

Mr. Robert Serry
UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

**Message to the colloquium on “Advancing Women’s Leadership for Sustainable
Peace in the Palesitnian-Israeli Conflict and Worldwide”, sponsored by the
Governemnt of Spain, and Co-Sponsored with UNIFEM and the International
Women’s Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC)**
Madrid, 1 June 2010

[Delivered by Ms. Lynn Hastings, Chief of Staff, Office of the UN Special Coordinator]

The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry had to remain in Jerusalem to address the crisis which began yesterday morning with the confrontation and bloodshed off the coast of Gaza. He has asked me to read the following message on his behalf:

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I greatly regret that the tragic events of yesterday have prevented me from traveling to Madrid to join you for this important meeting. I was looking forward to engaging with you on ways to promote peace in the region, and how to ensure greater participation of women in the peace process. I thank the IWC and the Government of Spain for graciously hosting this event.

Since yesterday, I have been actively engaged in responding to a terrible crisis that once again highlights the fragility of efforts to achieve peace in the region, the bitter price paid by civilians, and the desperate need for political solutions.

The Secretary-General has called for yesterday’s events to be fully investigated and for Israel to give a clear explanation of what happened, and the Security Council has already met to consider the issue. On the ground, I and my UN colleagues are following developments closely and we are actively engaged to try to prevent further crisis and destabilization.

But let us all be clear what the immediate lesson of yesterday’s events should be: the bloodshed would have been entirely avoidable if Israel had heeded the repeated calls of the international community to end the blockade of Gaza.

I understand some of Israel’s concerns about Hamas, and Hamas has not lived up to its responsibilities. But the current approach to Gaza is not achieving productive goals for anyone who seeks peace. I am a regular visitor there, and see the harmful and counterproductive impact of the blockade. I see the historical and legitimate social and economic fabric of the Strip collapsing, along with its infrastructure and its prospects for long term development. At the same time, I observe a minority thriving, politically and

financially, on trading illegally through the tunnels and disempowering the voices of political moderation.

The entire situation afflicts significant hardship on men, women and children in almost every facet of their daily lives. I would also add that, from within Gaza, there is disturbing evidence of rising violence, against women, often with fateful consequences. Women and women organizations are under pressure from several sides, in a climate of impunity. Their voices must be heard, and protected. That is why, as the United Nations, Gaza is perhaps our highest daily priority, in a constant effort to fulfill our duty to the population, but also, to bring about a different approach to Gaza as a whole. This must start with a fundamental relaxation of the closure of Gaza. While we have made some steps forward in this regard, with the approval of some UN projects and a slightly wider range of commercial goods, more far-reaching changes are needed in key areas like education, health, and water and sanitation. If yesterday's crisis taught us anything, it is that this cannot wait any longer.

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We must see Gaza as part of a much larger picture, as part of the overall challenge of delivering the two State solution. As I discussed with some of you when we met last week in Jerusalem, two things need to happen urgently, and in parallel, to reach that goal: serious negotiations, and serious actions on the ground to meet obligations and build confidence. Like many of you, I believe that both these goals require an active third party role at the table and on the ground, to ensure that commitments made are commitments monitored and commitments kept, and to help to overcome the inevitable blockages that can develop in political talks. I urge all of you to support the fragile process of proximity talks underway, bearing in mind the commitment on the part of the United States to actively mediate these talks and President Obama's explicit intention to hold both parties accountable. This commitment is buttressed by the Quartet as a whole, which is determined to act in unison to address challenges on the ground and in talks themselves. While this will not be easy, we have no alternative but to try.

When I met with some of you last week, you impressed upon me the fateful consequences for those, like the IWC, who are working for peace if this process were to fail. When the peace process stumbles, the tremors are felt deep within society on both sides. Both you as leading members of civil society and those of us involved in the diplomatic process must therefore resolve to leave no stone unturned to try to achieve success.

In seeking to overcome decades of conflict and mistrust, including within your own societies, the ability of organizations like yours to withstand such shocks and ensure

continued support for peace in difficult times is essential. The IWC's ability to operate, and remain engaged, under difficult circumstances, is a testament to your dedication and leadership. Channeling the diversity of your members' backgrounds into a unified agenda for peace, spoken in one voice with many accents constitutes a true inspiration.

Peaceful activism plays an important role in conveying new voices, and demonstrating that peace has a legitimate and representative constituency. It is an essential complement to the formal peace process and women must play their full and rightful role in it.

This is indeed the essence of Security Council Resolution 1325 and why today's meeting is so important. The 10 year commemoration by the IWC of Security Council Resolution 1325 bears significant resonance with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict -- not least because the IWC itself was born from it. We know however that a lot more needs to be done. Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 remains problematic worldwide, and the Palestinian-Israeli context is no exception. Sustained efforts to reflect women's concerns and ensure greater women engagement at various levels of the peace process must continue.

For the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territory, the commitment to actively support the fulfillment of the resolution takes many forms. It includes continued efforts to integrate 1325 dimensions into individual agency programmes and to organize or participate in a number of 1325 specific commemoration and awareness raising events, in which we will welcome IWC inputs and engagement.

You have my personal commitment that, together with my deputy, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Maxwell Gaylard, we will continue to meet, as frequently as possible, women leaders and organizations and to encourage other senior diplomatic officials to do so. This engagement is fundamental to hear, understand, and convey the priorities, concerns, as well as ideas of those leaders and activists on the ground. Interactions between senior diplomatic representation and those women who are "in the trenches" of the peace effort can provide a level of visibility and protection that is currently very much in need. I am convinced that the active and robust engagement of women, both individually and collectively, in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace, is fundamental.

I am also convinced that this is now more important than ever. The two State solution is the only way to achieve the Palestinian people's long-delayed right of self-determination through independence and dignity in a functioning state of their own; and the continuing aspiration of Israelis for lasting security and full acceptance in the region. But we cannot simply talk about it forever. We have to make it happen before it is too late. Let us work together with determination in that cause.