
Sri Lanka's Response on Archbishop Desmond Tutu's Gaza Report

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Statement made on behalf of Sri Lanka by Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, during the Interactive Dialogue on the Report of the High-Level Fact Finding Mission to Beit Hanoun. Sri Lanka welcomes the report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Beit Hanoun and the presentation of Archbishop Tutu. The Mission appreciated the need for thorough investigation before pronouncing on so worrying a situation, and we are sorry that Israel did not feel itself able to cooperate with the Mission. The terrible suffering of the Palestinian people over so many decades is an issue that has worried the world, and we believe Israel, set up through the United Nations, and legitimately concerned about terrorist threats to its existence, should make it clear through cooperation with the United Nations that it subscribes to international norms and law, in its efforts at self defence. Discussion with Israeli personnel was intended to redress the imbalances perceived by Israel, and such discussion should not be denied in a context in which, as even the European Union had indicated, disproportionality was feared.

The issues of disproportionality and compensation raised by the Mission should, Mr. President, make clear the need for a more committed and consistent approach on the part of those who were largely responsible initially for the sufferings of the Palestinian people. Sri Lanka recognizes the horror of what was perpetrated by several European countries against the Jews over many centuries, and in particular, during the Holocaust, and we are glad that such anguish will not recur. For this reason alone, the current commitment of the European Union to Human Rights is welcome. We also understand the need to compensate for earlier aberrations felt after the Second World War. However, that this compensation should have been at the expense of innocent others is something we still cannot understand, and which only could have been possible in a context in which the current concern with equality of rights did not obtain. Archbishop Desmond Tutu But for this reason, we believe it is imperative that compensation for the Palestinians, restoration of lands that were not sanctioned by the United Nations when it established Israel, insistence on strict adherence to social and economic rights as well as political and civil ones, should be promoted by all member states. We hope the report of the Mission will draw attention to lapses, and that Israel, recognizing kinship of suffering, will move swiftly to a political settlement that recognizes the willingness to compromise displayed by democratic Palestinian forces in the midst of so many difficulties. We call then upon those who exercised power sixty years ago, who continue to exercise power now, to temper power with justice and work with commitment and consistency to end the suffering that, perhaps unwittingly, they created so many years ago.