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**Secretary-General's press encounter following his briefing to the Security Council on his recent trip**

**New York, 8 February 2012**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

I have just briefed the Security Council. Let me reiterate three main points.

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Second, this is also a critical moment for the Middle East peace process.

It is crucial for Israelis and Palestinians to remain engaged, submit proposals on territory and security, and build confidence.

I spoke with President [Mahmoud] Abbas two days ago, following his agreement with Hamas leader Khaled Meshal to form a new government of technocrats under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

I believe that Palestinian reconciliation and negotiations with Israel need not be mutually exclusive.

But there is considerable frustration and scepticism on both sides. Time is not on the side of either party.

I urge both leaders, President Abbas and Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu, to recognize the need to rebuild momentum. Goodwill gestures and positive facts on the ground will go a long way toward setting the stage for progress in the negotiations.

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Q: Mr. Secretary-General – on your trip to the Middle East and Palestine, in your meeting and so forth and statement that you have given, you have been sounding very optimistic – that there might be some light at end of the tunnel. Now that Israel has not indicated at any point in time that it will stop settlements or do anything to appease, to make things better – how do you see the situation over there? Is it dismal or do you think it is going to get better?

SG: I have been urging both leaders to resume their negotiations which were created in early January under the auspices of the Jordanian Government – the Jordanian King. It is important not to miss these opportunities. The situation is not favourable and it seems that parties are still just taking 'wait and see' positions, considering all that is happening in the region. But I urged them that, while the situation may look fragile and volatile in the region, this is the right moment to enter into negotiations to promote peace and stability in the region.

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