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ANSWER TO PALESTINIAN PROBLEM LIES IN PERFORMANCE OF STEPS REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT ROAD MAP, SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS

Following is the message by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Geneva today, delivered by Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA):

I send my best wishes to all who have gathered to discuss international assistance to the Palestinians and Palestinian economic recovery. You meet at a time of both hope and suffering for the Palestinian people.

The hope springs from the outcome of the Aqaba Summit. Since then, despite all-too-familiar acts of violence in which both Palestinians and Israelis have suffered, we have seen certain positive steps. In addition to beginning to dismantle particular outposts, Israeli forces have withdrawn from certain positions in the Gaza Strip and Bethlehem, enabling the Palestinian Authority to assume responsibility for security in those areas. The United States played an essential role in making this possible. On the Palestinian side, armed groups have agreed to a ceasefire. That is very important. Violence is not the answer to the Palestinian problem. The answer, for both sides, lies in reaching a political solution through the performance of the steps required to implement [the Road Map](#).

The Quartet and the international community must hold the parties to their commitments and help them to implement the Road Map, until they reach its final goal: a permanent settlement of the conflict, based on Security Council resolutions [242](#), [338](#) and [1397](#), and the realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. The Quartet, in cooperation with the parties, is now working on an effective mechanism for monitoring performance.

But as the parties and the international community work towards the goal of a permanent settlement, each and every day the Palestinian people suffer. They live in circumstances of social and economic devastation. During the last few years, not only have many thousands been killed or wounded, but the infrastructure and productive sectors of the Palestinian economy have been virtually destroyed. Unemployment and poverty rates have reached unprecedented levels. The capacity of the Palestinian Authority to function has been weakened. A total collapse of the Palestinian economy has only been prevented by the infusion of substantial aid and budgetary support.

The humanitarian emergency in the occupied Palestinian territory has been exacerbated by the tightening of the stifling regime of closures and curfews, as well as by continued settlement activity and the construction of a separation wall. All of these actions tear at the very fabric of Palestinian economic and social life, and cause deep frustration and anxiety. Israel has a right to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks. Too many Israelis have been targeted by Palestinian groups. But Israel's security must be protected using reasonable means within the boundaries of international law. Now that the implementation of the Road Map is under way, Israel should ease its security measures so as to minimize the suffering of the Palestinians. Israel should also implement in full all the recommendations of the Bertini report, lift restrictions on movement of persons and goods and allow international and local humanitarian personnel full, safe and unfettered access. And Israel will need to take further – and more significant – steps beyond the dismantling of outposts erected since March 2001.

In parallel, the Palestinian Authority should continue its reforms in a transparent manner in close consultation with the international community – specifically, the Quartet's Task Force on Palestinian reform – and must act decisively to prevent terrorism.

For its part, the international community must continue and increase its support to the Palestinians, to halt a downward spiral of social and economic despair and help them begin to climb a ladder towards restoration and development. The United Nations, along with international donors and non-governmental organizations, is fully engaged in this effort. UNRWA, UNDP, OCHA, UNICEF and others are providing assistance and essential services to the Palestinian people. As they work to support the political process, my Special Coordinator and Personal Representative, Terje Roed-Larsen, and his team at UNSCO, are also monitoring the economic situation, liaising with donors and coordinating the provision of assistance to the Palestinians.

However, UNRWA's vital assistance to millions of Palestinian refugees is threatened by chronic funding shortages. I appeal to donors to contribute generously to the agency's regular programmes as well as its emergency activities, so that it can continue its desperately needed work, not only in the direct provision of food aid, medical care, education and employment, but also in rehabilitation and employment generation. I also underscore the vital humanitarian and development work of the United Nations development system to alleviate poverty, build local capacity and develop Palestinian institutions, and in the fields of healthcare, agriculture and the environment.

Ultimately, only a permanent political settlement which ends the occupation can provide a durable solution to the economic and humanitarian problems of the Palestinians. But the resuscitation of the Palestinian economy and the improvement in the daily lives of the Palestinian people are key building blocks of a sustainable peace process. There has never been a more important time for the Palestinian people to see that the international community is supporting their socio-economic recovery and security. I therefore thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this important seminar, and wish you every success in your deliberations.

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