

**Jerusalem, Israel, 15 January 2009 - Secretary-General's opening comments at press conference with Israeli President Shimon Peres**

I am very pleased to meet again with President Peres.

As you know, I am in the midst of a regional tour.

I have been in Egypt and Jordan, and I have already met with Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Livni, and Defence Minister Barak.

Tomorrow, I will be visiting Ramallah to see President Abbas and PM Fayyad.

And I am traveling on to Turkey, Lebanon, Syria and Kuwait.

This is a very difficult time for Israel, for the Palestinians, for this region.

Let me reiterate at the outset my condemnation of the rocket fire from Gaza aimed at Israeli civilians.

I have always made clear my unequivocal condemnation of these rockets as acts of terrorism.

They have no justification and they must cease.

No citizens in any country should have to live like this.

Israel is a member state of the United Nations.

Indeed, it is a special member state of the United Nations.

Israel mentions the United Nations seven times in its declaration of independence.

Israel has a right to live in peace and security. Israel has a right to defend its citizens.

I have always firmly upheld that right and I will always insist that Israel is treated by the same standards as all other Member States.

This also means that Israel has responsibilities, and also a duty to act wisely in the long-term interest of peace.

It is here that I have expressed my concern about what is happening in Gaza.

Many people have died and still are dying. Civilian suffering has reached an unbearable point.

That is why I have urged an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire.

This is the core objective of Security Council resolution 1860. The rockets must stop.

And Israel's offensive must end. All violence must cease, and the bloodshed and suffering among the civilian populations must be halted.

Resolution 1860 makes clear that the issues of key concern to Israel, most particularly the resupply of weapons to Gaza militants, must be addressed if a ceasefire is to be sustainable.

I fully agree with that. I also believe we have to find arrangements to ensure that the crossings are properly opened, that the question of Corporal Shalit is resolved, and that Gaza is reunited with the West Bank under one legitimate Palestinian Authority.

This all must come together as a package if a ceasefire is to last.

I also have spoken forcefully about the need to address the humanitarian issues in Gaza.

The people of Gaza are facing a dire humanitarian crisis. This is a fact.

We are working closely with the Israeli authorities to alleviate the crisis as much as possible, and we appreciate the open channels of communication that have been established.

And I want to remind all of you of the outstanding work of the United Nations on the ground in the midst of this crisis, helping to sustain the civilian population.

This is dangerous work and there have been serious incidents where UN workers and installations have come under attack.

I am glad to have additional assurances regarding these matters.

But as I also said in my talks with the President and with the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Defence Minister, unless the violence stops, more civilians, including women and children, will be killed, even if Israel genuinely tries to avoid this.

Today's unfortunate incident of another attack against the United Nations compound in Gaza is another vivid reminder of this reality.

Mr. President, if I may conclude by saying that I am encouraged by a series of discussions I had with President Mubarak of Egypt, King Abdullah of Jordan, and the Israeli leadership.

I understand today that the Israeli government will make an important decision on a ceasefire and I hope that decision will be the right one. Truly I hope that Israel will show to the world that it is a responsible member of the United Nations, abiding by Security Council resolutions.

The time has come for the violence to stop and for us to change fundamentally the dynamics in Gaza, and to pursue again the peace talks for a two State solution, which is the only road to lasting security for Israel.

I count on the wise leadership that President Peres has shown throughout his public career.

Thank you very much.