media release

Global Leaders Support New Israeli-Palestinian Peace Initiatives

Brussels, 1 December 2003: Fifty-eight global leaders - former presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, defence ministers and heads of international agencies - have signed a statement in support of the Israeli-Palestinian peace plan formally launched today in Switzerland, and an associated petition initiative.

Both of the initiatives being backed are aimed at creating a new dynamic for peace in the Middle East. The “Geneva Initiative”, negotiated by teams led by former ministers Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, is the most ambitious blueprint for peace ever written by citizens of the two sides. The “People's Voice” project, initiated by Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh, aims at gathering mass Israeli and Palestinian public support for similar principles describing the outlines of a permanent status settlement.

The basic elements of the Geneva Initiative blueprint already command majority support among both Israelis and Palestinians, as shown in a poll released on 24 November 2003 commissioned jointly by the James A. Baker III Institute at Rice University and the International Crisis Group (see www.crisisweb.org for media release and poll details).

The citizen initiatives show - at a time of increasing despair and hopelessness among both Israelis and Palestinians - that a comprehensive peace agreement is indeed achievable. The attached statement emphasises that point, and calls on the international community to do everything possible to help make it happen.

The International Crisis Group, which initiated this international statement of support (on the understanding that efforts were under way by others to produce similar expressions of support from within the U.S.), has produced its own series of reports on this subject in July 2002. Middle East Endgame I: Getting To A Comprehensive Arab-Israeli Peace Settlement, and Middle East Endgame II: How A Comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian Peace Settlement Would Look spell out, in terms very similar to the Geneva Initiative, what the detailed elements of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement might look like; and detailed treaty proposals for resolving other outstanding Arab-Israeli issues are contained in Middle East Endgame III: Israel, Syria and Lebanon - How Comprehensive Peace Settlements Would Look. All these reports are accessible on www.crisisweb.org.

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The International Crisis Group (ICG) is an independent, non-profit, multinational organisation, with over 90 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.
To Israelis and Palestinians

A Statement of Support

On the occasion of the signing today of the “Geneva Initiative” – a blueprint for peace negotiated by teams of Israelis and Palestinians led by former ministers Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo – we express our strong support both for this and the “People's Voice” petition initiated by Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken far too great a toll already. Both peoples have paid dearly in lives and livelihood in a war which both are losing. Every passing day undermines the prospects for a peaceful, two-state solution. As long as the conflict endures, it will be a source of instability and violence for the region and the international community as a whole.

We believe that the best way to move forward is to address at the outset, not at the end of an incremental process, all the basic principles of a fair and lasting solution. Postponing the final outcome makes any progress hostage to extremists on both sides. A process must be devised to give practical and political expression to the heartfelt desire of clear majorities on both sides to end this conflict once and for all.

The Geneva and People’s Voice initiatives both reflect that public opinion, and can help give it new momentum. On the Israeli side, they can help undo the myths taking hold since the collapse of the peace process and onset of violence: that the Palestinian people are not prepared to accept a two state solution and Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. On the Palestinian side, they can offer an alternative to the current mindset that sees in violence the only possible means of ending the occupation. They send a powerful signal that an alternative to the current situation exists. They have the potential to transform the domestic political dynamics on both sides.

International support will be crucial to translate these endeavors into a concrete mechanism to bring about a lasting peace. The international players most relevant for this purpose – the U.S., E.U., Russia, UN ‘Quartet’, and the members of the Arab League – should wholeheartedly back these initiatives. They should urge both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority to be guided by the outcomes most of their peoples want. And they should make clear their own willingness to lend all the political, economic and military support needed to help implement a comprehensive peace agreement.

The Israeli and Palestinian peoples, by making clear their belief in the Geneva and People's Voice initiatives, can help turn the principles embodied in them into reality. You can count on our support in this endeavor.

Martti Ahtisaari
Former President, Finland

Ali Alatas
Former Foreign Minister, Indonesia

George Alleyne
Former Director, Pan American Health Organization

Oscar Arias Sánchez
Former President, Costa Rica, Nobel Peace Prize 1987

Lloyd Axworthy
Former Foreign Minister, Canada

Alexander Bessmertnykh
Former Foreign Minister, Soviet Union

Carl Bildt
Former Prime Minister, Sweden

Boutros Boutros-Ghali
Former UN Secretary-General

Lakhdar Brahimi
Former Foreign Minister, Algeria

Fernando Henrique Cardoso
Former President, Brazil
Ingvar Carlsson
Former Prime Minister, Sweden
Lord Carrington
Former Foreign and Defence Secretary, UK and NATO Secretary-General
Jorge Castañeda
Former Foreign Minister, Mexico
Claude Cheysson
Former Foreign Minister, France
Jacques Delors
Former President, European Commission
Jiří Dienstbier
Former Foreign Minister, Czechoslovakia
Ruth Dreifuss
Former President, Switzerland
Uffe Ellemann-Jensen
Former Foreign Minister, Denmark
Gareth Evans
Former Foreign Minister, Australia
Mark Eyskens
Former Foreign and Prime Minister, Belgium
José María Figueres
Former President, Costa Rica
Malcolm Fraser
Former Prime Minister, Australia
Hans-Dietrich Genscher
Former Foreign Minister, Germany
Bronisław Geremek
Former Foreign Minister, Poland
Mikhail S Gorbachev
Former President, Soviet Union, Nobel Peace Prize 1990
I K Gujral
Former Prime Minister, India
Bob Hawke
Former Prime Minister, Australia
Bill Hayden
Former Governor-General and Foreign Minister, Australia
Raffi K Hovannisian
Former Foreign Minister, Armenia
F W de Klerk
Former President, South Africa, Nobel Peace Prize 1993
Wim Kok
Former Prime Minister, Netherlands
Masahiko Komura
Former Foreign Minister, Japan
Budimir Lončar
Former Foreign Minister, Yugoslavia
Barbara McDougall
Former External Affairs Secretary, Canada
Gianni de Michelis
Former Foreign Minister, Italy
Boyko Noev
Former Defence Minister, Bulgaria
Sadako Ogata
Former UN High Commissioner for Refugees
Lord Owen
Former Foreign Secretary, UK
Surin Pitsuwan
Former Foreign Minister, Thailand
Augusto Ramírez-Ocampo
Former Foreign Minister, Colombia
Fidel V Ramos
Former President, Philippines
Jerry John Rawlings
Former President, Ghana
Mary Robinson
Former President, Ireland
Michel Rocard
Former Prime Minister, France
Nafis Sadik
Former Executive Director, UN Population Fund
Salim Ahmed Salim
Former Prime Minister, Tanzania, and Secretary-General OAU
Cornelio Sommaruga
Former President, International Committee of the Red Cross
Kalevi Sorsa
Former Prime Minister, Finland
Eduardo Stein
Former Foreign Minister, Guatemala
Pär Stenbäck
Former Foreign Minister, Finland
Max van der Stoel
Former Foreign Minister, Netherlands
Thorvald Stoltenberg
Former Foreign Minister, Norway
Hanna Suchocka
Former Prime Minister, Poland
Alex Sceberras Trigona
Former Foreign Minister, Malta
George Vassiliou
Former President, Cyprus
Hubert Védrine
Former Foreign Minister, France
Franz Vranitzky
Former Federal Chancellor, Austria
Ernesto Zedillo
Former President, Mexico

1 December 2003

Signatures subsequently received:

Abdou Diouf
Former President of Senegal
Vahit M Halefoğlu
Former Foreign Minister of Turkey