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### UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

#### OPENS IN VIENNA WITH EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN

(Received from a UN Information Officer)

VIENNA, 24 March – The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained of concern, particularly in Gaza and East Jerusalem, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today in a message delivered by Maxwell Gaylard, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People opened in Vienna.

Reporting on his recent trip to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Secretary-General said “the closure [of crossings into Gaza] is unacceptable, unsustainable and counterproductive”. A durable solution required the opening of the crossings for both humanitarian and commercial goods to and from Gaza, with measures in place to end weapons smuggling. Palestinian actors must do their part by bringing an end to violence and rocket attacks, and rising above partisan interests to pursue the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank.

The two-day Seminar, the theme of which is “Building institutions and moving forward with establishing the State of Palestine”, was organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, with the aim of raising the profile of and garnering support for the Programme of the Palestinian Authority entitled “Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State”. The Seminar would also assess the current socio-economic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; discuss the urgent need to bring relief to the Gaza Strip; and look into ways to mobilize broad international assistance in support of the Palestinian economy and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Delivering a keynote address and opening remarks, Ali Al-Jarbawi, Minister for Planning and Administrative Development of the Palestinian Authority, said the Palestinian Government Programme reaffirmed Palestinians’ explicit commitment to the two-State solution and the Authority stood ready to engage in final-status negotiations, which should not be open-ended. The Programme was aimed at making real progress towards peace, recognizing that open-ended negotiations had not borne fruit and never would. “Palestinians cannot be coerced into coexistence with a fragmented State of leftovers – a State isolated by cantons separated by walls and checkpoints, guarded by soldiers of another State,” he said.

He said the two-year Programme consisted of 11 national goals on the path to realizing the vision of a peaceful and prosperous Palestine, aiming to bring equality and social justice to all its citizens and guaranteeing equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for all, free from discrimination. Important progress had been made in implementing the Programme, which clearly demonstrated the Palestinian Authority’s ability to govern and deliver services. “Just imagine for a moment what we Palestinians could achieve if freed from the shackles of occupation. And imagine the frustration that we Palestinians feel at being denied the freedom to control our own destiny for so many decades,” he said.

Expressing hope that the international community would step up its condemnation of Israeli actions, which continued to take Palestinians backwards, he said: “Despite the apparent determination of Israel to continue to hold on to occupied Palestinian land and resources, my message to you today is that there is a willing and proactive Palestinian partner for peace.”

Also making opening statements were Johannes Kyrle, Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Austria, the host country, and Zahir Tanin, Head of the Delegation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations in New York.

Other speakers were representatives of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Iran, Morocco, Syria and Algeria.

Observers for the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the African Union also addressed the Seminar, as did a representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

#### Opening Remarks

JOHANNES KYRLE, Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Austria, said in a message of welcome that the Seminar was dedicated to the crucial challenge of institution-building and establishing the Palestinian State, a task that also lay at the heart of the European Union. No peace, no security, no prosperity would ever be sustainable without democratic public institutions, based on the rule of law and complemented by civil society participation.

He said that, through the Quartet, the international community had once again reconfirmed its unwavering assistance to the establishment of the State of Palestine. It had expressed its support to the Palestinian Authority Programme, "Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State", which aimed to finalize the process in 24 months. That was also the time period that the Quartet deemed appropriate for reaching a negotiated settlement that would end the occupation begun more than 40 years ago.

Calling on Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to re-engage in negotiations as soon as possible and in good faith, he said the Secretary-General of the United Nations had praised the quiet courage of the Palestinians and called on them to choose the path of non-violence, unity and international legitimacy during his recent visit to the Gaza Strip, the one area with the most painful contradiction between the legitimate aspirations of a people and the failure of political efforts to improve their living conditions.

He said Austria and the donor community would help the Palestinian people realize their aspirations and offer full political support to all efforts for a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which would benefit Palestinians and Israelis alike, and form the basis for a stable and prosperous Middle East.

MAXWELL GAYLARD, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, delivered a message in which United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reported on his recent tour of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel following a meeting in Moscow, where the Quartet principals had reiterated their strong commitment to a two-State solution and the need for resumed negotiation to move quickly towards that goal.

He said the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained of concern, particularly in Gaza and East Jerusalem. In Gaza, reconstruction of destroyed and damaged buildings and infrastructure remained nearly impossible due to the Israeli closure. He had informed the people in Gaza that the Government of Israel had approved a number of United Nations civilian recovery projects involving water and sanitation, the repair of a flour mill, the provisions of containers to temporarily accommodate schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the completion of a United Nations housing project, among other things. However, that package of recovery projects represented only a first step, he said.

