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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL SUBMITTED IN PURSUANCE OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 344 (1973)

The following information is communicated in accordance with paragraph 3 of Security Council resolution 344 (1973) of 15 December 1973. The Peace Conference on the Middle East was convened by the Secretary-General on 21 December 1973 in Geneva. The following Governments were represented: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America. The Secretary-General, as Chairman, opened the Conference at 11 a.m. on the same day and made a statement, which is attached. The Conference, in two public sessions on 21 December, heard statements from the representatives of the USSR, the United States, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. After informal consultations among the delegations and with the Secretary-General, the Conference met again in closed session at 11 a.m. on 22 December. At the close of that session, the Secretary-General summed up the conclusions of the Conference about its future work as follows:

"After both formal and informal deliberations, the Conference reached a consensus to continue its work through the setting up of a military working group, as well as other working groups which the Conference may wish to establish. The military working group will start discussing forthwith the question of disengagement of forces. The working groups will report their findings and recommendations to the Conference, which is continuing on an ambassadorial level. The Conference at the foreign ministers level will reconvene in Geneva as needed in the light of developments."

TEXT OF A STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AT THE OPENING IN GENEVA OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST

It is a great honour for me to open this historic conference and to welcome the representatives of the participating Governments. It is also a source of gratification to me that this unique event is taking place under the auspices of the United Nations. The Palais des Nations has housed many historic meetings, but none has been of more potential importance, both to the Governments concerned and to the international community as a whole, than this conference on peace in the Middle East.

I am certain that I am speaking on behalf of all the participants in the Conference when I also take this opportunity to thank sincerely the Federal and Cantonal authorities of Switzerland for their valuable assistance. We are indeed most grateful for their unflinching and generous co-operation in making- the necessary arrangements possible.

There is no need to remind the distinguished representatives of the Governments here assembled of the concern of the international community for the success of our deliberations. This concern was emphasized most recently by the Security Council when it expressed the hope that the Conference would make speedy, progress towards the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East.--The United Nations has been seized of the various aspects of the Middle East conflict for more than a quarter of a century and has devoted an immense amount of time and effort both to keeping the peace and to the search for a just and lasting settlement.

On 11 October of this year, five days after bitter fighting had broken out once again in the Middle East, I appealed to the Governments concerned to look urgently to the possibility of turning the tragic conflict into a starting point for a new effort at a real settlement. Similar appeals were made by numerous Governments. Now, two months later, this new effort is taking shape in Geneva. None of us, I know, underestimates the difficulties of the task ahead, but the very fact of this Conference - and the willingness of the Governments concerned to respond to this new effort to find a just and lasting settlement - is a source of encouragement and hope for all mankind.

The basis for this meeting was laid down in Security Council resolution 388 (1973) of 22 October 1973- 'That resolution called upon the parties for an immediate cessation of all firing and a termination of all military activity. It called upon the parties to start immediately the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) in all its parts, and it decided that negotiations should begin at once between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

In subsequent resolutions on 23 and 25 October, the Council confirmed its decisions on an immediate cessation of all kinds of firing and of all military action, called for United Nations observations of the cease-fire and decided to set up a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF). The United Nations military observers and the Force were immediately put into the field, and they continue to exert their best efforts to keep the peace.

On 11 November, the representatives of Egypt and Israel, under the auspices of the Commander of UNEF, met at kilometre marker 101 on the Cairo -Suez road and signed the six-point agreement which had been communicated to the Secretary-General on 9 November by the Secretary of State of the United States. In subsequent meetings, the modalities for the implementation of five of the six points were agreed upon by the parties and were put into effect with the assistance of UNEF and the International Committee for the Red Cross. It is gratifying that, in this way, the humanitarian aspects of the six-point agreement have been largely fulfilled.

I am aware of the outstanding humanitarian problems relating to the Middle East questions as a whole. The Commander of UNEF, in close co-operation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, is making persistent efforts to find solutions to some of these problems, and I myself have taken initiatives in an effort to resolve others. It is my earnest hope that through such efforts and through the proceedings of this Conference rapid progress may be made in this regard.

On the implementation of one point of the agreement, namely, the question of the return to the October 22 positions in the framework of agreement on the disengagement and separation of forces under the auspices of the United Nations, the parties have not so far reached accord, although detailed exploratory discussions have been held. I hope that through its deliberations this Conference may make progress on this important matter, as well as embarking on the next step envisaged in resolution 338 (1973), namely, the negotiations aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

The presence of the Secretary-General of the United Nations here today reflects the deep concern of the international community in the Middle East question. It also symbolizes the willingness of the Organization to be of assistance whenever the parties require it. I want to assure all the parties here present that in that spirit I and my staff, both at United Nations Headquarters and in the Middle East, stand ready to be of assistance in any way that may seem useful to them. We have, I believe, amply demonstrated this readiness to act promptly in the critical events of recent months.

Before concluding, may I express appreciation to all the Governments which, by their spirit of co-operation and their desire to make progress on this most complex and crucial question, have made possible the convening of this Conference today. The Conference has a unique opportunity to come to grips with a most difficult, dangerous and complex international problem. If this opportunity is not seized, the world will inevitably be confronted once again with a dangerous and highly explosive situation in the Middle East. Unless progress can be made, the ceasefire and the United Nations peace-keeping arrangements already in operation in the area will remain fragile, and there will be an ever present danger that fighting will break out again.

The Conference presents a historic challenge to its participants not only because the eyes of the world are upon it but because the situation in the Middle East, with all its manifold implications, urgently demands the statesmanship, courage, patience and vision of each and all the participants. I know that these qualities are not lacking in this room. I am sure that all the participants share a sense of urgency and will not fail to seize the opportunity to build a lasting structure of peace in the area. It is an opportunity which may not recur for a very long time. I wish this Conference all success in its noble task.