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## Secretary-General's remarks at joint press encounter with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Ramallah, 1 February 2012

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for your very kind welcome and hospitality. It is always a great pleasure and privilege for me to continue to work with you and thank you very much for all the support you have given to me.

I am also very pleased to visit Israel just after the start of my second term as Secretary-General. You can count on me as Secretary-General in working together for peace and stability in this region.

Peace and stability in the Middle East has global implications. That is why everybody wishes that these peace talks should continue so that you can see and realize just and lasting peace in this part of the world.

Again ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to meet you today. Prime Minister Netanyahu and I just concluded a very constructive dialogue over lunch and again thank you very much for your wonderful hospitality.

Once again, we are at critical moment for Israel and the region. I am encouraged that the parties have started direct talks in the framework of the Middle East Quartet and under Jordanian auspices.

I remain hopeful that direct, frequent exchanges between the parties will continue. I also hope that Israel will be forthcoming with its own concrete proposals on territory and security, as called for by the Quartet in order to reach agreement on all final status issues before the end of this year. The success of Amman talks is in the interest of both Israelis and Palestinians.

I commend the Prime Minister Netanyahu, his commitment to a two-state solution. This is the moment to display further leadership to ensure that the negotiations continue. As you were re-elected as leader of the Likud party and you are going to continue another term -- as I am beginning a second term as United Nations Secretary-General, you have got a good opportunity.[It is a] good opportunity for us to work together to continue for the Middle East peace process.

A credible political horizon is imperative for the emergence of a Palestinian state living in peace and security side-by-side with Israel. The consequences of inaction would be grave for either side. Now is also the time for both sides to take steps that build trust and confidence. I discussed with the Prime Minister meaningful ways to sustain these nascent talks. I also strongly urged the government of Israel to act in a constructive spirit and offer goodwill gestures which will help create positive dynamics.

The Prime Minister and I also discussed the situation in this area and Gaza and I informed him of my planned visit tomorrow. I shared my concerns about the fragility of the calm and stressed that continued rocket attacks out of Gaza must stop. It is unacceptable.

Gaza remains a priority for me and for the United Nations family. I thus urged the Prime Minister to take further steps to facilitate the delivery of the United Nations important humanitarian and development assistance in the service of the Gazan people.

Let me conclude by saying that I am well aware of the anxiety in Israel about the evolving regional situation. It is my firm belief that Israel can contribute positively to regional transformations and improve its strategic relations with its neighbours, including by constructively engaging in the peace process with the Palestinians. And I look forward Mr. Prime Minister to working together to achieve our shared goals.

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Q: Mr. Secretary-General, you have talked about goodwill gestures and you have been critical of settlements. Have you asked the Prime Minister to make a freeze of settlements a goodwill gesture. And if so, Mr. Prime Minister, have you put that on the agenda and if not, why not? Thank you.

SG: My position, the United Nations position on settlement is clear. It does not help the ongoing peace process. I have told clearly President Peres this morning --and this afternoon to the Prime Minister-- that they should refrain from further settlement for smooth ongoing peace talks. This can be one of the ways of expressing goodwill gestures.

Q: Secretary-General, you are continuing from here to Ramallah, to the Palestinian Authority. There have been several incidents in the past month of reports regarding hate and racist messages under the Palestinian Authority. There has been a religious leader calling for murdering Jews and also a TV show glorifying the [inaudible] murders. Do you plan to say anything to President Abbas about these incidents? And Prime Minister Netanyahu, what was the reason for changing the criteria for priority status on housing in the West Bank in the past days? Did you get any requests from the international community regarding the original government resolution which was passed on Sunday?

SG: Israelis and Palestinian people have a common interest, in a sense a common destiny, to live in peace and security, harmoniously, as neighbours. So, this will not change because the status of being neighbours will never change as long as people exist and countries exist. Therefore, it is a common interest, common view, common vision that two peoples live in peace and harmony. That's the common vision two leaders have already agreed in principle. That's the two-state vision. As the Prime Minister said, the two peoples should live in peace and security side by side. Then any hatred --hate speeches or provocations-- they are not helpful, they are not acceptable. They have to engage in a very genuine process of negotiation. That is why I am here. That is why the Quartet is very much committed. You should understand that the whole international community, people are looking to the both of you so that you can engage in dialogue. I think it is high time -- this is once in a generation opportunity. As Secretary-General, I have made it quite clear that the Middle East peace process is one of the top priorities of my term as Secretary-General. You have the full support of the whole international community. So please seize this moment, this opportunity not to lose this momentum. It has already been seven decades. During the last two decades, we have not made much progress in the peace talks. That is why I believe that this is the most appropriate time, considering all the transformational changes taking place. I urge again both leaders, Prime Minister, please demonstrate your leadership, strong vision and courage and determination to move ahead with this process. Thank you very much.