
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT AND FIRST MEETING OF THE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE SPECIAL HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME FOR THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

**[Remarks delivered by H.E. Ambassador Dr. Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani, Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly]
New York, 8 February 2012**

Excellencies,

Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The President of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, regrets that he could not join you for today's event. As his Chef de Cabinet, I am pleased to make the following remarks on his behalf.

I am honored by Dr. Clos' invitation to address you at this ceremony, dedicated to the establishment and first meeting of the Advisory Board of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People.

The issue at hand is particularly relevant and important to me for two main reasons.

The first is that my vision for the work of the General Assembly this session includes, among its four pillars, "Sustainable development and global prosperity".

Issues related to human settlements are of course very pertinent to this pillar.

I am pleased to note that the General Assembly has already made good progress this session, with the adoption of resolution 66/207, which, among other decisions, calls for a Third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development, to be convened in 2016.

I commend the Government of Turkey for offering to host the conference in Istanbul, and I wish Dr. Clos great success in his job as Secretary-General of the Conference.

A strong follow-up to the process of human settlements in the UN system is crucial to the realization of the basic human right to proper housing.

The second reason this issue is particularly important to me is that I have also identified among the four pillars, "the peaceful settlement of disputes".

The commitment to peacefully resolving disputes is also reflected in the very creation of this Advisory Board.

I understand that the resolution of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat establishing the Advisory Board was drafted by a committee. A committee which included Palestine, Israel, Jordan, the United States, Chile and Rwanda.

It is significant that such a wide array of important international actors, including key players on the issue of Palestine, could come together to take this very positive step.

I hope that this may serve as a seed for similar initiatives in the future, with a view to improving the living conditions of all peoples in the Middle East, and in particular of the Palestinians.

Furthermore, one should not forget that such instances of collaboration can also help build trust among the parties and, thus, have positive effects on the wider peace process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Governing Council of UN-HABITAT has given this Advisory Board a clear mandate. A mandate to focus on planning, land and housing.

In this regard, I strongly encourage the relevant Palestinian institutions to work in cooperation with UN Habitat, to continue to undertake their development plans in Occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley. This is especially pressing in Area C, which makes up 62% of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Infrastructure projects will also bolster the standard of living of the Palestinians.

Finally, I would encourage UN Habitat to continue to support the Palestinian National Authority's efforts to develop their institutions, with a view to adequately providing services and sustainable development to the Palestinian people. Such development will only enhance peace in this region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I deeply appreciate the efforts made by the countries and organizations that have already come forward with the donation of resources for this Advisory Board's activities. In particular, I would like to recognise Bahrain, Belgium, France, Saudi Arabia and the European Union. I strongly encourage other countries to consider following their example.

I would also invite the wider Membership, dedicated to seeking a stable and sustainable Palestine, to engage with the Board's work.

I will end by expressing my full support to the work of the Advisory Board of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People. I wish the members of the Board great success in their noble undertaking.

Thank you.