"The closure is unacceptable, unsustainable and counterproductive," he continued, stressing that a durable solution required the opening of the crossings for both humanitarian and commercial goods to and from Gaza, with measures in place to end weapons smuggling. Palestinian actors must do their part by ending violence and rocket attacks, and rising above partisan interests to pursue the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank. In Gaza, the Secretary-General had called publicly for a prisoner exchange so that the missing Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and Palestinian prisoners could be released.

While Israel's policy of settlement restraint was a step beyond previous Governments' positions, he said he had conveyed to Israel's leaders that settlements were illegal under international law and that the Road Map called for a full settlement freeze, including in East Jerusalem. He had also expressed concern about an announcement concerning holy sites in the West Bank and provocative actions in East Jerusalem, such as evictions and home demolitions as well as the advancement of plans for new settlement construction. "At this critical juncture, all sides need to observe calm, show restraint and refrain from inflammatory rhetoric," he said.

He welcomed Palestinian efforts towards reform, institution-building and development under the leadership of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad aimed at establishing a Palestinian State. "It is vital that the Palestinian Authority continue to advance this State-building agenda while striving to meet its other Road Map obligations in full, including an end to incitement against Israel," he said. He encouraged key contributors to Palestinian State-building to channel their assistance through the Palestinian Authority's single treasury account.

Palestinian reform efforts had contributed to an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) of 6.8 per cent in 2009, he said. Israel's lifting of restrictions and easing of movement also represented a positive step in encouraging growth in the West Bank. A further easing of restrictions that increased the predictability of movement and facilitated trade would be central to ensuring future economic growth.

ZAHIR TANIN (Afghanistan), Head of Delegation for the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, emphasized that the Seminar would focus on the Palestinian Authority Programme, "Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State", also known as the Fayyad Plan. It called for Palestinians to unilaterally build – within 24 months – the administrative, economic and institutional foundation of an independent State in spite of the Israeli occupation and as a peaceful, constructive means to countering it.

He said the Programme might be understood as the Palestinian answer to Israeli settlement-building by creating unilaterally positive facts on the ground that would restructure the strategic equation. The fundamental difference was that, unlike Israel's settlement activity, the Palestinian Authority Programme was consistent with international law. It would promote, rather than hinder, prospects for a peace agreement.

Mr. Tanin said the Programme's success would be determined by the measure of progress in the political area. At the international level, support must be built for broad recognition of an independent Palestinian State. After the projected two years, that recognition could be enshrined in a Security Council resolution that

would clearly determine the borders of the Palestinian State, based on pre-1967 lines.

Noting the nexus between the search for a political solution to the question of Palestine and its socio-economic underpinnings, he said the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip had been steadily worsening as a result of the Israeli military offensive and the continuing blockade, which prevented reconstruction. In the West Bank, Palestinian access to land and resources continued to be severely impeded by a multilayered system of restrictions. The situation in East Jerusalem also continued to deteriorate, with thousands at risk of eviction, house demolition and/or displacement.

Mr. Tanin concluded by reaffirming the Committee's position that Israel's illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory must end without conditions, which should allow the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. A two-State solution should be based on Security Council resolution 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), he said, adding that only serious and sustained international engagement would bring about a negotiated settlement of all outstanding issues and reverse the growing support for radical forces.

ALI AL-JARBAWI, Minister for Planning and Administrative Development of the Palestinian Authority, stressed that the Palestinian cause was not a humanitarian or a development cause, but a political cause par excellence. Conveying his thanks for the sustained financial support from the international community, he said that, as Planning Minister, he could not do much planning because of Israeli actions.

He said that, in cooperation with donors, he was working on some 48 projects, ranging from \$1 million to \$1 billion yearly and was particularly grateful for that

support, as it came within the framework of support for the Palestinian cause. It was essential that assistance to the Palestinians basically lay in a straightforward process consisting of ending the occupation and building a Palestinian State. If that goal was not reached quickly, the details would remain unimportant.

### Statements

IL CHUL RI (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said many countries were calling upon the United Nations and the international community to end the Israeli atrocities in the Gaza Strip at once, and to take effective measures to protect Palestinian civilians and provide them with the necessary assistance. Israel, however, was expanding settlements and demanding a conditional peace treaty. The reason why the Palestinian problem remained unresolved lay in the complicity of the United States and a few other countries with the occupation. Israel must immediately stop all its actions aimed at permanent occupation, including military operations, air strikes, settlement construction and the economic blockade.

