



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

Bulletin

on action by the United Nations system and
intergovernmental organizations
relevant to the question of Palestine

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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTS NEW DEPUTY SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

On 4 May 2015, the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued the following statement on the appointment of a new Deputy United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (SG/A/1566-BIO/4720):

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today announced the appointment of Robert Piper of Australia as Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. Mr. Piper will also serve as United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Mr. Piper will succeed James Rawley of the United States to whom the Secretary-General is grateful for his distinguished service and in particular for his dedicated contribution to Gaza's reconstruction efforts.

Mr. Piper brings over 25 years of humanitarian and development experience with the United Nations, leading efforts in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction in a number of complex situations. He has been serving as the United

Nations Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel region since 2013.

From 2008 to 2013, he was United Nations Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative for Nepal. He played a similar role leading the United Nations system in Kosovo from 2002 to 2004. Mr. Piper has held a number of other key posts with UNDP at Headquarters and in the field, including as inaugural Director for the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund and as Deputy Director for Emergency Response.

Mr. Piper has a Bachelor of Arts degree, with honours in political science, from the Australian National University. He was a Yale University World Fellow in 2004.

Born in 1966, he is married and has four children.

II. ESCWA ISSUES REPORT ON THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION

On 8 May 2015, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia submitted its report on "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan". The following are excerpts from the summary of the report (A/70/82-E/2015/13):

In its resolution 2014/26, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session, through the Council, a report on the implementation of that resolution. The Assembly, in its resolution 69/241, also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its seventieth session. The present report, which was prepared by the

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, is submitted in compliance with the resolutions of the Council and the Assembly.

Israel continues employing practices and policies in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In 2014 the Palestinian civilian death toll was the highest recorded since 1967,

and the level of destruction was unprecedented, owing in particular to the Gaza conflict in July and August 2014. Israeli discriminatory policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan include excessive use of force, settlement expansion, property destruction and exploitation of natural

resources. Impunity is afforded to Israeli security and military personnel and settlers. The cumulative impact of these policies and practices not only violates the rights of the population, but also exacerbates their social and economic conditions.

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III. ILO SUBMITS REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF WORKERS OF THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES

On 13 May 2015, the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, submitted a report entitled “The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories” to the 104th session of the International Labour Conference. The following are the concluding observations contained in the report (ILC.104/DG/APP):

129. The lives and livelihoods of Palestinian workers and their families continue to be marked by uncertain employment, the lack of growth in the West Bank, the tensions in East Jerusalem, and the slow reconstruction and high level of deprivation in Gaza. Similar factors also affect the Syrian citizens of the occupied Syrian Golan. The basic constraint remains: restrictions arising out of the Israeli occupation and the settlements, which are increasingly entrenched in the occupied territories. There is a feeling that the space for development of the Palestinian society, and ultimately for a sovereign Palestinian state, continues to diminish

130. Economic and especially political developments appear to be suspended until the internal dynamics of both Israel and the Palestinians produce governing structures which could provide the conditions for resuming the peace process. Without this, it is difficult to see how the confidence could be found for any significant economic activity and investment, either domestic or international, which would allow the Palestinian economy to reverse what looks like a slow but sure downward spiral with consistently bleak employment and income prospects. Donors are liable to disburse the large sums pledged for the reconstruction of Gaza only hesitantly until they are convinced

that building activity and repairs to installations can really be carried out.

131. Although confidence is impossible to quantify, and notoriously difficult to foster, it is indispensable for driving the economy forward and promoting investment, growth and jobs. After a long period of failed negotiations, with insecure incomes as a result of uneven growth and unpredictable clearance revenues, and with further violence and war still looking like real possibilities, this is a daunting task. To restore confidence, just muddling through is not enough. There needs to be a concrete aim at the not too distant end of the road. For the Palestinians, over a number of years this has been a promise of a two-state solution.

132. The state- and institution-building process that has taken place during the last years is now facing a potentially existential question. What are the institutions to be used for, if the aim of a sovereign state is seriously delayed or postponed? Institutions need to be able to function fully, in practice, so that the stakeholders benefit from them and acquire and maintain the practice of using them.

133. This concerns not only physical institutions but arrangements and processes, such as governing boards and laws and their

implementation. Wherever the economy is squeezed, social programmes, employment and income security, and workers' rights are among the first to be affected. A large array of legislative and institutional arrangements, as well as the Palestinian Decent Work Programme and social dialogue, risk being undermined if uncertainty takes a more permanent hold. This will invariably be felt first by the most disadvantaged groups in society.

134. Another negative effect, already widely felt, is that prospects for private economic activity, be it large projects, small-scale enterprises or the fruits of the labour of individual urban workers or farmers, are negated. With expanding settlements and the restrictions arising out of the occupation, the amount of energy and activity needed for even supposedly simple transactions can become prohibitive. It becomes demoralizing when the occupier's economy and administration can repeatedly produce and deliver much more efficiently — which is possible because of all the advantages it derives from the situation.

135. A comparison of the present and projected wage levels, even with a strengthened application of the Palestinian minimum wage, is sufficient to explain the continuous attraction of the Israeli labour market, including work in the settlements. With the amount of potentially precarious work outside the permit regime, the conditions of recruitment and employment should be addressed as a matter of urgency. In the longer

run, for the Palestinians, working in Israel should be an option but not a necessity. However, that will happen only when the parameters of two complementary economies and labour markets are established.

