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### **Ban calls for more Israeli steps to lift blockade of Gaza**

29 July 2011 – The Israeli Government needs to take more steps to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip, particularly to allow the free import of construction materials into the area, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

In a **meeting** with Ehud Barak, Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Mr. Ban discussed the current impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the situation in Lebanon and the wider Middle East, according to information released by his spokesperson.

The United Nations chief urged "an early resumption of meaningful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations," which have been stalled for nearly a year.

On Gaza, Mr. Ban "expressed his appreciation for the approval of UN projects and underlined the need for further steps by the Government of Israel towards the lifting of the closure" in line with an earlier Security Council resolution.

Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza for what it said were security reasons after Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist, ousted the Fatah movement in the Strip in 2007.

Last month Israel approved building materials for new homes and schools to be constructed in Gaza by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In June last year Israel also started allowing more civilian goods into Gaza while restricting access to concrete, iron and other materials.

Mr. Ban's comments today to Mr. Barak echo the remarks made by the Middle East Quartet – the diplomatic grouping comprising the UN, the European Union, Russia and the United States – in its most recent statement, made earlier this month.

The Quartet said that while the efforts to ease the blockade were welcome, "considerably more" needs to be done.

Today Mr. Ban also voiced concern to Mr. Barak about settlement expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. He also encouraged efforts aimed at restoring good relations between Israel and Turkey.