

I propose to begin today with a brief overview of the Gulf crisis: its origins and significance, the international response to it, the existing situation and how it may evolve.

As you are well aware, the crisis was triggered by Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait. Since that time, despite overwhelming international condemnation of its action and calls for its withdrawal, Iraq has declared the annexation of Kuwait and has reinforced its military position on the ground.

Iraq's action has precipitated the most serious international crisis of recent times. This in a region of long-standing volatility and deep and abiding animosities fuelled by poverty and economic disparities, religious and national enmities and the extremism and indiscriminate hatred which these breed. This is the region of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, recurrent domestic strife in Lebanon, of repeated Arab-Israeli wars, and cycles of vicious killings between Israelis and Palestinians of which the recent killings in Jerusalem are but the latest distressing example. In these circumstances, the Gulf crisis has explosive potential. The states of the region are heavily armed adversaries, disputing pre-eminence, influence, and control of vital reserves of oil.

All of these problems are crucial to peace in the area and must be addressed by the world community in multilateral or other fora with a determined commitment to find just and lasting solutions. But solutions to these problems cannot be linked to a solution to the Gulf crisis. Iraq's actions have created an additional problem of critical proportions involving grave dangers. None of the other long-existing problems of the entire Middle East region can be successfully addressed until the essence of the Gulf crisis is resolved. Only when this is achieved will it be possible to focus on other fundamental issues whose solution is essential to establishing any enduring stability and peace in the Middle East region.

This crisis takes place in a new international climate brought about by the end of the cold war. The acquisition of territory by force has represented dangerous and objectionable international behaviour for most of this century. But it is only now the world community can make the objection both credible and tenable. Iraq's actions represent a fundamental challenge for the international community in an era when the end of old super-power rivalries have opened the way for a more harmonious and co-operative approach to resolving international problems and protecting peace and security.