136. The termination of the devastating war in Gaza was accompanied by promises of reconstruction but no agreed roadmap for reaching the result. It is to be hoped that the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism will be successful and will lead to an end to the continuing blockade. In economic and employment terms, the effect of shutting down the illicit tunnel trade — which was an element of support for the de facto authorities in Gaza — had been a drop in activity and an increase in unemployment already before the war. Beyond the immediate reconstruction efforts, Gaza needs to be able to gain real prospects for economic and commercial development, and it should have access to the markets in the immediate vicinity.

137. Any conceivable approach for a new beginning will immediately have to face the questions of employment and income security as well as the social and labour rights of the workers of the occupied Arab territories. Each time the parties, with whatever international facilitation and support they may have, come to a crossroads, they will have to make choices which directly affect the workers. That is why it is particularly important at this stage to remind them of the interrelated and mutually reinforcing objectives of decent work.

IV. SECRETARY-GENERAL STRONGLY DEPLORES ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ACTIVITIES

On 15 May 2015, the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued the following statement on Israel's settlement activities (SG/SM/16752):

The Secretary-General strongly deplores the advancement of settlement activities on three occasions over the past three consecutive weeks by the Israeli authorities in the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem.

He reiterates that settlements are illegal under international law and urges the Government of Israel to halt and reverse such decisions in the interest of peace and a just final status agreement.

The Secretary-General reiterates that the international community will not recognize unilateral actions on the ground and that the

status of Jerusalem can only be resolved through negotiations.

V. WHO REPORTS ON HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

On 15 May 2015, the Secretariat of the World Health Organization issued a report on “Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan”, prepared for the 68th World Health Assembly. The following are excerpts from the report (A68/37):

1. In 2014, the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA67(10), which requested the Director-General, inter alia, to report on its implementation to the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly.

2. The current population for the occupied Palestinian territory is 4 550 368 (2 790 331 of whom live in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, and 1 760 037 in the Gaza Strip).¹ Two million are registered refugees, of whom 800 000 live in 19 refugee camps in the West Bank and eight in the Gaza Strip.² The population is predominantly youthful: 39.7% of Palestinians are aged 0-14 years, 30.0% are aged 15-29 years, and 4.4% are aged 60 years or more:

3. The Palestinian economy has been in decline since 2012 and estimates at the end of 2014 indicated a contraction in gross domestic product of 2.5% compared with 2013.³ Restrictions on movement and access, including the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the barrier wall on the West Bank and the permit regime, have contributed to the worsening economic conditions. Private sector

development has also been hindered by the fragmented legal and regulatory business environment, which varies in the Gaza Strip, east Jerusalem and the different areas of the West Bank, and by the restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods, and on trade between the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.⁴

4. At mid-year, the unemployment rate had declined to 16.0% in the West Bank, but had increased to 45.1% in the Gaza Strip. One quarter of the Palestinian population lives in poverty, with the poverty rate in the Gaza Strip twice as high as in the West Bank.⁴ In addition, 1.9 million Palestinians (1.3 million in the Gaza Strip and 0.6 million in the West Bank) experience food insecurity and need humanitarian aid.⁵

5. In 2014, the number of Palestinian fatalities and injuries resulting from violence associated with military occupation was the highest since 1967, amounting to 2333 deaths and 15 788 injuries — primarily occurring during the conflict in the Gaza Strip in July–August 2014. The conflict had a significant impact on the daily life of Palestinians, with

¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/881/default.aspx#Population>, accessed 1 April 2015) and State of Palestine Ministry of Health, Health annual report, Palestine 2013 (<http://www.moh.ps/attach/704.pdf>, accessed 1 April 2015).

² UNRWA, “Where we work” www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/, accessed 1 April 2015.

³ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=1294&mid=3171&wversion=Staging>, accessed on 1 April 2015).

⁴ World Bank. Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, September 22, 2014 (<http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Feature%20Story/mena/WBAndGaza/wbg-docs/wbg-ahlc-report-2014-eng.pdf>, accessed 1 April 2015).

⁵ Occupied Palestinian territory. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2015. Factsheet issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/hno2015_factsheet_final9_dec.pdf, accessed 1 April 2015).

half a million people being displaced, of whom 100 000 remained homeless at the end of 2014, and some 22 000 homes being either totally destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.⁵ Widespread damage to infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics and ambulances,⁶ and educational, water and sanitation facilities,⁷ has limited access to basic services.

6. In the West Bank, one quarter of the population (668 000) live in five areas where they are particularly vulnerable to social isolation, residency and planning restrictions, house demolition and forced displacement, reduced access to Palestinian services, confrontations with Israeli military forces and settlers, and the threat of violence. The areas are: east Jerusalem; the H2 area of Hebron city; Area C where Israeli military authorities control civilian affairs and security; the so-called seam zone; and closed military and firing zones.⁵

7. Access to health services is restricted by the separation wall and checkpoints, which prevent patients, health personnel and ambulances from directly accessing major Palestinian referral hospitals located in east Jerusalem. For Palestinians from the West Bank — excluding east Jerusalem — and the Gaza Strip, access to east Jerusalem referral medical centres is only possible after obtaining a permit issued by the Israeli authorities, a complex process which can result in delays and denial of care. According to a WHO update that is currently in preparation, in 2014, of the 18 141 patients who applied for permits to cross the Erez checkpoint in order to attend referral hospitals in Israel, or Palestinian hospitals in east Jerusalem, 17.6% were either denied permits or did not receive timely

replies and therefore missed their hospital appointments. The rates are higher than in 2012 (7.5%) and 2013 (11.3%).⁸ A total of 322 patients (281 males and 41 females) were called for security interviews as a condition of application. The number of permit applications to pass through Erez increased by one third over the figure for 2013, and was almost double that for 2012. The increase in demand reflected mounting difficulties in exiting the Gaza Strip through the Rafah border crossing into Egypt, as well as more serious health needs arising from an inadequate supply of medicines and insufficient medical capacity within the Gaza Strip. Of the 230 712 Palestinians who applied for permits to access Jerusalem from the West Bank, including patients, companions and visitors, 22.6% were either denied permits or experienced delays in receiving them.⁹

8. Patients from the Gaza Strip seeking specialized health care were significantly affected in 2014 by the closure of the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, one of only two exit points for its residents. The volume of patients and companions decreased by 93% after the July 2013 closure, with travel permitted only sporadically and in a limited number of humanitarian cases.

