



Secretary-General

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PUT NATION ABOVE FACTION, PEACE BEFORE ALL ELSE, SECRETARY-GENERAL ADVISES LEADERS

IN REMARKS TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in New York today, 24 November:

It is a pleasure to join you for this annual observance. Every year on this day, we express our solidarity with the Palestinian people. For my part as Secretary-General, I underscore my commitment to doing my utmost in the search for a just, lasting, comprehensive, and urgent settlement of the question of the Palestinians.

The Palestinians have been deprived of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and statehood, for more than 60 years. Israelis live with an ever-present sense of insecurity. There is only one way to address such legitimate rights and fears: a peace agreement that results in an end of occupation, an end of conflict, and the creation of a State of Palestine living side by side in peace with the State of Israel.

The Israeli and Palestinian leaders re-launched bilateral negotiations a year ago at Annapolis. They agreed to try to reach a peace treaty by the end of 2008. I regret that this goal appears unlikely to be achieved.

However, the parties have succeeded in creating trust and a framework where none existed only two years ago. We must not diminish that achievement.

I commend the commitment made by President [Mahmoud] Abbas and Foreign Minister [Tzipi] Livni during the recent Quartet meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh earlier this month to continue talks into next year, and to seek a full and final settlement. The present negotiations have been promising and substantial. This must be an irreversible process, not open-ended. And it must resolve the permanent status issues of Jerusalem, settlements, borders, refugees, security and water.

My biggest concern in the immediate period ahead is the situation on the ground. In the West Bank, the determined efforts of the Palestinian Authority led by Prime Minister [Salam] Fayyad have achieved progress in the security sector and institution-building. The cities of Hebron, Jenin and Nablus are safer places today than they were just a few months ago. I hope these efforts continue in a manner that ensures deepening respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Israel must do more to enable and empower these Palestinian efforts. I strongly call on Israel to adhere to its commitments under the Road Map, reaffirmed at Annapolis and again at Sharm el-Sheikh, to cease settlement activity, remove outposts and open Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem.

Israel must also refrain from unilateral actions in Jerusalem, such as demolitions and evictions, which undermine trust or alter the status quo. I recognize Israel's security concerns. But the improved environment of security cooperation must lead to an easing of closure in the West Bank in order to increase stability and to bring about a much-needed boost to the Palestinian economy.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains of major concern. I call for immediate measures to ease the near-blanket closure of Gaza, which leads to worrying deprivations of basic supplies and human dignity. And I unreservedly condemn rocket fire.

The way forward is for all parties to respect the calm brokered by Egypt, and to reach out to the civilian population of the Gaza Strip instead of wrongly punishing them. I call on Israel to allow sufficient and predictable supplies to reach the population, to ensure access for humanitarian workers, and to facilitate stalled United Nations projects.

I also reiterate my profound concern at the ever-deepening Palestinian divide. I call on Hamas and, indeed, all Palestinian factions to work urgently to reunify the Gaza Strip and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. This should be done in a manner that allows the peace process to move forward. At this crucial time in their quest for freedom and statehood, the people of Palestine deserve their leaders to put nation above faction, and the pursuit of peace above all other considerations.

I commend the efforts of the international community, including leaders in the region, who are working hard to support the parties. At this time of uncertainty and change, the role of the international community is vital.

I will be urging the new administration of the United States to be actively engaged in this process from the outset, as a matter of utmost priority.

I will also press the Quartet to assume the full measure of its responsibilities, and to continue showing a firm political commitment. Quartet members are actively considering having another meeting before the end of this year.

I will continue to advocate more attention to the Arab Peace Initiative.

I continue to urge donors to be generous, and fulfil the pledges made at the Paris Donors' Conference in support of the Palestinian Authority.

Above all, I will ensure that the United Nations plays its full role in the quest for peace, even as it continues to provide assistance in the humanitarian, economic and social areas.

We have seen many difficulties in the past year. But it has been a crucial time in setting the stage for peace. Two thousand nine must be the year that these preparations bear fruit. Let us all work constructively, tirelessly and consistently to help the parties make this happen. The Palestinian people need and deserve no less.

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