
Off-the-Cuff

**Secretary-General's remarks at press encounter with President Mahmoud Abbas
Ramallah, 15 August 2013**

Assalam Alaikum.
Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. President, for your hospitality and warm welcome.

I am pleased to visit the State of Palestine.

I am here to demonstrate the continued commitment of the United Nations to the Palestinian people's legitimate rights to self-determination and aspirations for statehood and a just and a lasting peace.

A viable Palestinian state is long overdue.

There is renewed hope thanks to the commitment of the Palestinian and Israeli leadership. This must be sustained.

I appreciate the efforts of the United States, particularly Secretary of State John Kerry. I am also encouraged about the recent pledge by the Arab leaders to revive the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative for regional stability.

I want to highlight the leadership and courage of President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. I urge all parties to avoid actions that would risk undermining prospects during the negotiations.

A two-state solution can be achieved through negotiations that resolve permanent status issues such as borders, security, refugees and Jerusalem.

I am encouraged that the parties have embarked on direct talks. These talks must be meaningful with a clear political horizon and must mark progress in the immediate period ahead.

There must be visible improvements on the ground.

I remain deeply troubled by Israel's continuing settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Settlement activity is deepening the Palestinian people's mistrust in the seriousness on the Israeli side towards achieving peace. It will ultimately render a two-state solution impossible.

I welcome the release of 26 Palestinian prisoners. But I remain concerned about the fate of some 5,000 Palestinian prisoners who remain in Israeli jails, especially those on hunger strike and administrative detention. They should either be tried or released.

I also call for the further easing of restrictions on the Palestinian movement and access, whether of goods or peoples.

The United Nations will continue to ensure the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza. These communities deserve economic growth and recovery, with access to land, sea and resources.

The President and I agreed that in the context of a resumed peace process we cannot and must not forget Gaza.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation has an adverse impact on Gaza's civilian population.

I continue to emphasize the importance of access through legitimate crossings.

At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns must be addressed.

I continue to support the efforts of President Abbas to promote Palestinian reconciliation. This is an indispensable part of a permanent settlement.

And in all our efforts, we must never lose sight of the plight of five million Palestinian refugees.

I commend President Abbas for his leadership and commitment under difficult circumstances. Hard choices lie ahead.

After years of frustrations, many remain doubtful about the prospect of success. Now is the moment to prove sceptics wrong.

I want to assure President Abbas and the Palestinian people that I, along with my Special Coordinator Robert Serry, and the entire United Nations team, will spare no effort to assist the parties in achieving lasting peace.

Thank you. Shukran jazeelan.

Q: Concerning on Palestinian status, the peace process and United Nations.

SG: As for your question, on November 29th last year, the General Assembly has granted the Palestine state the non-member observer state status and thus granted statehood, and the representative of the Palestine state has every access to all the debates of the United Nations. And my understanding is that while this negotiation is progressing, I understand that the two parties have some understandings that you reserve all your efforts to make this negotiation a success to achieve a two-state solution. Then, if you realize the two-state solution, I think you will realize all your other priorities and therefore, I urge the parties concerned to exert all your efforts to make this progress moving, with great and successful results.