9. It has been reported that access to health services for the 5447 Palestinian political prisoners¹⁰ from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in detention and prison facilities in Israel, and for Palestinians held in Israeli military facilities in the West Bank, lacks transparency

⁶ Health Cluster, "Gaza Strip: Joint Health Sector Assessment Report" http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/Joint_Health_Sector_Assessment_Report_Gaza_Sept_2014-final.pdf?ua=1, accessed 1 April 2015).

⁷ Fact sheet issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on Gaza water, September 2014 (http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/gazastrip_water_vl.pdf, accessed 1 April 2015).

⁸ Right to health: crossing barriers to access health in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2013. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2014 (http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/WHO_-_RTH_crossing_barriers_to_access_health.pdf?ua=1, accessed 1 April 2015).

⁹ Palestinian General Authority for Civilian Affairs office, communication, 27 January 2015.

¹⁰ The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Statistics on Palestinians in the custody of Israeli security forces (http://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners, accessed 1 April 2015).

and supervision by the Israeli Ministry of Health, and that independent external physicians are denied access. More than 200 cases challenging the lack of access to medical services, and three court petitions requesting access for independent doctors were reported to have been filed in 2014 on behalf of prisoners.¹¹ According to recent statistics, there were 163 children in prison or military detention in 2014, including 18 children aged less than 16 years.¹² These prisoners are particularly vulnerable because of the “widespread, systematic and institutionalized” ill-treatment of children,¹³ which can affect their mental well-being.¹⁴

10. The Palestinian Ministry of Health re-unified its health system in 2014 under the Palestinian Authority, following agreement with the de facto government to end the seven-year political separation between West Bank and Gaza Strip. While the Ministry of Health, UNRWA and nongovernmental organizations together provided geographical coverage of primary and hospital level services, the financial crisis affecting the Palestinian Authority continued to have a serious impact on the scope and quality of Ministry of Health services. Budget shortfalls have resulted in chronic shortages of essential drugs and medical disposables in the Gaza Strip, and, most recently, in the West Bank, prompting an

increase in referrals. Health services have been disrupted by frequent strikes by health workers and stoppages by health suppliers. The restrictions imposed on the movement of health staff and goods also hinder the overall functioning and development of the health system.

11. So far, service delivery in the public sector has followed a selective, service-centred approach whereby specific areas, such as maternal health or noncommunicable diseases, are managed by dedicated staff. The Ministry of Health is now moving towards a patient-centred approach, with the adoption of a family practice model for primary health care. This approach is essential in addressing the high burden of noncommunicable diseases in the occupied Palestinian territory, where the leading causes of death remain cardiovascular disease, cancer, cerebrovascular diseases and diabetes,¹⁵ and the prevalence of related risk factors (smoking, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity) remains unacceptably high.

12. Infant and under-five mortality rates continued to decline. In 2013, infant mortality was 12.9 deaths per 1000 live births, compared with 20.8 deaths per 1000 live births in 2005. The under-five mortality rate was 15.5 deaths per 1000 in 2013, down from 24.6 deaths per 1000 in 2005.¹⁶

13. The prevalence of disability was 2.7% in the West Bank and 2.4% in the Gaza Strip,¹⁷ although disabilities increased notably in the Gaza Strip in 2014 as a result of the large number of persons with traumatic injuries, including more than 100 amputations, resulting from the July–August 2014 conflict. An increase in the burden of mental and

¹¹ Physicians for Human Rights — Israel, communication to the WHO Health in Prisons Programme, August 2014.

¹² The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Statistics on Palestinian minors in the custody of the Israeli security forces (http://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody, accessed 1 April 2015).

¹³ UNICEF. Children in Israeli detention: observations and recommendations, 2013 (http://www.unicef.org/oPt/UNICEF_oPt_Children_in_Israeli_MilitaryDetention_Observations_and_Recommendations_-_6_March_2013.pdf, accessed 1 April 2015).

¹⁴ The impact of child arrest and detention. Paper issued by the Madaa Creative Center, Silwan (<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/2012-madaa-report-on-child-arrest-and-detention-in-silwan.pdf>, accessed 1 April 2015) and Solitary confinement for Palestinian children in Israeli military detention. Defence for Children International/Palestine Section (http://www.dci-palestine.org/sites/default/files/report_doc_solitary_confinement_report_2013_final_29apr2014.pdf, accessed 7 April 2015).

¹⁵ State of Palestine Ministry of Health, Health annual report, Palestine 2013 (<http://www.moh.ps/attach/704.pdf>, accessed 1 April 2015).

¹⁶ Ministry of Health. Health status in Palestine 2005 (<http://www.moh.ps/attach/128.pdf>, accessed 1 April 2015).

¹⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&language=en&ItemID=1165&mid=3172&wversion=Staging>, accessed 1 April 2015).

psycho-social disorders can be expected in a population experiencing prolonged occupation, lack of personal security, severe movement restrictions and human rights violations, including displacement in a post-conflict situation.

