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### BRIEFING SECURITY COUNCIL, SPECIAL COORDINATOR PAINTS STARK CONTRAST BETWEEN DEADLOCKED

#### ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS, DRAMATIC CHANGES IN REGION

##### Envoy Reports Mutual Low Confidence, Lack of Trust in International Efforts to Help Overcome Differences

In stark contrast to the recent dramatic political transformations in the Middle East, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations remained at a standstill, with each party sceptical of the other's intentions, as well as the international community's seriousness, United Nations envoy Robert Serry told the Security Council today as he called for "credible and effective international intervention" to get the process back on track.

"I must in all frankness report low confidence and trust in each other and in international efforts to help them overcome their differences," said Mr. Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, in his regular monthly briefing to the Council. While it was true that shifting regional dynamics had added an element of uncertainty to an already difficult peace process, progress towards a negotiated settlement addressing all core issues would make a critical contribution to stabilizing the wider region, he added.

Mr. Serry is also Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and the Secretary-General's Envoy to the Quartet.

Conveying Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's "profound concern" over the impasse in the political process, Mr. Serry said the parties were unlikely to overcome the deficit of trust without credible and effective international intervention. "In our view, it is becoming increasingly clear that a more concrete and substantive basis of negotiations on all core issues, including borders and security," he added, emphasizing that the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process must play its full role in that regard.

He went on to say that Quartet envoys, having reaffirmed their commitment to a two-State solution, were working to meet separately with the parties and with representatives of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee. They planned to give serious consideration to the Committee's views on how to bring about a resumption of negotiations on all core issues, including borders and security. He added that the Quartet principals had affirmed, during their meeting in Munich on 5 February, that Israeli-Palestinian peace and a comprehensive, wider Arab-Israeli peace were imperative if outcomes detrimental to the region were to be avoided.

"The longer the impasse in the talks persists, the greater our concern that tensions on the ground will unravel modest achievements and stand in the way of a negotiated solution," he warned, stressing that actions which risked prejudging the outcome of the negotiations were particularly unhelpful, and describing Israel's ongoing construction of some 2,000 housing units in the West Bank as "a regrettable development". He called on Israel to heed international calls, as well as the provisions of international law and the "Road Map", by freezing all settlement activity, including natural growth, and dismantling outposts.

Urging the parties to "refrain from provocative actions at this time", he recalled that Israel's destruction of 66 Palestinian homes in Area C of East Jerusalem had led to the displacement of about 100 people, impacting the livelihoods of vulnerable herding communities, all while the construction of adjacent settlements continued. However, adversity on the ground had not stopped the Palestinian Authority from forging ahead with its State-building agenda, he noted.

Having realized significant achievements over the past years, and with more reforms under way, the strong Palestinian institutions now established represented the basis of a "State-in-waiting", he continued. Yet, further progress was fundamentally constrained by Israeli measures of occupation that denied territorial contiguity and inhibited freedom of movement. The continued divisions among Palestinian factions were also a serious concern.

He went on to note that Palestinian security forces continued to make strides in maintaining law and order in the West Bank. Economic activity was on the rise, he said, noting Israel's removal of some obstacles to support that trend. There was easier access to Nablus via the Huwwara checkpoint, increased tourist access

to Bethlehem and more predictable access for meat and dairy products into East Jerusalem for the rest of the West Bank.

Mr.erry recalled that on 4 February, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel had agreed with Quartet Representative Tony Blair on a package of measures designed to help improve Palestinian livelihoods and support economic growth in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. "It is imperative that these steps be facilitated and implemented in full," he emphasized. "More and speedier measures by the Israeli Government are urgently needed to shore up the State-building effort."

He went on to describe the Israeli Government's commitment to allow Palestinian security forces to deploy into seven towns in Area C as another step forward. He noted, however, that Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had repeatedly impressed upon him that the Israeli security operations within Palestinian population centres meant to be under the control of the local security forces was a major concern. There had been 434 incursions in the past month alone, which had resulted in one Palestinian death, 96 injuries and nearly 400 arrests.

