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Amid Tide of Terrorism in Region, Two-State Solution 'Only Viable Way Forward', Secretary-General Tells United Nations Meeting on Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, delivered by Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, in Moscow today:

It is my pleasure to extend greetings to all those taking part in the United Nations international meeting on Israeli-Palestinian peace. I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this event as well as the Government of the Russian Federation for hosting it.

As the Middle East faces a vicious tide of terror and extremism, we must maintain our focus on the urgent need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and realize the legitimate right of Palestinians to their own State, and of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. Failing to do so can further destabilize the region. The nearly half century-long occupation must end, and the two-State solution is the only viable way forward. A just and lasting peace can only be achieved through negotiations. It will demand difficult decisions from both parties. However, it is precisely because of the dangers that lurk in the Middle East today that both sides must show leadership and personal commitment to peace and negotiations.

The current reality is unsustainable and will only further disenfranchise the Palestinian people and increase the risk of escalation and violence. After all the setbacks, a majority of people on both sides still support the idea of two States. It is their voices we must listen to and their efforts we must support.

I welcome recent statements of support for the two-State solution by Prime Minister [Binyamin] Netanyahu and have written to encourage him to take concrete and credible steps, including a freeze on building and planning settlements, in order to promote the resumption of meaningful negotiations. The building of settlements on occupied land is illegal under international law, makes a final agreement more difficult if not impossible, undermines the possibility of establishing two viable States and risks isolating Israel. Politicians on both sides should avoid provocative actions and rhetoric and must expend every effort to build upon existing agreements, including relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, to generate momentum towards a final status agreement.

I am deeply worried that the Palestinian reconciliation process has made very limited progress in nearly a decade. This is hurting the people of Gaza and undermining Palestinian statehood aspirations. The Palestinian Government should be fully empowered to take its legitimate governance and security responsibilities in Gaza, including control of the crossings. I urge Israel to lift its blockade on Gaza. All the crossings into Gaza should be opened to enable the legitimate movement of people and goods.

I am also deeply concerned by the recent resumption of rocket attacks by Palestinian militants from Gaza towards Israel. All factions on the ground have a responsibility to ensure that Gaza remains peaceful and to avoid another escalation, with its intolerable human cost. I urge donors to help Gaza get back on its feet by honoring the commitments they made at the Cairo conference last October.

I will continue to work with all parties to encourage a return to peace negotiations on the basis of an agreed framework. I am encouraged by the commitment of Arab leaders to uphold the Arab Peace Initiative and I encourage the Quartet, the Arab League, the Organization for Islamic Cooperation and all regional and international stakeholders to play a more active, supportive role in fostering an enduring peace. The United Nations remains committed to a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine resulting in two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.

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