14. Water quality and quantity is at crisis level in the Gaza Strip where 90-95% of public water supplies are not potable without treatment and the main aquifer will probably be unusable by 2016.¹⁸

¹⁸ Gaza in 2020: a liveable place? Report issued in 2012 by the United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian

territory (15. In response to a request made by the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly in decision WHA67(10), a more detailed account of health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory has been made available.¹⁹ The report concerned is based on a field assessment conducted by an external consultant, supported by WHO staff.

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territory (http://issuu.com/unrwa/docs/gaza_in_2020/1?e=0, accessed 1 April 2015).

¹⁹ See http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/Cons_Rep_2015_EN_16_311.pdf (accessed 12 May 2015).

VI. SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 19 May 2015, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov briefed the Security Council on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. The following are excerpts from the briefing (S/PV.7178):

I am honoured indeed to address the Security Council in my new capacity as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

At the outset, allow me to thank President Abbas and his Government for their warm welcome and genuine interest in working with the United Nations in advancing the just cause of peace. I would like to also express my gratitude to the Government of Israel for its warm reception and for engaging on a host of important issues related to the situation on the ground. Since taking up my assignment, I have engaged with Palestinian and Israeli leaders. I have also met with political, civil society and business stakeholders in the West Bank and Gaza and with key partners in Egypt and Jordan in order to begin developing a better understanding of the reality on the ground and the prospects for the future.

The Middle East faces a vicious tide of terror and extremism that presents a serious challenge not just to the region, but also to international peace and security. However, the inability to respond for over 60 years now, both to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a State and to Israel’s quest for security, has fuelled a situation that is becoming more dangerous by the day. Generations of Palestinians and Israelis have come to realize that sustainable and just peace cannot be reached through conflict, but must be the result of negotiations. Thousands of people have died so that today we may hold this truth — that peace cannot be achieved through violence, but at the negotiating table — to be self-evident.

This hard-earned belief in peace and negotiations must not be allowed to wither away. If it does, it could further destabilize the Middle East for decades. To save it, to give hope back to people, we must act to advance the prospect of a two-State solution: Israel and

Palestine living side by side in peace and security. How to do this is not an academic question, but one that must be addressed by the parties on the ground, the international community and the United Nations as well.

I do not underestimate the difficult decisions that both parties will have to take. Nor should we underestimate the domestic challenges that Israeli and Palestinian leaders alike will have to overcome. The region is facing a complicated security threat. However, it is precisely because of the dangers that lurk in the Middle East today that both sides must show historic leadership and personal commitment to peace and negotiations.

I take this opportunity to call on the new Government of Israel to take credible steps, including a freeze of settlement activity, in order to promote the resumption of meaningful negotiations. Continued security cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli authorities remains a cornerstone of a peaceful resolution. Both parties must make every effort to build upon existing agreements, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, in order to gain momentum towards a final status agreement. The Secretary-General stands ready to work with all in order to encourage a return to negotiations on the basis of an agreed framework.

On 14 May, the Israeli Knesset confirmed Prime Minister Netanyahu's new coalition Government. Its guidelines state that it will "strive for peace with the Palestinians and all our neighbours, while safeguarding the security, historical and national interests of Israel".

The Secretary-General and I will be engaging with the new Government to explore realistic options for a return to meaningful negotiations towards a two-State solution within a reasonable time frame. However, this goal is increasingly threatened by actions on

the ground that exacerbate the divisions that exist between the two sides.

We are deeply concerned to see the advancement of settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank on three occasions in the past month. On 14 May, tenders were issued for 85 housing units in Givat Ze'ev, south of Ramallah. On 6 May, the District Planning and Building Committee approved permits for 400 new residential units in the settlement of Ramat Shlomo, and, on 27 April, 77 tenders were issued for residential units in two other East Jerusalem settlements.

These announcements come at a sensitive time in which the international community is looking to Israel to demonstrate its readiness to engage with the Palestinians on building peace. There should be no illusions about the impact of these unilateral actions. They not only undermine the collective hopes of those longing for a just resolution of the conflict, but they again call into question the viability of achieving peace based on the vision of two States. Settlement activity is illegal under international law, and I urge the new Israeli Government to reverse these decisions and refrain from such action in future.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, tensions continued as Israeli security forces conducted some 265 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrests of 294 Palestinians. In separate incidents in late April, three Palestinian men, including a 17-year-old boy, were shot and killed after reportedly stabbing and injuring Israeli security officers at checkpoints in Hebron and Ma'ale Adumin. On 25 April, a Palestinian man was suspected of intentionally ramming his car into a group of Israeli policemen in East Jerusalem, injuring four. On 11 May, an Israeli was injured in a reported stabbing attack near a West Bank checkpoint. And on 14 May, three Israeli youths were struck by a car driven by a Palestinian man close to Gush Etzion.

Despite repeated objections, the Israeli Government continues to demolish Palestinian homes and structures. During the reporting period, a total of 15 structures, which contained 33 residences, were demolished, leading to the displacement of 25 people, including 14 children. On 4 May, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a request by Palestinians from the Area C village of Susiya to freeze demolitions in the village. And on 10 May, an Israeli court ordered the demolition of eight buildings in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Semiramis. The United Nations once again urges Israel to cease such demolitions and displacements.

The United Nations also remains concerned about the recent moves to relocate Bedouin communities near Abu Nwar in the politically sensitive El area of the West Bank that may be linked to further settlement construction.

