

## **Statement of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the Annapolis Conference:**

In the name of God, the compassionate, (SPEAKING IN ARABIC) with great hope, but it is accompanied with great worry that this new opportunity might be lost.

But the meanings of your message are well known and they carry your personal bridge and commitment by your great country and its determination to embrace the Palestinian and Israeli peace and the Arab-Israeli peace to be converted in the arena of negotiations to be the first and foremost arena for making peace.

And that this initiative would culminate your term of office is an outstanding achievement which would add a new shining star in the skies of the world, the world of the future free of violence, oppression and bigotry.

And also we would like to applaud you, Mr. President, for choosing this charming city, Annapolis, as a venue for convening this international conference.

In addition to its beauty and distinctive location, it bears the symbol of freedom; the most sublime value in our life.

Freedom is the single word that stands for the future of the Palestinians and captures the meanings of all their generations. It is their sunshine and it is the life that inspires their future. It is the last word voiced by the martyrs and victims, and it is the lyric (ph) of their prisoners.

I must also pay tribute to the role played by Dr. Condoleezza Rice and her aides. For without her relentless resolve and determination and her vision vis-a-vis all aspects of conflict in our region, we would not have been convening here.

Dr. Rice took important strides with us in order to affirm that the path of peace is the only choice and it is irreversible. And that the path to negotiations for peace and to achieve peace is the right path.

It is important for me to indicate here that this distinguished participation and large participation from sister Arab and Islamic countries, the Quartet, and the group of great industrial countries, and the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations, and many prominent European and Asian countries, as well as nonaligned countries and African states and from South America, in a unique conference in the history of the conflicts would provide impetus and protection, in addition to the fact that it carries the meanings of encouragement to pursue the path of Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations and move that forward and the need to reach the solution of two states, based on ending occupation and the establishment of the state of Palestine side by side to the state of Israel, and the resolution of all issues relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Arab-Israeli conflict in all their aspects, as an indispensable qualitative step, so that comprehensive and normal peace relations would be established in our region.

I am proud that this Arab and Islamic contribution and this broad international participation in the work of this conference is a testimony to the fact that sister and friendly states are standing by us, the people of Palestine, as a leadership, and for our efforts to achieve peace.

It is a support of our approach that calls for a balanced historical settlement that would ensure peace and security for our independent state and for Israel, as well as for all countries in the region.

This Arab and Islamic participation in today's meeting is also an affirmation that the Arab peace initiative was not a step without well-defined targets, but indeed it was a bold strategic plan that aims changing the nature of relations in the region and to usher in a new era there.

But to achieve that does not depend on the Arab and Islamic position by itself, but requires meeting this position by a reciprocal strategic willingness that would basically lead to ending the occupation of all Palestinian occupied territories in 1967, including East Jerusalem, as well as the Syrian Golan and what remains of occupied from Lebanese territories, and to resolve all other issues relating to the conflict, especially the Palestinian refugees question in all its political, humanitarian, individual and common aspects, consistent with Resolution 194, as emphasized by the Arab peace initiative and the participation of sister states that host refugees and carry huge burdens in this regard.

I am not making an overstatement, Mr. President, if I say that our region stands at a crossroad that separates two historical phases, pre-Annapolis phase and post-Annapolis phase.

In other words, this extraordinary huge opportunity provided today by the Arab, Islamic and international position, and the overwhelming support from the public opinion in both the Palestinian and Israeli societies for the need to exploit the occasion of this conference that would launch the negotiating process and not to do away with the potential that it carries, I say that this opportunity might not be repeated. And if it were to be repeated, it might not enjoy the same unanimity and impetus.

Mr. President, what we are facing today is not just the challenge of peace, but we are facing a test of our credibility as a whole: the United States, members of the Quartet, and all members of the international community, Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, the Arab and Islamic group, as well.

It is a test that would leave its indelible impact on the future of the region and on the relationship among its peoples and the international powers that are entrusted in the peace, stability of our region on the other hand.

We came with this perspective to Annapolis today. And, therefore, we do recognize the volume of this possibility that we are bearing and the gravity of the burden that we must shoulder.

We do recognize, and I presume that you share me this view, that the absence of hope and overwhelming despair would feed extremism. Therefore, we have a common duty to spread genuine hope in order to achieve full transformation toward complete peace (inaudible) and long term during your term of office, Mr. President, thanks to your support and understanding.

Tomorrow, we have to start comprehensive and deep negotiations on all issues of final status, including Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, water and security and others.

We have to support this negotiating process in concrete and direct steps on the ground that would prove that we are moving in an irreversible path toward negotiated, comprehensive and full peace, and to ensure ending all settlement activities, including natural growth, and reopening closed Jerusalem institutions, removal of settlement outposts, removal of road blocks, and freedom of prisoners, and to facilitate our mission in the authority to enforce law and the rule of law.

Here, I must defend in all sincerity and candor, and without wavering, the right of our people to see a new dawn, without occupation, without settlement, without separation walls, without prisons where thousands of prisoners are detained, without assassinations, without siege, without barriers around villages and (inaudible).

I look forward, Mr. President, to see that our prisoners have been set free and returned to exercise their role in supporting peace and to stand by us in our mission to build our statehood and our homeland.

It is my duty to say that, to have peace, we need the fate of the city of Jerusalem to be a critical component in any peace accord that we might reach.

We need East Jerusalem to be our capital and to establish open relations with Western Jerusalem, and to ensure for all the faithful from all religions their right to exercise their rituals and to access holy shrines without any discrimination and on the basis of international and humanitarian goals.

In this regard, I wish to emphasize that we shall pursue our obligations under the road map, in order to combat chaos, violence, terrorism, and to ensure security, order and the rule of law.

