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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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PRESS CONFERENCE

New York, 11 November 2008

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Following the Nairobi summit, I chaired a meeting of the Quartet in Sharm el-Sheik. This was the first time that the parties jointly took the initiative to brief the Quartet on progress in their bilateral negotiations.

All of us regret that an agreement is unlikely to be reached by the goal set by the Annapolis process – by the end of this year. However, all Quartet members were impressed by the commitment of the parties to pursue negotiations and remain focused on the goal: a final peace treaty, on all core issues.

We expect negotiations to continue uninterrupted through the coming period of transition. And all parties will be looking to the incoming U.S. Administration to engage early, as a matter of highest priority. The goal remains clear to all: an end of conflict, an end of occupation, a two state solution.

We also agreed on the urgent need to improve the situation on the ground, and to support the work of the Palestinian government to build security and improve living conditions. This requires action on Roadmap commitments, including on settlements, as well as a cessation of actions such as house demolitions that are contrary to international law or alter the status quo, including in East Jerusalem.

We were acutely conscious of the distressing conditions in Gaza. I call for Hamas and all Palestinian factions to respond positively to Egypt's unity efforts. I call for the calm to be respected. And I call on Israel to ease the severe closure of Gaza by allowing sufficient and predictable supplies to reach the population, ensuring access for humanitarian workers, and facilitating stalled UN projects.

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Q: Thank you. Can you tell us about your meeting with King Abdullah yesterday and what you discussed?

SG: Yes, I had about an hour-long meeting with Saudi King Abdullah. First of all I commended his initiative to bring this inter-faith dialogue to the General Assembly. He exerted a great deal of time and energy to converge the differences of opinions into one. It has been very much a commendable initiative. And we also discussed on many other issues in the region, particularly including the situation in the Middle East, including the recent Quartet meeting, the situation in Somalia, in Lebanon, the situation in Iraq. We will continue, I'm sure that I will have another opportunity of meeting him this evening and tomorrow morning. We are looking forward to his speech tomorrow morning at the General Assembly. As you know, I'm going to have a number of bilateral meetings with the leaders participating in this high-level meeting. The number of bilaterals will increase. In fact, as I have postponed this morning my visit to Los Angeles, so I'll be here during that entire period of time.

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Q: Mr. Secretary-General, you said that you met with the Saudi King yesterday, and you tackled the whole issue of the Middle East, including Lebanon. And you said also that you will have bilateral meetings with leaders. Will you meet with President [Michel] Suleiman of Lebanon?

SG: Of course, yes, yes

Q: [inaudible] the meeting on [Resolution] 1701 and the report on the buildup of Fatah al-Islam in the south of Lebanon. What is the issue on the Shab'a Farms? There is very quiet information coming from Shab'a Farms. Can you update us on this issue, please?

SG: Today and tomorrow I am going to have meetings with President [Shimon] Peres and Foreign Minister [Tzipi] Livni [of Israel] separately to discuss the issues, my forthcoming report on Security Council Resolution 1701. I am going to discuss all the matters, including Shab'a and the withdrawal of the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) from Gaza and all the current situation on the ground, how to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and I am going to urge them to stop the demolition of houses and stop settlements. My meeting with them will include comprehensive agendas.

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Q: Mr. Secretary-General, one quick follow-up on the conference tomorrow. You are hosting a dinner tonight and there are going to be two days of the possibility of... you have the President of Israel coming, and you have a lot of senior Arab leaders. Are you going to be doing anything to try and promote some meetings between the Israelis and Arab leaders? I notice, particularly, that you are hosting a dinner tonight. Is the Israeli leadership coming along with, I assume, a lot of the Arab leaders who are in town?

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SG: Yes, it is quite unique when you expect that President Peres of Israel and the King of Saudi Arabia and many Kings and leaders from the Arab world are having a sit-down together and having dinner. This is quite encouraging and positive. In that regard, I sincerely hope that through their participation in the meetings and

through this kind of a social, diplomatic gathering, that they will be able to promote further understanding.

The bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians have been going on. And their joint brief meeting sitting down together with the Quartet members was also very much an encouraging one.

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Q: Can you explain to us, please, Sir, why the Annapolis peace process has failed in reaching an agreement by the end of the year, as it was supposed to?

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SG: I wouldn't describe it as a failure of the Annapolis [process]. It is regrettable that Annapolis has not been able to achieve the agreement by the end of December. It is unlikely, as I said, that there will be an agreement by the end of December. Both leaders agreed that this negotiation will continue. These will be ongoing, continuous negotiations and one that all Quartet members have supported, even during the transition in the United States and in Israel. That is very encouraging. We will continue to support such progress. We were told by the parties that their negotiation has been promising and substantial, but because of the confidentiality of these very delicate negotiations, we didn't discuss at length on this matter. One of the principles is that until everything is agreed, nothing is agreed. They have agreed to that principle. Therefore it may not be possible to announce, one by one, whenever there has been some agreement, so I think you need to be patient on this matter.

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Q: Mr. Secretary-General, I know you danced around this question a little bit earlier, but upon this likely historic meeting later on today between King Abdullah and the possibility of sitting down at the table with Shimon Peres and Tzipi Livni, what do you hope will come out of the meeting of these minds here while they are in New York? Your greatest expectation -- protocol aside, I understand what you were saying before, but I am sure you have some genuine hopes?

SG: What I can tell you at this time is that it is not going to be a meeting which I am going to organize between the two leaders. Bilaterally, I have met. But sitting in the same room and engaging in the same functions -- normally, in the past, they have not been sitting in the same place like this. That is very important and positive and encouraging. The purpose of this meeting itself is to promote mutual understanding and address all the differences of opinions, either political or religious. Through this high-level meeting, I hope this will also create some atmosphere favourable, conducive to addressing the differences of political issues. That is what we can expect. I will do my best, keeping in mind this kind of opportunity [for] what we can, I can, do to promote further understanding between the two different parties.

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