Turning to Gaza, I cannot but recall the shock of my first, very brief tour of the destruction of the Shujaiya neighbourhood. No one — I repeat, no one — can remain untouched by the scale of devastation, the slow pace of reconstruction, and the vast needs that exist in order to rebuild lives and livelihoods. Gaza is desperate and Gaza is angry: angry at the blockade; angry at the closure of the Rafah crossing; angry at Hamas, including for imposing an illegal “solidarity tax”; angry at the donors for not honouring their commitments to reconstruction — at everyone. There is a clear moral and humanitarian imperative not just for the United Nations and the international community, but primarily for the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to prevent the implosion of Gaza. I particularly call on the factions on the ground to ensure that Gaza remains peaceful.

Despite the fact that the agreed ceasefire, brokered by Egypt, continues to hold, some security incidents have persisted during the reporting period. Three rockets were fired at Israel from Gaza on 23 April: one exploded in

an open area in Israel and the other two fell short and exploded inside Gaza. On 3 May, militants fired another rocket which hit inside Gaza near the security fence, and Palestinian militants also test-fired 19 rockets at the sea. Thankfully, no injuries or damage were reported in any of these incidents, all of which we condemn.

In response to the rocket firing, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted an airstrike in Gaza that damaged a Hamas military site, but no casualties were reported. The IDF also reportedly shot and injured nine Palestinians in Gaza: three fishermen whose boats were fired upon by the Israeli navy and six Palestinians shot while approaching the Gaza border fence. Three militants were also killed in separate incidents where smuggling tunnels collapsed.

Without genuine Palestinian reconciliation and unity, all efforts to improve the situation in Gaza will face major difficulties. On 19 April, a delegation of Palestinian ministers travelled to Gaza to begin a process to reintegrate public-sector employees, tens of thousands of whom have not received salaries for over a year. Discussions, however, broke down the following day.

Despite this setback, I welcome the determination of Prime Minister Hamdallah and his efforts to find a solution to the problem of public-sector employees in Gaza. His commitment that no one will be left behind is an important guarantee. I encourage all factions to support these efforts. The United Nations also stands ready to work with all stakeholders and support the Government in mobilizing the necessary resources for this process.

A comprehensive reconciliation must include the Government of national consensus resuming control over the crossings of Gaza into Israel and Egypt. This is key to allowing more movement of goods and people and to the eventual reopening of the crossings. The responsibility for addressing these issues lies

first and foremost with the Palestinian authorities. But it also rests partly with the United Nations and the international community, which must empower the Government to take up its leadership role in Gaza, including through the fulfilment of the donor pledges made in Cairo last October.

What is clear is that no approach that divides Gaza and the West Bank should be supported. Palestine is one, and the United Nations will work with determination to advance unity through its legitimate institutions.

The ultimate objective of the United Nations in Gaza is to see the lifting of all closures within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). In the absence of such a fundamental change, the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism is the only option currently available to facilitate the entry of material and to enable the implementation of large-scale projects that can bring reconstruction, jobs and stability.

I can report that, as at 19 May, close to 85,000 of the 100,000 households in need of construction materials to repair their homes had received them. In addition, 85 of the 167 projects submitted and funded by the international community and the private sector have been approved; eight of those projects are currently under way.

All of these developments are positive but far from sufficient to address Gaza's reconstruction needs. The United Nations is working closely with the Israeli Ministry of Defence's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, the Palestinian Minister of Civil Affairs and donors to finalize arrangements to speed up reconstruction. I take this opportunity to thank all counterparts

for their constructive engagement on these matters.

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In conclusion, let me return briefly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the coming period will be critical to the future of the peace process. The United Nations has repeatedly warned that maintaining the status quo is not tenable. It will inexorably lead to the continued erosion of living conditions for Palestinians and Israelis alike, and it will undermine the security and stability of all. My introductory meetings clearly demonstrated that, despite the prolonged absence of a political horizon, the sometimes poisonous rhetoric of incitement and the destructive actions of those seeking to undermine a return to talks, there remains a steadfast desire and determination to achieve an enduring agreement. Any resolution will require a comprehensive regional solution — conceivably with support from the reinvigorated Quartet — that includes greater engagement with key Arab states. However, while the international community has a critical responsibility to support a peace process, a lasting solution can be achieved only by the parties themselves.

I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Council. I look forward to working with you, and to your guidance on the way forward. Allow me to place on record my gratitude to my predecessor, Robert Serry, for his tireless efforts in this position. I also want to thank the excellent team at the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and here in the Secretariat, without whom our work in the field would not be possible.

VII. OCHA AND UNRWA EXPRESS GRAVE CONCERN ABOUT ISRAELI PLANS TO TRANSFER PALESTINIAN BEDOUINS

On 20 May 2015, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East issued the following joint press release on the Israeli plans to transfer Palestinian Bedouins:

The Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, James W. Rawley, and the Director of UNRWA Operations West Bank, Felipe Sanchez, expressed their grave concern today that Israel is rapidly advancing plans to transfer Palestinian Bedouins in the central West Bank from their current communities.

The UN Secretary-General has recently expressed concern in a report of March 2015 that “(p)lans to transfer thousands of Bedouin and herders [•••] may also be connected with settlement expansion. The Bedouins and herders are at risk of forcible transfer, a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as multiple human rights violations.”

On 28 April, residents of Abu Nwar were informed that some families would have to move to the Al Jabal area outside of East Jerusalem, where the Israeli authorities have been preparing the ground for the past months. “Israeli practices in Area C, including a marked increase of demolitions and confiscations of donor-funded structures in the first quarter of 2015, have compounded an already untenable situation for Bedouin communities,” said Mr. Rawley.