The government of the Palestinian National Authority works tirelessly and without any wavering under extremely conditions to achieve this noble goal that represents, first and foremost, a Palestinian national interest before it becomes a political requirement that is imposed by signed accords or the road map.

Our people distinguish completely between emphasis on the danger of terrorism and using it as a pretext to maintain the status quo and to pursue the current practices that we suffer from every day.

There must be a chance given to us to build our civilian security and economic institutions.

And the international community must sponsor this opportunity so that our authority and our government would fully fulfill their mandates.

I must emphasize that our determination to end occupation emanates from our vision that we would remove the most important reasons for terrorism in our region and worldwide without underestimating the need to fight terrorism under all circumstances and from any source. Because it is a comprehensive threat that threatens the future of every people and imperils human civilization, its gains and achievements, and brings dire consequences on all of us.

Here, I must applaud the tireless efforts undertaken by Mr. Tony Blair, who continues to work in order to build and enhance building Palestinian institutions and to complete great projects at the economic level in order to improve the living conditions and the terms of peace. And in that endeavor, he continues to submit very constructive ideas.

And I wish to pay tribute to the role of the European Union, Japan and our Arab brothers who made commitments to support these economic projects and building the future Palestinian state institutions.

Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to address the mind and conscience of every citizen in Israel from this rostrum.

I'm speaking on the basis for our recognition that, despite the importance of international and regional support for the success of the peace process, but the most determining factor for the making peace and stability and its sustainability at the end of the day is the public opinion in Palestine, Israel and their legitimate leaders.

I start by saying that, despite our disagreements on critical issues, but Prime Minister Ehud Olmert showed desire for peace that I have perceived during our bilateral discussions, and that genuinely contributed to reach this important step for which we are meeting today in order to launch.

Mr. Prime Minister, I wish that we, together, continue and closely work in order to achieve a historical mission that we have waited for too long.

Each one of us must pitch in our weight and experience and sense of resolve in order to overcome the obstacles that we will face and to close the gaps between our positions in a bid to achieve a solution that would end occupation and the long years of suffering of the refugees and ensure good neighbor relations, economic cooperation, humanitarian openness so that all of them would ensure guarantees for peace that are stronger than any documents, commitments or pledges, despite the importance of these all.

I say to the citizens of Israel, in this extraordinary day, you, our neighbors on this small land, neither us nor you are begging for peace from each other. It is a common interest for us and for you.

Peace and freedom is a right to us, in as much as peace and security is a right for you and for us.

Time has come for the cycle of blood, violence and occupation to come to an end. Time has come that both of us should look at the future with confidence and hope, and that this long-suffering land, which was called the land of love and peace, would not be worth of its own name.

Peace is not impossible to achieve if there was will and good faith and every party got its legitimate right.

Those who say that peacemaking between us is impossible, actually does not need except to perpetuate this conflict toward the unknown, but it is, we all know, in other words, that continuation of bloodshed for many decades to come. After that, we would not reach the solution proposed today, all of which we know, all its components and elements. Or the ideal of peace would be killed in the hearts and minds.

Indeed, peace is possible but it requires our common efforts so that we could make it and preserve it.

And on this day we stretch our hands to you as equal partners in peace. The whole world is our witness and the world as a whole is supporting us.

Therefore, we should not lose this opportunity which might not be available once again. Let us make a peace with a brave (ph) and protect that peace in the interest of the future of our children and your children.

To our friends across the globe, members of the international Quartet, and all participants in this conference, powers and states outside this conference who have been and continue to lend support for us, I say to all of you that our people will never, ever forget your support for it under all circumstances and under our most difficult times.

We look forward that your political presence will continue to be with us after this conference, in order to support Palestinian-Israeli negotiations with a view to reach the desired results.

We all hope that the work of this conference would be supported by the success of the Paris economic conference to be held after a few weeks.

The continuation and success of negotiations would be the real key to change the face of the entire region.

Allah, the Lord, said in the Quran, in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful, all you who believe, enter into peace, all of you, don't follow the steps of Satan.

Satan is your obvious enemy.

The Lord also said, If they move toward peace, then you should move to peace and have faith in the Lord, because God, the Lord, will listen and support that effort.

And on this occasion, may I record here, as we are here in the United States of America, the words of former United States President John F. Kennedy, who said, quote, Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate, end of quotation.

To our Palestinian people, to all Palestinians in Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and in refugee camps and the diaspora, may I address these words?

I do recognize that each one of you has his or her personal pain, personal tragedy as a result of this conflict and as a result of the years of tragedy and occupation. These are very bitter years.

Don't be depressed, Don't lose confidence and hope, For the whole world today now is stretching its hand toward us in order to help us put an end to our tragedy, to our holocaust that has been running for too long, and to lift the historical injustice that our people suffer.

And we shall be ready as individuals and as a people to overcome pain and the tragedy when we reach a settlement that would ensure our rights, that would make us equal with all other peoples in the whole world: the right to independence and self-determination.

To the Palestinian mothers who are awaiting the return of their children from prisons, to the Palestinian children who are dreaming of a new life, a better future \_ more prosperous, more safe future, to our brave prisoners \_ my sisters, brothers, children \_ wherever you are, have confidence in the future and tomorrow, because future Palestine is coming, because this is the promise of the whole world to you.

Be confident that the dawn is coming.

To my people and relatives in the Gaza Strip, you are at the core of my heart. The hours of darkness will end in the face of your resolve and determination. For your insistence on the unity of our people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as one geographical political unit without any divergence, your suffering will end. Right and peace will prevail.

May I close by recalling some words of Abraham Lincoln in one of the darkest moments of American history? Quote, Let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations, end of quotation.

We started with peace and I end on a note of peace and we hope that peace would prevail.  
Peace be upon all of you.