ISHAYA EL-KHOURY (Lebanon) said his country had left no stone unturned in promoting the Palestinian cause as it had suffered along with the Palestinian people because of Israeli actions and still harboured Palestinian refugees. No initiative to alleviate the situation in the Gaza Strip could be implemented as Israel blocked all such moves. He invited donors to enhance their contributions to UNRWA, which had difficulties in providing assistance to refugees in host countries and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He said the Israelis had rejected the Arab Peace Initiative and continued their policy of illegal settlements, isolating Arab villages and towns in order to void the Arab and other initiatives. The main challenge was to speak out about the thousands of Palestinians threatened by bombing. The United Nations should help Palestinians achieve a decent standard of living by stressing the need to implement international resolutions fully in order to establish a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

HARALD EGERER, Head of the Vienna Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said the hostilities in the Gaza Strip had severely damaged the environment, and a UNEP expert team had been deployed to the Strip to draw up an assessment of the environmental impact of the conflict. The UNEP Governing Council had requested the agency to help implement the recommendations of that assessment report and had invited Governments and international institutions to provide financial and other support.

He said that UNEP activities in the Gaza Strip included providing safe water to all infants, compiling a report on key groundwater issues and developing a hazardous waste management strategy for the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Projects for 2010-2011 included the development of a national water quality monitoring system, the development of a national land management strategy, preparation of the State of the Environment report and identifying, developing and implementing a renewable energy programme.

ALI ASGHAR SOLTANIEH (Iran) said the continuing crisis in the Middle East came from the silence of the international community on the issue of occupation of the Palestinian Territory and ignoring its people's human rights. The problem of the Middle East was a lack of awareness of the root causes, including Israel's refusal to comply with any international obligations. Although Iran was demanding an end to the occupation, it believed that the resolutions of international organizations could not fully restore the rights of the Palestinian people as long as Israeli defiance continued, with the support of its allies, the United States in particular.

He said that Israel, supported by the United States at any price, had no genuine political will to help the Palestinians achieve a dignified life, recalling that the commitment of the United States to Israel's security was "rock solid and enduring forever", according to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Iran had proposed a democratic plan to solve the question of Palestine, which included the return of refugees and the holding of a referendum among the people of Palestine, including Muslims, Christians and Jews, on the country's future.

### Keynote Presentation

Mr. AL-JARBAWI, Minister for Planning and Administrative Development of the Palestinian Authority, said the Palestinian Government Programme reaffirmed Palestinians' explicit commitment to a two-State solution, and the Authority stood ready to engage in final-status negotiations, which should not be open-ended. The five-year interim period of the Oslo Accords had expired five years ago, but facts on the ground made a viable State impossible, he said, adding that if more time passed, a two-State solution would be impossible. The Palestinian Authority had given itself two years to establish the institutions for a Palestinian State, where Palestinians could live and work without fear of violence, and where they were protected from violations of human rights.

He said the Programme was aimed at bringing real progress towards peace, recognizing that open-ended negotiation have not, and never would, bear fruit. "Palestinians cannot be coerced into coexistence with a fragmented State of leftovers – State isolated by cantons separated by walls and checkpoints, guarded by soldiers of another State," he said. The Palestinian Government Programme consisted of 11 national goals on the path to realizing the vision of a peaceful and prosperous Palestine. The aim was to bring equality and social justice to all Palestinian citizens and to guarantee equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for all, with freedom from discrimination.

In Gaza, he said, the Palestinians sought an immediate end to the siege so that the essential work of lifting Gaza out of its current state of poverty and desperation could begin. The Programme was also committed to closing the gap in development and human security that had opened between the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, and to the restoration of Jerusalem as a city of peace, worship and tolerance. Israel continued to execute a systematic campaign to alter Jerusalem's geographic, demographic and cultural character, and to cut it off from the remainder of the West Bank. That campaign must be brought to a halt immediately and be reversed in order to make a two-State solution viable.

The Programme attached great importance to positive relations with the international community and building a State of Palestine that would be a cornerstone of stability in the Middle East, he said. It sought to build a self-sufficient Palestine, which, rather than being dependent on external aid and support, was able to make a real and significant contribution to political, social and economic life in the region and around the world.

The Palestinian Authority had made important progress in implementing its Programme, he said. Progress was also being made in modernizing the legal framework in order to create an enabling environment for sustainable economic growth. Efforts to join the World Trade Organization were just one example of the preparatory work, he said, adding that the Palestinian Authority was also building partnerships with the private sector. The provision of basic social services was going well relative to other countries in the region and around the world. Efforts were also being made to improve infrastructure so as to ensure that all citizens – irrespective of whether they lived in the so-called Areas A, B or C – had access to roads, electricity and water networks.

He said great strides were being made in developing efficient, effective and accountable policing services, which had already brought a welcome sense of security and stability. Legal frameworks were being reformed to ensure that the security services protected and served citizens, while respecting their democratic rights and freedoms. The results were remarkable given the context, in which the Israeli Army restricted the movements of police, judges and civil servants.