Abu Nwar is one of 46 Palestinian Bedouin communities (7,000 people, 70 per cent of whom are Palestine refugees) in Area C slated for transfer to three proposed “relocation” sites. “For Abu Nwar, or any other communities in the immediate E-1 vicinity, this would represent a continuation of developments that commenced in 1997 when Palestine refugees were loaded on trucks and

taken to the same urban site in Eizariya, after which an illegal settlement was constructed on their former land,” said Mr. Sanchez. “History has shown us that these transfers have not proven to be in the interests of the Bedouin communities.”

The plan occurs against the backdrop of a discriminatory zoning and planning regime that facilitates the development of illegal Israeli settlements at the expense of Palestinians, for whom it is almost impossible to obtain permits for construction. Instead, they live in constant fear of eviction and home demolitions. The forced urbanization of Bedouin communities in the three relocation sites would destroy their culture and livelihoods.

“There is also concern over the strategic implications of these plans, given that many of the communities are located in areas slated for further Israeli settlement, including the El plan, which has long been viewed as an obstacle to the realization of a two-state solution”, said Rawley.

“We are fast approaching the point of irreparable damage,” advised Sanchez. “As occupying power, Israel is obligated to ensure the wellbeing of these communities and to respect international law. I strongly urge the Israeli authorities to halt all plans and practices that will directly or indirectly lead to the forcible transfer of the Bedouin and call on the international community to support the Bedouins’ wish to remain where they are, pending their return to the Negev, and prevent this transfer from occurring.

VIII. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ORGANIZES THE UN ROUNDTABLE ON LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People organized the United Nations Roundtable on Legal Aspects of the Question of Palestine in The Hague from 20 to 22 May 2015. The following is the Chairman's Summary issued after the event:

The **United Nations Roundtable on Legal Aspects of the Question of Palestine** was organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and hosted in the premises of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Roundtable reviewed legal mechanisms to ensure accountability for violations of international law – in particular with regards to the Geneva Conventions, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) – in relation to the question of Palestine. Participants included international legal scholars and experts and twenty-five Palestinian participants from relevant Ministries of the State of Palestine and from its diplomatic missions in Geneva, The Hague, New York and Vienna. The Roundtable was closed to the public and the media.

On behalf of the **Chair**, the Vice-Chair of the Committee, who presided over the Roundtable, recalled that on 1 April 2015 the State of Palestine had become a State Party to the Rome Statute and that in 2014 Palestine had also acceded to the Geneva Conventions and a number of other international treaties. Together with the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the ICJ on the *"Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory"* these legal instruments constituted landmarks of the Palestinian people's struggle to achieve and exercise their inalienable rights to sovereignty and self-determination. They were also markers on the road of the Palestinian State to becoming a full-fledged member of the international community.

The **Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine** reviewed ideas being put forward by the international community on how to restart negotiations towards the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful solution. Current efforts by Member States at the Security Council should reaffirm the longstanding parameters for such a solution, on the basis of the two-State solution in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, establish a timeframe for negotiations and implementation of the outcome, and launch a new round of collective negotiations leading to implementation of these parameters and conclusion of a peace agreement. The Permanent Observer believed that achieving justice for Palestine was in everyone's interest as the alternative could be an increase in instability and radicalization in the region.

In the **ensuing sessions**, experts noted that the State of Palestine could rely on different legal options to promote its rights. Media attention had recently focused on **Palestinian access to the Rome Statute of the ICC** albeit the Geneva Conventions were perhaps more important for the State of Palestine, as all Member States of the United Nations were bound by them. In its 2004 Advisory Opinion, the ICJ had reaffirmed the **applicability of the Geneva Conventions to the Occupied Palestinian Territory**, as had been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Security Council. Accordingly, the Geneva Conventions clearly defined the obligations of the occupier and the rights of the occupied.

Expert presentations compared the **divergent evolution of previously mandated territories**. The situation of the territory of South West Africa (today Namibia)

evolved from a weaker legal standpoint compared to the Palestinian case. In the 20 years passed before the Security Council took action a body of legal arguments and opinions had developed, which facilitated the end of the status quo and the realization of independence for Namibia. Yet Palestine, with a stronger legal case, has not achieved independence.

Participants in the Roundtable visited the ICC premises and received in-depth briefings about its **mandate and structure**. Later, they debated the **advantages and disadvantages of referring cases before the Court**. **There was also an in-depth discussion on how to address the issue of Israeli settlements** in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, comprising East Jerusalem, **under international law and including by the ICC**. The settlements undermine the Palestinian people's right to self-determination as they involve a mesh of policies leading to the appropriation of land, changing the demographic composition of the Territory, forced the displacement of the Palestinian civilian population, demolition of properties, impunity for crimes committed by settlers against civilians, and the construction of infrastructure leading to a creeping annexation. Experts also debated the **reality as tantamount to Apartheid created by the settlements**, with one set of laws applicable to them and other civil-military laws applicable to Palestinians, who should be instead the objects of protection.

Other legal options mentioned included seeking **additional advisory opinions from the ICJ** on topics that could include the legal consequences of Israel's prolonged occupation, the illegality of the Gaza blockade and Israel's exploitation of natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Experts believed that the concept of **"prolonged occupation"** could not be used as an excuse to dilute international obligations and rights or to annex territory as this would reward the occupier and be a reversal of international law meant to protect occupied peoples. However,

some experts cautioned against seeking another advisory opinion and questioned the value of it at this time and in light of the comprehensive advisory opinion of 2004, without excluding examining the possibilities to seek further advisory opinions in the future as necessary and appropriate. In the case of settlements, the focus of legal action should be on the crime of "transfer of population by the occupier". Fulfilment of the State of **Palestine's reporting obligations pursuant to the international treaties**, to which it recently acceded, was also seen as an important step for the State's adherence to international law.

