



Secretary-General  
SG/SM/12742  
GA/PAL/1147

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

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**SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS 'DAUNTING CHALLENGES' REMAIN IN SHARED QUEST  
FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE, IN MESSAGE TO MALTA MEETING**

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message to the International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, delivered by Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in Qawra, Malta, 12 February.

It is my pleasure to send greetings to this International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

I also send greetings to the people of Malta. The meetings I held with the Government, Parliament and civil society during my visit last April convinced me of Malta's determination to contribute to United Nations efforts to address issues of global and regional concern, including peace in the Middle East. I thank Malta for hosting this event, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean for the active and constructive role it aims to play at the United Nations.

We continue to face daunting challenges in our shared quest to achieve statehood and self-determination for Palestinians, security and recognition for Israel, and lasting peace in the Middle East. I urge all parties to respond positively to calls for a resumption of political talks, and then work concertedly for quick, meaningful results. Permanent status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, refugees, security, settlements and water will be resolved only through negotiations.

I welcome Israel's efforts and willingness to resume talks. However, a return to negotiations is being seriously hampered by developments on the ground. Regarding continued settlement expansion in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, I call on Israel to adhere to international law and its obligations under the Road Map. At this crucial juncture, Israel should refrain from taking steps which have the potential to prejudge negotiations and create tensions. This is particularly important with respect to East Jerusalem, where settlement infrastructure is being expanded and consolidated while Palestinian residents are being subjected to evictions, demolitions and revocation of residency rights. A way should be found, through negotiations, for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all.

I welcome the reform efforts of the Palestinian Authority, which seek to establish the economic, social and institutional basis of Palestinian statehood. 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. I urge all donors, including members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, to enhance their political and financial backing of this vital endeavour. I also encourage the positive steps Israel has taken to ease movement restrictions and facilitate economic activity. I also support Egypt's efforts toward the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank.

In Gaza, the protracted suffering by civilians is a source of tremendous concern. The continued blockade is unacceptable and counter-productive, destroying legitimate commerce and denying aid organizations and the United Nations itself the means to begin civilian reconstruction. I also condemn renewed rocket fire from Gaza, which indiscriminately targets Israeli civilians. The United Nations will continue to try to bring relief to Gazans, to promote dialogue, and to rally international support for a strategy that can deliver calm for Gazans and Israelis alike. We will also continue to promote respect for international law, and accountability for violations.

Clear parameters to end the occupation that began in 1967 and create a State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security are contained in Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Political will is required by the leadership on both sides, along with creative support by third parties. The countries of the Mediterranean have an important role to play in building confidence between the parties, and within the overall subregional community of which they are an integral part. Confidence begets confidence; stability begets stability; security begets security; peace begets peace. Let us, together, help the parties to resolve their decades-old conflict and forge a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

In this spirit, please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.

