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RENEWED MIDDLE EAST VIOLENCE MUST NOT DIVERT INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FROM 'ROAD MAP', SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL TO HEADQUARTERS CONFERENCE

Following is Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message to the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, delivered by Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in New York, 4 September:

I welcome you all to United Nations Headquarters. The active engagement of civil society in the work of this Organization gives life and meaning to the concept of "We, the peoples", in whose name the United Nations Charter was written.

Efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been part of the Organization's work almost since its inception. These efforts continue at this crucial time, in cooperation with the other members of the Quartet — the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation.

Assisted by the Quartet and the international community, Israelis and Palestinians have committed themselves to the [Road Map](#). Its goal is clear — an end to terrorism and violence, an end to occupation, a permanent settlement of the conflict based on Security Council resolutions [242](#), [338](#) and [1397](#), and the realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

Your support is indispensable if that vision is to be achieved. And it must be achieved, if the Palestinian people are, at last, to live a normal and secure life, in a land unencumbered by military occupation, strife and unbearable living conditions, while Israelis, at last, live in peace and security within their own borders, free from fear.

The road to peace is strewn with many obstacles. Sadly, after initial encouraging steps taken by both parties, the ceasefire has broken down. The level of violence increased sharply last month, with repeated incursions into Palestinian cities, targeted assassinations and other retaliatory measures, as well as deadly suicide bombings against Israelis. Palestinian and Israeli civilians continue to be killed in indefensible acts of violence.

I have called on the parties to exercise utmost restraint — to break the cycle of violence and counter-violence. I repeat that call today. And I urge both sides to deepen their commitment to security cooperation so as to allow the political process to move forward.

The Road Map drawn up by the Quartet remains, if fully and fairly implemented, the best way to reach an independent and viable Palestinian State. We must not allow the renewed cycle of deadly violence to divert us from it. The whole international community must strengthen its efforts to help both parties stay the course.

Settlement expansion and the construction of bypass roads remain serious impediments to the Road Map, which clearly calls for a freezing of all settlement activity and for settlement outposts erected since March 2001 to be dismantled. And the construction of the barrier in the West Bank separates Palestinians from their farms and from other Palestinian communities, creating facts on the ground and running contrary to the letter and the spirit of the Road Map. These activities tend to predetermine the outcome of future negotiations on permanent status, and threaten to undermine the vision of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority must act decisively to halt terrorist attacks. A solution will not be achieved through terrorism. Civil society, particularly Palestinian civil society, must speak loudly and clearly against terrorism, which is not only unjustifiable, but harmful to the Palestinian cause.

It is also important for the Palestinian Authority to continue its reforms in a transparent manner in close consultation with the international community — specifically, the Quartet's Task Force on Palestinian Reform. Civil society has an important role to play here too. In the spring, civil society representatives were invited to participate in the National Committee for Reform. But this is not enough. Creative ways must be found to engage civil society more deeply in the various aspects of the reform process.

The humanitarian situation is a cause for great concern. Israeli withdrawals have been accompanied by some easing of restriction on the movement of Palestinian workers and commodities. But closures and curfews in the West Bank remain. Palestinians are still not able to move around freely, to seek medical care, to take their children to schools, or to attend to other aspects of their lives. The United Nations has stressed the need for international and local humanitarian staff to be allowed full access to Palestinian areas. The Palestinian people need to see real and tangible benefits in their lives.

The United Nations, along with international donors and non-governmental organizations, is fully engaged in development and humanitarian work on the ground. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as other organizations, continue their efforts to assist the Palestinian people. The United Nations Special Coordinator for

the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, Terje Roed-Larsen, maintains close contact with the parties, the other members of the Quartet, and donors, in order to promote political and security dialogue and to foster cooperation on economic and humanitarian issues.

For more than 50 years, the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) has provided Palestinian refugees with a broad range of essential services. UNRWA needs the sustained support of the donors at this time of crisis and dire economic hardship, as it struggles to cope with budget shortfalls and increased requests for services.

The work carried out by civil society organizations individually and in partnership with the United Nations greatly contributes to efforts for peace and provides much-needed humanitarian assistance. Of particular importance are joint grass-roots initiatives between Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations, as well as between Jewish and Arab groups in the United States, Europe and elsewhere. These initiatives enable ordinary Israelis and Palestinians to build bridges of trust and understanding, laying the groundwork for mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

If the vision of the Road Map is to be achieved, civil society must play its part. I therefore thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this event, and I wish you all a successful and productive Conference.

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