



Secretary-General
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SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN MESSAGE, URGES PARTIES TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED

BY ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PROXIMITY TALKS, REFRAIN FROM PROVOCATIONS

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, as delivered by Bader Al-Dafa, Under-Secretary-General, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), to the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine, in Rabat, Morocco, 1 July.

It is my pleasure to send greetings to the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine held under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I thank the Government of Morocco for hosting this gathering.

This meeting occurs at a time of tension and uncertainty in the region. Israeli-Palestinian proximity talks mediated by the United States continue — but they are complicated by ongoing crises on the ground. It is essential that all parties refrain from provocations and seize the opportunity presented by the talks. The coming months will be critical in determining whether we can move to direct negotiations, with more positive actions on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

I have long called for a different and more positive approach to Gaza. The 31 May flotilla crisis has illustrated that the situation in Gaza is unacceptable. I welcome Israel's recent steps towards a new policy on Gaza, but full and swift implementation is crucial, as well as further measures beyond those announced.

The goal must be an end to the blockade so that humanitarian assistance, commercial goods and persons can flow through functioning land crossings. The United Nations will closely monitor developments, and will insist that the change in approach delivers real change on the ground. We must work together to meet the enormous needs in Gaza, while addressing all other issues cited in [Security Council resolution 1860](#) (2009).

I also call on Hamas to show political responsibility by enforcing an extended ceasefire, and moving forward with the Egyptian reconciliation proposal. The continued captivity of Corporal Gilad Shalit serves no Palestinian interest. Access should be granted to him and he should be released.

I remain concerned about the situation in Jerusalem, where provocative announcements on new settlement construction continue to undermine trust and cause unrest. Settlement construction should stop, as should measures which discriminate against Palestinian residents of the city and the ability of Palestinians to access the city. Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem should be reopened in accordance with the Road Map. Jerusalem remains a permanent status issue and a way should be found for the City to emerge as the capital of both Israel and a future State of Palestine, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all.

Despite Israel's restraint policy, settlement construction also continues in the rest of the West Bank based on approvals given prior to the announced restraint, or in its violation. This contravenes international law, Security Council resolutions and Israel's Road Map obligations. I again call for an immediate freeze on all such activity.

I welcome the reduction of obstacles to movement over the past year. Nonetheless, hundreds of checkpoints and other obstacles continue to deprive Palestinian residents of access to their land, hospitals and schools, and stifle economic activity. More progress is necessary.

In spite of the occupation and challenging political and economic circumstances, the Palestinian Authority's State-building initiative has shown remarkable progress. This includes the vital areas of security and rule of law, and must be carried forward. This initiative is an essential complement on the ground to the negotiations. It has the strong support of the international community, including the Quartet and, it is important to stress, Israel. The United Nations will continue to support this initiative.

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I will continue to work to bring an end to the 1967 occupation and to the conflict, and to help achieve a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For that to happen, the Israeli-Palestinian proximity talks must, without delay, lead to direct negotiations that will tackle all permanent status issues. All of us are called upon to lend our support towards the realization of the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the shared capital, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, supported by the Arab Peace Initiative.

In this spirit, I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful meeting.

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