



Secretary-General
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**SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN MESSAGE FOR AFRICAN MEETING, STRESSED PALESTINIAN,
ISRAELI COMMITMENT TO PEACE THROUGH NEGOTIATED TWO-STATE SOLUTION**

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message to the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine, as delivered in Pretoria today, by Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs:

I thank the people and Government of South Africa for hosting this meeting organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. And I offer warm greetings to all the participants.

Israelis and Palestinians continue to search for a solution to end their conflict. There have been some important recent developments. The agreement reached in Mecca between Palestinian factions led to the formation of a Palestinian National Unity Government that will hopefully work to curb the intra-Palestinian violence that threatens to destabilize the Gaza Strip. I encourage this new Government to continue its efforts to overcome internal Palestinian discord and move toward acceptance of Quartet principles. I have urged the international community to nurture this process, and I hope this includes new thinking on ways to alleviate the Palestinian fiscal crisis.

I am encouraged by recent international and regional efforts to get Palestinians and Israelis back on the negotiating track. The Riyadh Summit of the League of Arab States endorsed its Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, and has established a Ministerial Committee to promote this process. United States Secretary of State Rice is actively promoting dialogue between the parties. Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have begun to meet regularly to discuss a range of issues, and I hope that the internal challenges each faces will not deter them from moving forward with discussions on the political horizon. The Quartet has a vital role to play in supporting these efforts and in ensuring that both parties are held to their commitments.

Yet many challenges remain. During my recent visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, I saw first-hand some of the obstacles that, over the years, have stalled progress in the peace process. I was deeply troubled by the network of checkpoints, by settlements and by the construction of the Barrier on a route that deviates from the Green Line. In talking to ordinary Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, I was struck by their deep longing for their own State and the many frustrations they face in their daily lives. The humanitarian situation is woeful and deteriorating, and the economy needs to be urgently revitalized.

Through my visit I also came to better understand the security concerns facing Israelis. Rocket attacks and indiscriminate violence against civilians should be stopped completely and without conditions. Security is also an urgent need for the Palestinians, who face a rising death toll as a result of IDF [Israel Defense Forces] incursions, as well as internal violence in Gaza.

I encourage both parties to demonstrate a true commitment to peace through a negotiated two-State solution. Palestinians need to cease rocket attacks against Israel and other indiscriminate violence against civilians. They should also work towards the immediate and safe release of the abducted BBC journalist, Alan Johnston, and of the Israeli soldier being held captive. I encourage Israel, for its part, to cease settlement activity and the construction of the Wall, to ease Palestinian movement and release Palestinian revenues, and to show progress on the release of Palestinian prisoners. Israel should also ensure that its military operations are in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law, so as not to endanger civilians.

The United Nations will continue to support international efforts aimed at bringing an end to the occupation that began 40 years ago, and achieving a two-State solution. A viable and independent Palestine and a safe and secure Israel would not only be a blessing for the two peoples, but would also help promote peace and stability in the wider region.

I am fully committed to advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515 and the principle of land for peace. I urge the international community, including Governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and individuals to intensify their efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to this terrible conflict.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.

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