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Off-the-Cuff

**Remarks at press encounter with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States**

**Cairo, 20 November 2012**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, Shukran and Salaam Aleikum.

Secretary-General [Nabil] Elaraby and I had a very constructive meeting this morning. It is important that the League of Arab States and the United Nations work closely together and I appreciate his leadership on many serious issues.

I am visiting the region because of the alarming situation in Gaza.

I am here to appeal personally for an end to the violence and to offer my help in ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire.

I am also here to express my heartfelt sympathy and condolences to many civilians caught up in the conflict, especially the families of the victims who were killed and wounded.

Secretary-General Elaraby and I share deep concern about the appalling rising cost in human lives.

Once again, families and children are dying as a result of senseless violence.

Once again, Palestinians and Israelis live in fear of the next strike.

And this must stop. Immediate steps are needed by all to avoid further escalation, including a ground operation, which would only result in further tragedy.

All parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians. That is true of those bearing arms, and it is true of those giving the orders to use them.

My message is clear: all sides must halt fire immediately. Further escalating the situation will put the entire region at risk.

I appreciate the League of Arab States, led by Dr. Elaraby, for rapidly mobilizing diplomatic support for efforts led by Egypt to seek a ceasefire. I support these efforts. There is no time to waste to end the violence.

A new cycle of bloodshed will make neither Israelis nor Palestinians more secure. Nor will bloodshed open the door to negotiations that could achieve the two-state solution necessary to end the occupation and such violence permanently.

From Cairo, I will go to Israel, where I will urge the Israeli leadership to end the violence and firmly reiterate that Israel must respect its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law.

We all must recognize that Israel has legitimate security concerns that must be respected in accordance with international law. But a ground operation would be a dangerous escalation.

I will also travel to Ramallah to have a meeting with President [Mahmoud] Abbas, whose efforts at finding a long-overdue two-state solution are now more crucial than ever.

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The Arab League is a key partner of the United Nations, and our joint efforts are of immense importance at this time. I thank Secretary-General Elaraby for his support and his leadership and I thank you very much for your concern and attention. Shukran Jazeelan. Thank you.