
**Secretary-General's Press Encounter
UNRWA Khan Younis Housing project in Southern Gaza
2 February 2012**

Good morning. It is good to be back in Gaza once again. This is my third visit in three years.

I am in the region to encourage the parties to continue the talks they have started in Jordan - and to see for myself the progress and challenges on the road to peace.

I thank the people of Gaza for their welcome. Gaza is a priority for the United Nations.

I vividly recall my visit in 2009, and the terrible destruction I witnessed immediately following the war. Today, I visited a school and a much needed housing project, both developed by UNRWA.

When I was last here, this project was suspended.

Since then, UNRWA has completed 151 housing units with 449 more underway. Not far away, UNDP is working to build a waste water treatment facility that will benefit all of Khan Younis.

By the end of the year, we hope to complete the Khan Younis project with a new neighborhood of 449 housing units, pending further approval. I will press the Israeli authorities to remove the restrictions. These projects, including many schools, illustrate the United Nations' important work in Gaza.

This ranges from essential humanitarian assistance to longer-term development - helping Gazans help themselves and realize their full economic and social potential. Continued progress for the people of Gaza requires a number of actions.

The current fragile calm must be maintained.

There needs to be further, immediate and more far reaching changes, including an end to the Palestinian divide.

Israel has taken some measures to ease the closure. More must be done.

I am pressing hard for policy changes to enable the United Nations and others to carry out our essential work.

Israel must open Gaza's crossings for all building materials, including aggregate, iron bar and cement - the 'ABC' of construction.

A steady flow of approvals for United Nations projects is also critical. Gaza's crossings must open for exports

Some have started but there is still enormous untapped economic potential that requires access to markets, particularly the West Bank and Israel.

Finally, there needs to be a freer flow of people. Later today, I will meet members of the Gazan business and civil society leaders to discuss these and other issues of concern.

The people of Gaza seek a better future and the opportunities to shape it.

This was the message I heard from the talented children in UNRWA's school here in Khan Younis.

We must continue to do all we can to realize these goals for all of the people of Gaza.

For my part, I will continue to do my utmost to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can lead lives in peace and security.

Thank you.

Q: I need your reaction to the "warm" welcome you got in Gaza, as you arrived amid demonstrations. You have come again, but without real political support for the Palestinians to end the blockade, what tangible difference have you, can you make?

SG: I met many people who were waiting for me at the entrance of Gaza. I fully share their frustrations and concerns. That is why I am here again for the third time. There are very dire social, economic and humanitarian problems. People need to be able to move freely. Goods must be imported

and exported without any restrictions. That is why I have been urging the Israeli authorities to lift completely and unconditionally the restrictions. You should also appreciate that since the end of the war, there have been significant changes which the United Nations has been working to bring. UNRWA, through its construction projects is transforming the landscape of Gaza. Gradually and slowly, the Israeli Government has been approving the import of construction materials and other necessities. We have seen the expansion of the UNRWA Khan Younis Housing project and I will make sure that I will again raise the issue of speedy approval with the Israelis. What is most important is that these restrictions must be lifted completely.

Q: The talks in Amman have stopped. Do the UN and the Quartet have other proposals? Also what are the prospects for any UN Security Council action on Syria?

SG: I visited Amman and had good meetings with His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan and then yesterday all day, I had a series of meetings with the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister of Israel and then I moved to the West Bank, to Ramallah and had meetings with the President and Prime Minister. I appreciate the initiative of King Abdullah to have started this meeting and I stressed the importance of moving ahead. The leaders of the two parties have committed to continuing these negotiations. There are still some concerns, or lack of mutual trust but I am hopeful that this dialogue will continue in a sustainable way. For the talks to move ahead continuously and sustainably, I emphasize the importance to the Israeli Government to create a conclusive atmosphere. I urge them to provide some goodwill gestures, confidence-building measures. As for the situation in Syria, the UN Security Council had a very serious debate yesterday. I hope and urge the Security Council to take a common position so that we can see the immediate end of bloodshed, so the urgent aspirations of the Syrian people can be realized. The Syrian people like all people in the world have the right to live in a society free of fear and with dignity, freedom, harmony and prosperity. The United Nations is committed to working towards that goal.

Q: (Inaudible)

SG: I know that the negotiations (Israeli/Palestinian) have been going up and down. I know that the Palestinian people have been deeply frustrated. All the violence there has been must stop. I would urge particularly that people from Gaza must stop firing rockets into Israel. Indiscriminate killing of civilians is unacceptable for any reason. Likewise, the Israelis must fully guarantee the freedom, dignity, decent standards of living and human rights of all Palestinian people. And provide politically favourable conditions for dialogue. The Israeli and Palestinian people have one and the same future, the same destiny, to live together in peace and harmony. That is the vision. That is the future of both Israelis and Palestinians, living side by side in peace and harmony. The UN has been, and will continue, to work with the Palestinians and the Israelis to achieve that goal. Thank you very much.