

## **Middle East**

### **Leaving behind violence, fear and hatred**

Resorting to violence in order to obtain security and peace is an illusion and a grave error. War only adds violence to violence. Since the beginning of the crises in Gaza and in Lebanon, one can already count the dead by the hundreds, the wounded by the thousands and the homeless by the hundreds of thousands. To this tragic summary, of which civilians are the principal victims, one must also add the anger that millions of people, plunged in the horrors of war, are feeling. Thus, the seeds of hatred are planted in the hearts of the combatants of tomorrow.

The choice of war is rarely the only option available. Thus, opting for war is taking on a very heavy responsibility. Self defense and resistance might indeed be acceptable justifications. However, bringing war and destruction into the heart of areas that are densely populated with civilians, destroying economic infrastructures, collectively punishing a population because a hostile organization is active in its territory, is not just a tragic error but also constitute war crimes to which those countries that support the forces of aggression are also accomplices.

Fear, hate and emotion are explosive in the Middle East. Many Israelis live in fear of attacks, kidnappings and a hostile regional environment. The Palestinians are revolting against occupation and imprisonment. Palestinian refugees live in suffering because of a forced exile and often in sordid conditions. The Lebanese undergo the ferocious backlash of a brutal and disproportionate offensive. Yet, violence is not an adequate response, neither morally nor politically.

Cold calculation of military efficiency, cynicism with regard to force, the dehumanization of the Other, these are steps backward. Only principles of justice, equality and respect for international law can advance the Middle East towards political solutions to the different conflicts that are tearing it apart. Full and sincere recognition of suffering and injustice undergone by the Other is the only way to leave behind the cycle of violence, fear and hatred.

Resolution 1559 can be a starting point for a real pacification of Lebanon. However, only the government of a Lebanese state that has full sovereignty restored can obtain the disarmament of Hizbullah, within the context of the fragile balance within Lebanese society and the integrity of its territory. In the case of Palestine, resolutions 242 concerning the return to the 1967 borders, and 194, concerning the right of return of the refugees, not applied by the State of Israel, are the bases for a just and lasting peace. There are Palestinian partners for negotiations, which remain the only way to solve the conflict and bring peace to the entire Middle East. Extremist ideologies will not continue to garner support from a population except if this unacceptable situation continues, and as long as the instinct for war overrides political courage and fear dominates reason.

Thus, we call on all the protagonists to engage without reserve in a process of negotiations for a solution whose juridical and political terms are already largely formulated.

We call on the leaders in France and in Europe to do everything possible to encourage all parties to renounce violence and choose the way of law and justice.

The Middle East is yet again at a decisive moment in its history. Only political courage, a long term vision that transcends diplomatic cautiousness, will prevent future tragedies.

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