



Secretary-General

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TIME WORKING AGAINST TWO-STATE SOLUTION, SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS IN MESSAGE TO MEDIA SEMINAR ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE, IN LISBON

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, as delivered by Kiyo Akasaka, Under Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, to the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, held in Lisbon, Portugal, on 22 July.

I thank the Government of Portugal for hosting this gathering. You meet as Israeli-Palestinian proximity talks have gotten under way. It is vital for the parties to refrain from provocations and seize this opportunity. The coming weeks will be critical in determining whether we can move to direct negotiations.

The two-State solution is the consensus position of the international community, Israelis and Palestinians. This is essential for Israel to maintain its democratic character and identity, and gain security and legitimacy throughout the region. And it is essential for Palestinians to achieve genuine freedom and national self-determination and to end the occupation. A negotiated solution to the refugee issue should also be found. But time is working against the two-State solution. Leaders on both sides must overcome their domestic political pressures and take bold steps for peace.

I welcome your focus at this meeting on the role of Israeli and Palestinian women in achieving peace and security in the Middle East. This year is the tenth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which called for higher levels of women's engagement in peacemaking and peacebuilding, not least because the impacts of armed conflict fall disproportionately on women. The core message of that landmark text — sustainable peace is possible only with the perspectives, leadership and full participation of women — is one we must take to heart in all regions, including the Middle East. I hope negotiators on both sides will do more to address women's many concerns and, above all, involve women in the search for peace.

I welcome Israel's recent steps towards a new policy with respect to Gaza. Full and swift implementation is crucial, as are further measures beyond those announced. The goal must be an end to the blockade.

Hamas, for its part, should enforce an extended ceasefire and move forward with the Egyptian proposal for reconciliation with the legitimate Palestinian Authority of President [Mahmoud] Abbas. With respect to prisoners, I continue to urge the conclusion of a prisoner-exchange agreement. It serves no Palestinian interest to keep Corporal Gilad Shalit in captivity; access should be granted to him and he should be released.

Jerusalem is a permanent-status issue and a way should be found for the City to emerge as the capital of both Israel and a future State of Palestine, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all. Although Israeli authorities have taken steps to freeze house demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem, recent developments heighten tensions and may undermine the fragile progress in the proximity talks. Settlement activity in any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory contravenes international law, Security Council resolutions and Israel's Roadmap obligations, and it should be frozen.

I welcome the reduction in obstacles to movement in the West Bank, but hundreds of checkpoints and other obstacles continue to stifle economic activity and deprive Palestinian residents of access to their land, hospitals and schools. Despite such challenges, the Palestinian Authority's State-building initiative has shown remarkable progress in the areas of security and rule of law.

I also welcome the attention this Seminar is giving to the role of new media in advancing the peace process. The growing use of new media in the Middle East offers truly exciting opportunities to reach wider audiences, particularly young people. I encourage young Israelis and Palestinians to use these new tools to spread positive messages that will promote a culture of peace, coexistence and better understanding between their people.

In that spirit, I offer my best wishes for a successful meeting.

