
Off-the-Cuff**Secretary-General's press encounter with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Jerusalem, 16 August 2013**

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. Thank you for your very kind welcome and hospitality. And I am also very pleased to see you in good health and I am very appreciative of your receiving me despite your recent operation. I sincerely hope that you will recover as quickly as possible and continue to be as healthy and dynamic as ever.

It is a great honour for me to visit Israel for the sixth time as Secretary-General of the United Nations. I think my visit is taking place at a crucially important timing for the Middle East peace process which you courageously and wisely agreed to resume. I am here to lend my strong support, of myself and the United Nations and the Quartet.

I am encouraged that Israelis and Palestinians have re-engaged in direct dialogue. But for these negotiations to have a chance at success, they need to be meaningful.

I know that when a problem has remained an open wound for decades, causing hardships and casualties on both sides, it might sometimes seem that the problem will never be solved.

Dealing [with] the symptom might seem easier in the short-term. It takes courage, vision, and creativity to decide that the long-term cost of that problem is actually too high.

That is what is happening now with the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

I applaud Prime Minister Netanyahu for having the courage to set out a solution as a priority.

I know that many Israelis look at regional unrest and ask whether now is the time to try to make peace with the Palestinians. Some might want greater government focus on tackling other issues within their own society.

I also say to the Israeli people that this process should and must lead to increased security and hope for a more stable region. The time is now for Israel to be fully respected as a member of the international community. In this regard I would welcome, very much welcome, a more constructive relationship between Israel and the Human Rights Council.

I believe Prime Minister Netanyahu recognizes that Israel will never realize its potential internally or externally, as long as there is no peace with Israel's closest neighbours, the Palestinians. The Prime Minister knows that occupying Palestinian lands is not a long-term solution to Israel's regional challenges. I am here to urge all the leaders to continue along the path to peace and to underscore a shared commitment to work together to make 2013 a decisive year for Israeli-Palestinian peace and peace in the region.

And as you have discussed I am also ready to discuss on all other regional issues including the Syrian crisis, the Egyptian situation, and the Iranian nuclear issue and the situation in Lebanon, and the situation in broader Middle East peace and stability. And I am grateful for your leadership, and count on your continuing leadership and great success and prosperity of the Israeli people and Government.

Thank you.