



Secretary-General
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SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN MESSAGE TO JERUSALEM FORUM, CALLS ON PARTIES

TO MAKE RENEWED EFFORTS IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

This is the text of a message from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Jerusalem International Forum, in Rabat, Morocco (28-29 October), delivered on his behalf by Robert H. Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestine Authority.

I send my greetings to the leaders gathered in Rabat for this international forum on Jerusalem. I thank His Majesty, King Mohammed VI, the Chair of the Jerusalem Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Yasser Arafat foundation for hosting this event.

For Muslims, Jews and Christians, for Israelis and Palestinians, and for peoples around the world, Jerusalem represents a place of faith and longing, a symbol of aspirations for nationhood, and a sacred space that must be open to all. As we are constantly reminded, events in Jerusalem can undermine trust on the ground and be felt in distant lands. It is for this reason that we must ensure that the holy city becomes a true symbol of peace, bringing people together and marking a new, more positive era for the whole region.

As has long been agreed between Israelis and the Palestinians, Jerusalem is a core issue that must be resolved through negotiations, along with all other core issues. The international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory subject to the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention. If peace is to be achieved, the goal must be for Jerusalem to be the capital of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all. This is the road to the fulfilment of both the vision of Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and the yearning for peace of people from all over the world.

I commend those Israelis and Palestinians who are working to reach across gulfs of misunderstanding and conflict to find ways to build cooperation, mutual respect, and trust, including in Jerusalem. Such efforts are made very difficult by continued evictions and house demolitions in East Jerusalem — including again yesterday — the closure of Palestinian institutions in the city, and the expansion of settlements contrary to international law and the road map. These actions exacerbate tensions, prejudice final status issues, and often have tragic human consequences. I reiterate the repeated calls of the Quartet and the wider international community for Israel to freeze settlement activity, cease provocative and unilateral actions, and reopen Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem.

I am concerned at the recent episodes of tension at the Haram Ash-Sharif/Temple Mount compound, and the potential for further clashes. Aided by my envoy based in Jerusalem, I continue to follow this issue closely and to urge all sides to respect the sanctity of the holy sites and cease provocations. I commend the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to alleviate tensions. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) also remains engaged regarding the sensitive excavations at the site of the reconstruction of the ramp leading to the Maghrabi Gate. We all share a responsibility to promote calm.

Today, access into East Jerusalem remains severely restricted by checkpoints, permits and the barrier, whose route is contrary to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. These measures separate families, limit Palestinian economic development and make it difficult for residents of the West Bank to access specialized medical facilities. The United Nations, which has a strong and visible presence in Jerusalem, continues to support through our programmes the health and education of the population and their economic, cultural and religious life, while urging the Israeli authorities to respect the organic relationship between East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank.

At this challenging time, I ask all of you to support President [Mahmoud] Abbas, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority in their efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict and to build the institutions of a Palestinian State. The United States continues its efforts in this regard, and all members of the Quartet are working to ensure that negotiations not only resume in an atmosphere conducive to their success, but are concluded expeditiously. The road ahead will not be easy, but only with the achievement of a two State solution, and a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, will Jerusalem be fully restored to its rightful place as a symbol of sanctity, brotherhood and peace for the entire world.

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