

H.E. Mr. Philémon Yang  
President of the General Assembly  
United Nations  
New York

22 November 2024

*Excellency,*

*Dear President,*

The Israel-Palestine conflict and the broader conflagration in the Middle East are showing no sign of abatement, with more death and destruction piled on the people of the region. The Palestinian civilians in Gaza, in particular, are subject to conditions well past any human limit of physical and psychological endurance. In this light and if nothing changes drastically, the upcoming observance by the UN General Assembly of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November, will de facto become a collective memorial service rather than an opportunity to project a better future for Palestine and the region.

Through this letter we implore you to take initiatives that could have a positive effect on the people of the embattled Occupied Palestinian Territory and the rest of the peoples of the Middle East, using the authority of your Office and the collective strength of the international community that the UN General Assembly most legitimately represents. The approach recommended is not about calling for ceasefires, or humanitarian imperatives, but about political creativity within the framework of international norms and UN resolutions.

We who sign this letter are former UN staff members, who convene as an informal Peacemaking Reflection Group ([PRG](#)). We have already written confidentially to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, recommending a strategy through which the UN could open political space for those in the region who are prepared to step back from the fighting and begin a dialogue towards peaceful co-existence. In our view, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the one where the strategic interests of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council appear least in conflict. Therefore, this is arguably the conflict where inclusive diplomacy by the UN and its Member States is most likely to lead to a positive outcome.

We attach for your information the recommendations that we submitted to the Secretary-General as part of this strategy, in the hope that they may also be of use to you. We kindly request that you share this letter with all members and observers of the General Assembly. A similar letter has been sent to the President of the UN Security Council.

We remain at the disposal of yourself and your associates should you wish to discuss our recommendations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration, and our commitment to support any initiative that you or other United Nations official or organ may undertake in our humble best ability.

Yours sincerely,

ASKWITH, Michael – former UN Resident Coordinator

BETTELLI, Paola – former Deputy Director, UN Regional Commissions New York Office

BROWNE, Stephen – former Deputy Executive Director, ITC

CHATURVEDI, Suvira – former Head of Office, UNIFEM-Kosovo

FRANCAIS, Patrice-Ariel – former UN Resident Coordinator

HAQ, Ameerah – former Under-Secretary-General, UN Department of Field Support

HEYN, Michael – former UN Resident Coordinator

KOSTAKOS Georgios – former Senior Officer, Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General

LEITNER, Kerstin – former UN Resident Coordinator

O'DONNELL, Francis – former UN Resident Coordinator

ROSE, Tore – former UN Resident Coordinator

RYAN, Jordan – former UN Assistant Secretary-General

SCHUMANN, Peter – former UN Resident Coordinator and AU/UN Peacekeeping Official at the ASG level

ZHAGORA, Vladimir – former Mediation Coordinator, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

## Recommendations submitted to the United Nations Secretary-General on 8 November 2024

- a. Engage directly with the outgoing US President Biden, and the incoming President-elect Trump, to **remove the US veto** on Palestine's admission to the UN; mention UNGA resolution, the ICJ's advisory opinion, and also Article 27.3 of the Charter, and US direct involvement in Israel's missile defence; but also that you are prepared to request the General Assembly to revive the Trusteeship Council for a unique **Trusteeship for Palestine**, along lines similar to the proposal by Lloyd Axworthy, Michael Manulak and Allen Rock.
- b. Convene informally, in Geneva or Vienna, or indeed New York, the leading "internal" **proponents of Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement** being former Israeli Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, as well as former Palestinian deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Nasser Al-Kidwa, as well as Limor Yehuda and Omar Dajani, Meron Rapaport and Awni Al Mashni, Achinoam Nini and Mira Awad, and such others can be identified on leadership levels in both societies, such as on the human rights level, Orly Noy and Hanan Ashrawi. Give their efforts a great boost, but also offer them **solid protection**, given the history of assassinations of peacemakers on both sides over the past century, possibly through an international accompaniment (**unarmed civilian protection**).
- c. Convene a **Symposium on the Middle East** of Chairs and Secretaries-General of the main networks of former world leaders (Presidents/Prime Ministers), such as the *InterAction Council*, *Council of Women World Leaders*, *The Elders*, *Club de Madrid*, etc., all well-placed to mobilise their governments in support.
- d. Constitute a **Commission on the Middle East**, which could include the former Presidents of the UN General Assembly; headed by a **Special Envoy** you appoint, and who would in turn consult with the Presidencies/Chairs/Secretaries-General of the Arab League, AU, EU, and G20. The primary role of the Commission would be to lay out the institutional foundations for a Community of Middle Eastern States, much as the *Schumann Declaration* laid the foundations for European integration and the eventual EU. Energy, infrastructure/transport, aviation, and watershed management and climate change could be key elements of regional cooperation. The Special Envoy should be a world leader with unquestionable credentials and access to all parties, such as a former UN General Assembly President, a former Timor-Leste or South African leader, or other respected former head of state or international organization.
- e. Encourage the Commission and these networks to develop a global visioning exercise for the Levant/Middle East, putting forward the feasibility of mutually-supportive win-win paths towards peaceful reconciliation and **a community of neighbouring states** that support Israeli and Palestinian sovereignties and some form of eventual confederal arrangement.
- f. With these networks, articulate that of all the major geo-strategic crises in the world at present, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, the PRC/Chinese-Taiwan tensions and the Korean Peninsula tensions, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the one where the strategic interests of the P5 UN veto-wielding powers appear least in conflict. Therefore, this is arguably the conflict where inclusive diplomacy by the UN and its Member States is most likely to succeed in bringing **consensus in the Security Council**.
- g. Delegate to your future globally-respected Special Envoy and Commissioners to undertake **intensive shuttle diplomacy** between the capitals of the P5, as well as Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Damascus, Doha, Jerusalem/Ramallah, Riyadh and Teheran.
- h. Given that the ICJ already found in its advisory opinion of 19 July 2024 that "*Israel has the obligation to make reparation for the damage caused to all the natural or legal persons concerned in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*", recommend to the General Assembly to create a "**Register of Damage and Harm**" on both sides, akin to that for Ukraine (resolution *A/RES/ES-11/5*), with a view to eventual compensation claims, to show the extent of destruction, attribute cause and source. This would also help the parties to build self-awareness, truth and reconciliation, whether it leads to formal compensation or not. It should be designed in such a way as to also document war crimes and help end impunity, going beyond the remit of the UNROD register established in 2006 to document claims arising from the Separation Wall in the West Bank.
- i. Invite civic leaders and celebrities from all sides to join forces for supportive multi-cultural and multi-media events that **forge public awareness and broader civic outreach**, in tandem with new educational programmes about non-demonising narratives of cultural histories, human rights, humanitarian law, and the roles of civil society and the media.
- j. **Donor conferences for reconstruction and investment** to follow, once ceasefires have been secured and, preferably, after later polls have ascertained prevailing popular support on all sides for reconciliation and resolution.