

## **Launch of Report on Cost of Conflict in the Middle East**

**Palais de Nations, Geneva, 23 January 2009**

The Strategic Foresight Group report Cost of Conflict in the Middle East was launched on Friday, January 23, 2009 at Palais de Nations, Geneva, in the presence of the United Nations Under Secretary General Sergei Ordzhonikidze. The event was hosted by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and chaired by Ambassador Fred Tanner, Director of GCSP.

Ambassador Thomas Greminger, Head of Political Division IV of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, introduced the initiative that generated the report, while The Rt. Hon. Lord Alderdice, former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, explained its genesis. Sundeep Waslekar, President of Strategic Foresight Group, presented the report. Distinguished experts from the region especially visited Geneva for the launch. They included Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Chief of Staff of the Arab League Secretary General's Office; Dr Mohammad Shtayyeh, President of the Palestine Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction;



### **Under Secretary General Ordzhonikidze and Amb Fred Tanner at the Launch**

Prof Yair Hirschfeld, Director of Economic Cooperation Foundation of Israel; and Hon. Mevlut Cavusoglu, Member of Parliament and acting Chairman of Foreign Affairs Department of AK Party of Turkey. The event was attended by senior members of the international community, including ambassadors and heads of missions in Geneva. Ms Bente Bingen attended the event as a special guest representing the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Rt Hon Lord Alderdice hosted a pre-launch presentation of the report at the House of Lords, British Parliament, two days earlier, which was attended by several Parliamentarians and Peers across parties.



### **Pre-launch event at the House of Lords, London**

The report and its launch has been widely covered all over the world with the media in the United States, Canada, UK, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, Spain, Russia, China, India, Israel, Iran, Lebanon, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Australia, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Malaysia and several other countries carrying key messages analysis of the report. The report has also been welcomed by the blogosphere.

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In his welcome address Ambassador Fred Tanner said: “This study reveals a price tag of enormous proportion on an enduring conflict and its human and material consequences. It enables us with the help of thorough data and analysis to tackle the real issues of the Middle Eastern conflict: deprivation of human development, of welfare and human dignity caused by militarization, rivalries and political impediments.”

UN Under Secretary General Ordzhonikidze said that the study was a welcome opportunity for allowing research to feed into global discussions and help strengthen the basis on which international decision-making takes place. He added: “As the Secretary General of the Conference on Disarmament, I welcome the focus on arms race in the Middle East. The region not only has the highest military expenditure burden in the world but also registers the highest increase... The authors rightly note that this record military spending has done little to improve human security in the region.” (Full Text)

Ambassador Thomas Greminger emphasized that everyone would lose if the conflicts in the Middle East continued. He said: “The costs have negative implications for the whole world. It is in the national interest of all to solve the conflicts in the region. The report shows that peace will bring results in the course of people’s lives.” (Full Text)

Sundeeep Waslekar presented the highlights of the report. He said that the statistics of costs is not constant. “With the continuum of costs, the people of the region have to make a choice. The choice is between the danger of devastation and the promise of peace.” He explained that some costs could not be quantified. “For instance, the costs of human dignity cannot be measured in numbers.”

Lord Alderdice said: “There are two reasons for feeling hope. The first is that it is the first time that anyone has put together the costs of these conflicts, which will enable policy-makers to take informed decisions. The second is the appointment of Senator Mitchell as Special Envoy of the US President to the Middle East.”. Describing the report as “truly eye-watering”, he explained: “The figures are extraordinary. We hope this report will help people focus their minds on the terrible costs.”

Mevlut Cavusoglu called it a timely report. He welcomed the ceasefire in Gaza and narrated the history of the project and expressed Turkey’s strong support of it. He said: “The report is an important initiative for conflict resolution and peace in the Middle East. It is especially important



to assess the costs at a time when there is complete breakdown of negotiations. We hope that the report will be used by governments and international organizations, besides scholars.”

Dr Mohammad Shtayyeh called it a valuable report and hoped that it would “an eye-opener for all in the region.” He quoted several figures from the report to explain the plight of the Palestinian people under occupation. He compared the costs for the Palestinians and Israeli people as the

### **Amb Greminger, Lord Alderdice, Mr Cavusoglu and Dr Shyayyeh**

difference between hardware and software costs. He urged the international community to consider the burden of these costs for their own taxpayers.

Prof Yair Hirschfeld said that several important observations and measures have come out of the report. He said: “The enormous advantage of the Strategic Foresight Group undertaking this report is that they have created dialogue without the blame game and cause and effect. SFG has

managed to bring together important parties around the table and create a potential group of partners. SFG has the capacity to create concepts and the coalition required for conflict resolution.”

Ambassador Hesham Youssef acknowledged his involvement in the initiative from the beginning and said that he was glad to see the initiative concluding into a reality. “We have gone beyond numbers and figures. We are all on the losing side. We all stand to gain by ending the conflict.”

All speakers deplored the conflict in Gaza and expressed hope from the Obama Administration. They also thanked the Swiss and Norwegian governments, AK Party, and Qatar Foundation for their support for the report.

*For the following information on the Cost of Conflict in the Middle East, please visit the homepage [www.strategicforesight.com](http://www.strategicforesight.com)*

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