to last, it will also require the constructive engagement of the countries of the region, including Syria and Iran.

Third, this conference should commit to a strong economic package for Lebanon. In the crumbling of its buildings and bridges around them, the people of Lebanon have seen years of painstaking reconstruction un-done with terrible speed. Lebanon must be rebuilt -- again. A donor framework should be established in order to secure funding for reconstruction and development, as we just heard from the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Italy.

A cessation of hostilities, a political framework, the deployment of an international force, and agreement on a reconstruction programme would give us the beginnings of a way out of this crisis. The Security Council must play its rightful role. Therefore I ask this conference to urge the Security Council to call for an immediate cessation of hostilities. This could pave the way for further progress, and signal the Council's intention to give strong international support to the process.

Excellencies,

The people of Lebanon are reliving scenes from a chapter in their country's history they thought had been closed. This time, we need solutions that will stand the test of time. Israelis, for their part, thought they had seen the last of rockets terrorizing them from beyond their northern border, but the conflict has been rekindled more fiercely than thought possible. The wider region, too, can hardly stand another conflict alongside the sectarian strife, extremism and economic stagnation that are already widespread.

Indeed, looking at this broader picture, it is also clear that we need a new push for a comprehensive Middle East peace. Without this, we are only buying time until the next explosion. Despite all that has happened, despite even the current situation in Gaza, clear majorities of Israelis and Palestinians favour a negotiated peace.

We need a peace track here, too - not least to help remove a pretext used by extremists throughout the region, including in Lebanon. The United Nations remains strongly committed to this objective, and intends to do all it can to revive dialogue towards a comprehensive peace in accordance with Security Council resolutions.

Dear friends,

In the days and weeks ahead, we will need all of you to provide significant humanitarian, military and political support. We cannot return to the situation that prevailed before this crisis erupted. Moreover, the international community must not disappoint the people who are looking to us for help. Together, we must do our part to

make Lebanon whole and secure, to make Israel secure and safe, and to set the region on its way toward comprehensive peace.

Thank you very much.

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