Several experts noted that new legal opinions and rulings could promote further positive and important **changes in international public opinion** and the **emergence of a new discourse on Palestine**. Israel's ongoing disregard for international law, as expressed in the ICJ's 2004 Advisory Opinion and United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, had generated increased awareness on the continuing injustice in Occupied Palestine. And indeed, the increasing number of **diplomatic recognitions** of the State of Palestine – latest by the Vatican – was an admission that the Oslo agreements were outdated and that the right of the Palestinian people to statehood and independence was broadly recognized by the international community. It was noted that other initiatives, such as **"civil society tribunals"** like the Russell Tribunal, also generate public awareness and political impact. They carried moral authority and were useful in promoting awareness and changing perceptions on issues such as corporate responsibility.

Shifts in international public opinion were also important **to promote compliance with international law**; seeking the **application of domestic law in national courts** using arguments based on international law, rulings, and advisory opinions could influence perceptions and generate change.

Many participants expressed regret at the failure of Israel, the United Nations and the international community at large to respond adequately to the ICJ's 2004 Advisory Opinion. They stressed that this had **negative consequences on the primacy and applicability of international law** and lamented the fact that the impunity spanning for decades on the question of Palestine was still ongoing. For some **the credibility of international law was at stake**, not just as regards the question of Palestine. In this context, it was noted that Palestine making use of international law was a positive initiative, as it reaffirmed the central tenet of international society that legal mechanisms are an appropriate, peaceful means to resolve conflicts instead of resorting to force or "surrendering" to an unjust reality. This was particularly true when diplomacy appeared unable to uphold international law.

Of the three very important interrelated rights of the Palestinian people, the right to self-determination had been covered by the ICJ's 2004 Advisory Opinion. However, the **refugees' right to return and compensation** had not been fully addressed. It was important that emphasis on collective national rights went hand in hand with the promotion of individual refugee rights.

In the **closing session, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations** recalled that Palestinians were constantly asked to "wait" and to engage in

negotiation processes that have not produced much. The Palestinian leadership would work to keep the question of Palestine at the centre of the international agenda. The State of Palestine was seeking diplomatic recognition and using all legal means available in pursuit of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to sovereignty and self-determination. If the Security Council was unable to take action at this time, the State of Palestine would seek other avenues available at the General Assembly. As it was discussed during the Roundtable, Palestine had a strong legal case. However, the example of South West Africa, which had a weak legal case but with strong political support achieved independence, was illustrative of the fact that legal victories alone were not sufficient. The Permanent Observer expressed gratitude for the experts' candid discussions and suggested that the group of participating legal experts become an *ad hoc* "advisory body" to the State of Palestine as it pursues its legal strategy.

The Vice-Chairman of the Committee summarized the outcomes of the Roundtable, organized in the spirit of international support for the Palestinian people to achieve their inalienable rights. He highlighted the practical, capacity-building aspect of the Roundtable, which enabled the State of Palestine to develop its legal expertise. The Committee would continue to assist the legal endeavours of the State of Palestine, and support the follow-up to this Roundtable.

IX. UNSCO ISSUES ITS REPORT TO THE AD-HOC LIAISON COMMITTEE

On 25 May 2015, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process issued its report prepared for a meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee to be held in Brussels on 27 May 2015. The following is the executive summary of the report:

Since the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) meeting in September 2014, concerns have grown about the lack of a political horizon for the resumption of negotiations. The international community has become increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress

on political negotiations. The coming period will be critical for the future of the peace process. The United Nations has repeatedly warned that maintaining the status quo is not tenable. It will inexorably lead to the continued erosion of living conditions for

Palestinians and for Israelis alike and will undermine the security and stability of all.

The new Government of Israel should take credible steps, including a freeze of settlement activity, to promote a resumption of meaningful negotiations. The Secretary-General has indicated that he is ready to work with all in order to encourage a return to negotiations, on the basis of an agreed framework. Continued security cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli authorities remains a cornerstone for peaceful resolution. Both parties must expend every effort to build upon existing agreements, including relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the Roadmap and the Arab Peace Initiative, to gain momentum towards a final status agreement.

The United Nations ultimate objective in Gaza is to see the lifting of all closures within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and in a manner which addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns. In the absence of such a change, the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) enables the entry, use and monitoring of "dual use" construction materials into Gaza and offers the possibility of implementing large-scale projects that can bring reconstruction, jobs and stability. The GRM was designed as a temporary measure implemented purely to address the critical need for entry of construction materials in the immediate post-conflict period. After a slow start, the GRM has rapidly scaled up. As of 20 May, assessments for the repair of 94,926 damaged housing units conducted by the United Nations have been submitted through the GRM for processing to receive construction material. A total of 84,865 households have now procured the materials necessary to repair their homes.

In addition, the private sector and the international community have submitted plans for 168 infrastructure and construction projects, including hospitals, schools, housing projects, service infrastructure and roads. Of these, 85 projects are approved and eight are

ongoing. It is now essential to finalize the "shelter stream" which will allow totally destroyed houses to be rebuilt and new houses to be constructed. Given the scale of work now required it is also essential that all available contractors be approved within the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism Materials Monitoring System (GRAMMS). In addition, dear information has to be disseminated to all Gazans explaining how they can avail themselves of the GRM and the relevant points of contact within the Government of Palestine. Ensuring sufficient capacity at crossings is an additional enabler for reconstruction. In that regard, we are encouraged by the upgrading of the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings to handle 800 trucks per day and plans to further raise capacity to 1,000 trucks per day.

