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Conference for peace in the Middle East (15 January 2017)

Over 70 countries and international organisations attended this conference hosted by Jean-Marc Ayrault, at which the French President François Hollande spoke.

Why was the Middle East Peace initiative launched?

Because the situation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories is getting worse in the absence of prospects for negotiations. Growing threats are weighing on the two-State solution, particularly the continuation of settlement-building and security problems facing the region's peoples. The crises engulfing the region (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.) have in no way reduced the significance or the symbolic importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is our responsibility not to negotiate in place of the two parties, which is neither possible nor desirable, but to act to create political momentum conducive to new negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians themselves.

Who will be taking part in the meeting in Paris on 15 January?

Over 70 countries and international organisations will attend this conference hosted by Jean-Marc Ayrault, at which the French President François Hollande will speak. The major international players concerned are: the Quartet (United States, European Union, Russia, United Nations), the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Arab and European partners, G20 countries and other actors committed to peace. This is a wider international conference in terms of participation than that of 3 June 2016, resulting from the momentum we have managed to generate for our initiative. It will be France's role to inform Israel and the Palestinian Authority of the Conference's message.

How will this differ from the meeting on 3 June 2016?

On 3 June last year, 28 countries or international organizations met in Paris at France's invitation. That meeting sought to send a signal of the international community's remobilization in support of peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, putting this absolute necessity back on the diplomatic agenda. Following the 3 June 2016 meeting, there were a number of developments: report from the Middle East Quartet, published on 1 July 2016; Russian and Egyptian initiatives; adoption on 23 December 2016 of resolution 2334 which, as Jean-Marc Ayrault has underlined, "recalls the importance of the solution of the two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and security." Moreover, work on the incentives announced on 3 June 2016 has moved forward in the three following fields:

- civil society;
- economic incentives;
- capacity building for the future Palestinian State.

Is there really any hope of a result?

Everyone is well aware of the difficulties dealing with a conflict that has lasted several decades. But we cannot remain as onlookers of a deadlocked situations that creates despair and insecurity. Our aim remains to mobilize the entire international community so that it actively commits by supporting a resumption of the peace process.

To achieve this, we must first together reaffirm our commitment to the two-State solution, which is the only way to ensure a fair and sustainable solution to the conflict.

We also need to make peace an attractive option again, by assembling the concrete contributions that all international partners are prepared to provide. These contributions will be central to the Conference on 15 January thanks to the reports from the working groups created in summer 2016.

Middle East Peace Conference Joint Declaration

1) Following the Ministerial meeting held in Paris on 3 June 2016, the Participants met in Paris on 15 January 2017 to reaffirm their support for a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They reaffirmed that a negotiated solution with two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, is the only way to achieve enduring peace.

They emphasized the importance for the parties to restate their commitment to this solution, to take urgent steps in order to reverse the current negative trends on the ground, including continued acts of violence and ongoing settlement activity, and to start meaningful direct negotiations.

They reiterated that a negotiated two-state solution should meet the legitimate aspirations of both sides, including the Palestinians' right to statehood and sovereignty, fully end the occupation that began in 1967, satisfy Israel's security needs and resolve all permanent status issues on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and also recalled relevant Security Council resolutions.

They underscored the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as a comprehensive framework for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, thus contributing to regional peace and security.

They welcomed international efforts to advance Middle East peace, including the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 on 23 December 2016 which clearly condemned settlement activity, incitement and all acts of violence and terror, and called on both sides to take steps to advance the two-state solution on the ground ; the recommendations of the Quartet on 1 July 2016 ; and the United States Secretary of State's principles on the two-state solution on 28 December 2016.

They noted the importance of addressing the dire humanitarian and security situation in the Gaza Strip and called for swift steps to improve the situation.

They emphasized the importance for Israelis and Palestinians to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law.

II) The Participants highlighted the potential for security, stability and prosperity for both parties that could result from a peace agreement. They expressed their readiness to exert necessary efforts toward the achievement of the two-state solution and to contribute substantially to arrangements for ensuring the sustainability of a negotiated peace agreement, in particular in the areas of political and economic incentives, the consolidation of Palestinian state capacities, and civil society dialogue. Those could include, inter alia:

- ▶ a European special privileged partnership ; other political and economic incentives and increased private sector involvement ; support to further efforts by the parties to improve economic cooperation ; continued financial support to the Palestinian authority in building the infrastructure for a viable Palestinian economy;
- ▶ supporting and strengthening Palestinian steps to exercise their responsibilities of statehood through consolidating their institutions and institutional capacities, including for service delivery;
- ▶ convening Israeli and Palestinian civil society fora, in order to enhance dialogue between the parties, rekindle the public debate and strengthen the role of civil society on both sides.

III) Looking ahead, the Participants:

- ▶ call upon both sides to officially restate their commitment to the two-state solution, thus disassociating themselves from voices that reject this solution;
- ▶ call on each side to independently demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to the two-state solution and refrain from unilateral steps that prejudice the outcome of negotiations on final status issues, including, inter alia, on Jerusalem, borders, security, refugees and which they will not recognize;
- ▶ welcome the prospect of closer cooperation between the Quartet and Arab League members and other relevant actors to further the objectives of this Declaration.

As follow-up to the Conference, interested Participants, expressing their readiness to review progress, resolved to meet again before the end of the year in order to support both sides in advancing the two-state solution through negotiations.

France will inform the parties about the international community's collective support and concrete contribution to the two-State solution contained in this joint declaration.