Those achievements had clearly demonstrated the Palestinian Authority's ability to govern and deliver services, he said, adding: "Just imagine for a moment what we Palestinians could achieve if freed from the shackles of occupation. And imagine the frustration that we Palestinians feel at being denied the freedom to control our own destiny for so many decades." The illegal occupation must end, he stressed, saying there was no real need to wait for two years, as the Palestinian Authority was ready now. However, the Authority would continue during that period to implement its Programme in order to be ready to reverse the

decades of “de-development” suffered under the occupation.

Expressing hope that the international community would step up its condemnation of Israeli actions that continued to take Palestinians backwards, he said the recent decision to construct 1,600 new houses for settlers in East Jerusalem was just one recent example. Settler violence against Palestinian civilians continued unchecked and unpunished. “Despite the apparent determination of Israel to continue to hold on to occupied Palestinian land and resources, my message to you today is that there is a willing and proactive Palestinian partner for peace,” he said, adding that the Palestinian Programme had been born of hope, not frustration.

#### Continuation of Statements

MIKHAIL WEHBE, Observer for the [League of Arab States](#), said the Palestinian people were still deprived of their legitimate national rights and suffered “daily aggressions” through the cruel blockade and continuing settlement construction. Israel was still perpetrating war crimes against the Palestinian people, he said, noting that it was ironic that the international community merely made lukewarm declarations about Israeli settlement policies, even though they were a stumbling block to any Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Other stumbling blocks included Israeli actions in East Jerusalem.

Underscoring the Arab commitment to support Palestinians efforts to establish a State according to pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, he said any further Israeli actions should be brought to a halt before any more negotiations could be undertaken. Should the Israeli practices continue, all initiatives would be doomed to fail, he said, stressing that the question of East Jerusalem should be brought before the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice. He also called for an urgent meeting of the Security Council to address the conflict in all its aspects, expressing hope that the right of veto would not be exercised. It was high time the international community changed its position with a view to practical international measures requiring Israel to account for its crimes and bring perpetrators of war crimes before international courts.

SHAHER AWAWDEH, Observer for the [Organization of the Islamic Conference](#), said Israel was violating international law and had increased its aggression in East Jerusalem in order to alter the city's Arab character. The international community's complacency had caused Israel to act with a complete lack of respect for international law, and such arrogance could no longer be tolerated.

The absence of a fair solution to the Palestinian question was a threat to international stability, he said, adding that the international community must do everything possible to stop Israeli violations and make it abide by all agreements and resolutions. The Organization of the Islamic Conference would welcome a compulsory mechanism to get Israel to conform to the international will by applying pressure, including sanctions.

HASSAN LAOUAOUDA ( [Morocco](#)) reaffirmed his country's commitment to support the Palestinian people and called for an end to the blockade against them. Morocco would work towards a peaceful, sustainable and fair settlement so there could be an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Since negotiations had reached deadlock due to Israel's illegal practices in East Jerusalem, it was necessary to support the Palestinian position on the freezing of settlements with a view to beginning final negotiations on the future of Palestine. He condemned the Israeli Government's decision to authorize construction of 1,600 settlement dwellings in East Jerusalem, which confirmed the strategy to isolate that part of the city from other Palestinian lands and separate it from any final solution.

BASSAM SABBAGH ( [Syria](#)) said that, to assist the Palestinian people, there was a need to address the root causes of their suffering, namely the continuous occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. Israel's constant expansion, with its ulterior motive of building “facts on the ground”, had led to the shedding of the blood of innocent people. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were living under a cruel blockade, while the situation in East Jerusalem was worrisome. The continuation of illegal settlement construction and the immoral blockade in the Gaza Strip were destabilizing regional and international security. The failure to prosecute the perpetrators of the crimes committed against the Palestinians allowed the continuation of illegal Israeli policies, he said.

KHADIJA MASRI, Observer for the [African Union](#), said the regional body's Commission was deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as a consequence of the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and the restrictions on the free movement of the Palestinians. The African Union called upon the Israeli authorities to lift the restrictions and open all crossing points in order to begin reconstruction in Gaza.

Human rights were being systematically trampled in Gaza, but no investigations had been carried out to document the grave violations there, she said. Despite all international efforts to re-establish dialogue, the Israeli authorities were continuing their illegal settlement activities, disregarding the peace process. The African Union Executive Council had expressed its support for efforts to end the division among the Palestinian people, she said, adding that it had also reiterated its belief that a lasting peace should involve the return of refugees and Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders, including withdrawal from Syria and Lebanon.

TAOUS FEROUKHI ( [Algeria](#)) said the escalation of Israel's illegal occupation, through the seizure of goods and houses, destroyed any hope for a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must end the destruction of Palestinian society and its denial of the Palestinians' basic rights, she said. Algeria supported the Palestinian Authority Programme for the establishment of the institutions necessary for a viable Palestinian State.

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