Also during the reporting period, the Palestinian Authority had taken a number of steps to meet expectations for political reform, including Prime Minister Fayyad's 8 February calling of local elections on 9 July, he said. President Mahmoud Abbas had declared on 17 February that presidential and legislative elections should also be held as soon possible, both in the West Bank and Gaza. " Hamas so far has rejected the calls for elections absent full reconciliation," Mr.erry added.

He also spotlighted Prime Minister Fayyad's decision last week to submit his Government's resignation, noting that President Abbas had immediately tasked the Prime Minister with forming a new Administration. The latter's suggestions regarding the formation of a national unity Government based on the principle of non-violence was important as a first step towards advancing reconciliation, he added. Amid all those developments, several hundred demonstrators had taken to the streets of Ramallah last week demanding that their leaders end their differences and reunite. "I urge all Palestinian factions to show responsibility and heed [those] legitimate calls," Mr.erry said.

He went on to report on his visit to Gaza last week, stressing that improving living conditions in the enclave remained a high priority. However, the reporting period had been marked by an escalation of rocket attacks emanating from Gaza, Israeli air raids and repeated confrontations in the border area. In addition to the more than 30 projectiles fired, a 10-year-old girl had been killed in Gaza when an explosive device had accidentally detonated. Calling for an immediate cessation of rocket activity, he urged the de facto authorities in Gaza to intensify efforts to maintain calm, while detailing Israeli air raids, tank fire and incursions against Hamas facilities and militants in response to the rocket attacks. He also called on Israel to exercise "maximum restraint" and to ensure the protection of civilians.

Expressing concern over Gaza's depressed economy due to the continuing impact of Israel's closure measures, Mr.erry welcomed the latter's approval of 14 additional United Nations infrastructure projects in the Strip, which had brought the total value of approved projects to \$155.4 million. It was now important for implementation to proceed smoothly, which would require the streamlined entry of material, he emphasized. Import levels had risen since June 2010 but were still below pre-2007 levels, he noted, expressing hope that both import and export levels could be scaled up. The world body was in discussions with the Israeli Government on a process — led by the Palestinian Authority with United Nations monitoring — for the commercial importation of construction materials destined for the private sector.

Reporting on the visit to the region by Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, he said she had spoken out against human rights violations such as settlement activity and the obstacles to movement imposed on Palestinians. She had also met with Israeli victims of rocket fire in Sderot and urged militants in Gaza to stop committing war crimes by such attacks. Mr.erry reiterated appeals for the release of Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, as well as concern over several thousand Palestinian detainees held in Israeli prisons. Finally, he welcomed the gradual reopening of the Rafah border crossing, closed between 30 January and 18 February.

Turning to other regional developments, he welcomed Israeli and Egyptian reaffirmations of commitment to regional stability and peace, as well as Israel's decision to allow 300 Palestinians living in Libya to enter the West Bank. However, he expressed regret at the lack of progress towards peace between Israel and Syria, as well as concern over a new campaign to encourage additional Israeli settlement in the occupied Syrian Golan.

On Lebanon, he recalled the tensions caused by demonstrations following the Government's collapse, reporting that Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati's consultations on forming a new Administration were continuing. He also noted that the administrative decree regulating the implementation of amendments to the labour law, approved by Parliament in 2010, represented an important step towards improving the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. In that regard, he urged more financial support for the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp.

Mr.erry also reported on commemorations of the sixth anniversary of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others, and reaffirmed the continuing commitment of the United Nations to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Concluding his briefing, Mr.erry emphasized that it was all the more urgent now that the Quartet maintained its credibility by finding ways to get the parties back to the negotiating table. There should be a readiness to offer more concrete suggestions to enable decisive progress towards peace, he said, expressing hope that the leaders would join in that effort by keeping up with their peoples' aspirations for stability and peace. That was the right lesson to draw from the recent changes occurring in the region, he stressed.

The meeting began at 10:20 a.m. and ended at 10:37 a.m.

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