The energy and water (wastewater treatment and desalination) sectors represent a fulcrum which makes progress across all sectors possible, including private sector growth. Improvements in these sectors will also have an immediate effect on the civilian population and would help the Gaza Strip increase its self-sufficiency helping to stabilize the overall situation. Annex A of the United Nations' September report to the AHLC outlined current gaps in the energy and water sectors along with short, medium and long-term measures to address those gaps.

There are grave concerns about the implications of on-going political divisions within the Palestinian political leadership on the operationalization of the GNC. Prime Minister Hamdallah's efforts to find a solution for public sector employees in Gaza is welcome and particularly his commitment that nobody will be left behind. We encourage all factions to support these efforts. The United Nations also stands ready to work with all stakeholders and support the Government in mobilizing the necessary resources for this process. A comprehensive reconciliation must include the GNC resuming control over the crossings into Israel and Egypt. The responsibility for addressing these issues lies

first and foremost with the Palestinian authorities. But it also partly rests with the United Nations and the international community, which must empower the Government to take up its leadership role in Gaza, including through the fulfilment of donor pledges of US\$5.4 billion (including \$2.5 billion in new funding) to support Gaza's massive reconstruction needs and the budget of the Prime Minister Hamdallah's government through 2017. Economic activity contracted in 2014 for the first time since 2006, driven largely by the volatile political situation in the second half of 2014. Restrictions on economic activity in Area C of the West Bank have been detrimental to the whole Palestinian economy. The economic gap between Gaza and West Bank is growing, due primarily to the impact of on-going restrictions on free movement of people and goods to and from the Gaza Strip. The political and security situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued to deteriorate.

Putting the Government's finances on a stable footing remains a considerable challenge. The GNC's financial crisis was compounded by the Government of Israel's decision to withhold tax revenues. While the recent release of outstanding tax revenues by Israel is welcome, it is essential that agreement on a sustainable solution on tax collection in line with the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords is reached.

The end of the hostilities in Gaza and the continued lack of a political horizon coincided with a gradual escalation of tensions between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with heightened levels of violence and renewed settlement activities. The situation in occupied East Jerusalem continued to deteriorate, revealing the extent of the frustration that grips the Palestinian population after almost 50 years of occupation and underscoring the imperative for re-invigorated involvement of the

international community. The increasingly religious nature of violence in Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank is particularly alarming. In the context of the increasing tensions in East Jerusalem, a series of targeted attacks on places of worship and other religious sites were recorded during the reporting period. Against the backdrop of rising tensions and increasing violence, the nearly 300,000 Palestinians resident in occupied East Jerusalem continue to face long-standing obstacles to their access to housing. There are also continuing challenges in accessing health facilities in the city. Access to and quality of education for Palestinians is likewise of continuing concern.

Area C is fundamental to the contiguity of the West Bank and the viability of Palestine and its economy. The process for approval of outline plans in Area C remains slow. Currently only three community-driven outline plans for four communities out of a total of 99 outline plans (some of which were submitted in 2010) covering 113 communities have been approved by the Israeli Civil administration (ICA). The United Nations continues to support local Palestinian authorities in developing adequate social infrastructure in Area C but the programme faces challenges due to the slow pace of Israeli approvals. The United Nations continues to support the construction and expansion of 15 schools and health centres in Area C, valued at approximately \$5 million. As previously reported, a package of agriculture-related works, valued at approximately \$5 million, to be implemented by the United Nations was not approved within the agreed timelines and, as a result, part of the funding has now been withdrawn. Finally, the United Nations remains concerned about the recent moves to relocate Bedouin communities near Abu Nwar in the politically sensitive El area of the West Bank that may be linked to further settlement construction.

X. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION ORGANIZES THE UN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SEMINAR ON PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

On 26 and 27 May 2015 in Astana, the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, organized the United Nations International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. The following is the message of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon delivered at the event by Cristina Gallach, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (SG/SM/16791-PAL/2189-PI/2134):

I am pleased to convey my greetings to all those taking part in this United Nations International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. I am grateful to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for hosting this event.

For nearly a quarter of a century, this annual Seminar has served as an important opportunity to enhance dialogue and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. In parallel, it has provided an opportunity to review and examine key media dynamics as they relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wider, ever-evolving situation in the Middle East.

This year's event occurs just weeks after the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day. This year's theme, "Let Journalism Thrive! Towards Better Reporting, Gender Equality, & Media Safety in the Digital Age", emphasized the importance of ensuring a free and pluralistic media everywhere against the backdrop of a fast-paced and changing digital world.

Today and tomorrow, you will exchange views on the ongoing and emerging challenges of peacemaking in the Middle East. You will deliberate on the challenges facing the media in covering the Israeli-Palestinian story and explore the role of social media in reporting news. And you will review the role of media in the midst of conflict, including during the last war in Gaza.

The United Nations system will spare no effort in supporting the quest for peace. The occupation that started in 1967 must end. But this can only happen through a negotiated solution. I have repeatedly called on all parties to resume peace talks and fulfil the aspirations of their people — the aspirations of Palestinians for an independent, sovereign and viable State and the aspirations of Israelis to live in a secure and safe State.

The media has an important role to play. With your support and engagement, we can work together to let journalism thrive and continue to promote peace, understanding and mutual acceptance. Please accept my best wishes for a successful seminar!