

New York, 17 June 2007 - Secretary-General's press remarks prior to his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

Prime Minister Olmert: I am glad to be here to be the guest of my dear friend, the distinguished Ambassador to the United Nations, Dan Gilleman. I am very, very happy to meet the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, whom I first met in Korea, when you were working as Secretary of State, and then in Israel, and we were friends for a long time.

This is a very disturbing day, because we had these attacks from Lebanon, on the Israeli township of Kiryat Shmona. We are still checking the circumstances, the particular vehicles of this event. Lebanon has been very quiet the last nine months, and we hope it will continue to be. Most likely, this is an attack by a small Palestinian movement. Of course, we emphasize the importance of the role of UNIFIL (the UN Interim Force in Lebanon) in the south, the Lebanese Army's role, also to be in the south of Lebanon. And this is something that probably we will have a chance to discuss.

Otherwise, this is an opportunity to thank the UN Secretary-General for the very important and serious and consistent role that he has played in the protection of peace in the midst of violence in parts of the Middle East which are of particular interest to us. [He made additional comments in Hebrew]

SG: Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to welcome Prime Minister Olmert to New York, to the United Nations; thank you very much for your invitation. It is a great pleasure. Your visit at this time takes place at a crucially important time, when the whole international community has been gravely concerned about what has been happening. The deteriorating situation in Gaza and in the region has been the source of great concern to all of us, and the failure of the national unity government in Palestine is also a great concern. It is a setback in terms of humanitarian security and the peace process in the Middle East. I would like to exchange views with Prime Minister Olmert over lunch, on how to address this very serious situation which we are facing.

The Quartet principals had a telephone conference on Friday morning, and we are going to do it tomorrow morning again, to exchange views on this matter. Meeting with Prime Minister Olmert will provide me a good opportunity to brief our Quartet principals in addressing these issues commonly. I have expressed my deep admiration and respect for Prime Minister Olmert's leadership in addressing all the challenges.

I know that Israel has legitimate concerns over security, placing challenges to them. At the same time, this is very serious for the United Nations – we have all the humanitarian concerns. We have many Palestinian refugees who are I think about 80 percent of the total population, who are living on daily assistance from UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and WFP (the World Food Programme) – over 10,000 United Nations employees, who are mainly Palestinians, whose security and safety are in danger. We need to overcome this crisis with common efforts, as well as wisdom. At the same time, I would urge all the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint, and to resolve all the pending issues through peaceful means, through dialogue. The United Nations is committed to facilitate the peace process and committed to provide all humanitarian assistance in this regard, and I am looking forward to having a good meeting with Prime Minister Olmert. Thank you.