



Secretary-General
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IN REMARKS TO PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, SECRETARY-GENERAL WARNS FORWARD MOVEMENT

NEEDED SOON ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, OR 'WE RISK SLIDING BACKWARDS'

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at the opening of the 2010 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in New York, 21 January.

I congratulate you and your distinguished colleagues on your re-election to the leadership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

As we open this year's session, intensive efforts are under way by the international community to restart the long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. I support the U.S.-led efforts to bring about a resumption of meaningful negotiations on all final status issues, including the security of Israelis and Palestinians, borders, refugees and Jerusalem.

In the absence of talks, confidence between the parties has diminished. Tensions have risen in East Jerusalem. People in Gaza and southern Israel continue to suffer from violence. If we do not move forward on the political process soon, we risk sliding backwards.

Notwithstanding the Government of Israel's decision to restrain settlement construction in the West Bank, I am concerned that settlement activity and financial support for settlement expansion continues in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The international community has repeatedly appealed to Israel to halt settlement construction throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Settlement construction violates international law and contravenes the Road Map, under which Israel is obliged to freeze all settlement activity, including the so-called "natural growth".

This is in no-one's interest, least of all Israel's. Settlement activity undermines trust between the two parties, seems to pre-judge the outcome of the future permanent status negotiations, and imperils the basis for the two-State solution.

In East Jerusalem, a series of worrisome events has not only stoked tensions in the City but also has the potential to endanger stability in the region. The Israeli authorities have continued to discriminate against Palestinian residents, including by ordering house demolitions and evictions and revoking identity cards. Local authorities have also announced plans to consolidate and expand settlement infrastructure.

It bears repeating that the international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory. The question of Jerusalem is a central and highly sensitive issue to be addressed by the parties in permanent status negotiations. A way must be found, through negotiations, for Jerusalem to emerge as 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 fulfilling the vision of Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In Gaza, one year after the end of the most recent round of hostilities, neither the issues that led to the conflict nor its aftermath have been fully addressed. Very few of the key measures for stability, as identified in Security Council resolution 1860, have been implemented. Moreover, and regrettably, accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law has not been adequately addressed. I call on Israel and the relevant Palestinian authorities to conduct, without delay, credible domestic investigations into the many reported allegations of serious human rights violations.

The grave humanitarian situation in Gaza remains of special concern to me. The amount of humanitarian and other supplies allowed in is insufficient to meet the needs of the population or to enable urgently needed reconstruction. I deeply regret that the United Nations proposal to kickstart civilian reconstruction activity has not been approved. I repeat my call on Israel to end its unacceptable and counterproductive blockade and to fully respect international law.

I am also greatly concerned about those in southern Israel who have to live in fear of continuing Palestinian rocket and mortar fire from Gaza. I call for a complete

end to violence and the targeting of Israeli civilians.

For 42 long years, the Palestinian people have been living under occupation. I reiterate my firm commitment to putting an end to the occupation, and to the conflict, through the creation of a State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security, and through the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

We shall pursue this objective in keeping with Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

If we are to advance this common agenda in the crucial period ahead, a revitalized Quartet must step up its engagement. This Committee has also a contribution to make.

I look forward to continuing our work together to end a tragic situation that has persisted for far too long, to the detriment of far too many men, women and children.

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