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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE TO THE UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR  
ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE  
Amman, 19 - 20 February 2008**

*Delivered by Robert H. Serry  
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to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority*

I am delighted to send greetings to the participants in this United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People.

You meet in the early months of a very important year for the Palestinian people and their long-denied legitimate aspirations for a viable, independent, sovereign, democratic State of Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, based on an end of the occupation that began in 1967.

The key ingredients for a breakthrough exist. President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have launched bilateral negotiations in order to resolve all core issues and achieve a permanent settlement. The Palestinian Authority has launched an impressive reform and development agenda and taken important security measures on the ground, while donors have pledged over seven billion dollars to assist. A range of international envoys, including Quartet Representative Tony Blair, have been deployed to ensure that tangible progress is made in implementing Road Map commitments, improving security conditions for both Palestinians and Israelis, and reviving the Palestinian economy.

Yet the harsh realities on the ground, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, give rise to understandable skepticism among many about the possibilities of peace. The months ahead must see these realities improve, together with progress in the political negotiations. On this, all Quartet members are united, and there is a determination also to work closely with the countries of the region, based on the Arab Peace Initiative.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority's reform and security efforts have provided a basis for moving forward, but much more now needs to be done. I reiterate the UN's position on the illegality of settlement activity anywhere in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Road Map requires a freeze on all settlement activity, including so-called "natural growth", and the dismantlement of all outposts erected since March 2001, as well as the reopening of institutions in East Jerusalem. I call for immediate steps to meet these obligations. I also reiterate the importance of further Palestinian Authority efforts on security, building on the steps already taken in Nablus and other West Bank cities. In this context, the

case for urgent steps to ease closures in the West Bank, in accordance with existing agreements, is clear. This must happen if the Palestinian economy is to revive, and if donor assistance is to produce long-term results. I also reiterate that the continued construction of the barrier on occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and that as Secretary-General I will continue to work for implementation of that opinion.

The current situation in Gaza is unsustainable in humanitarian, human rights, security and political terms -- for the Palestinians, Egypt, and Israel too. The ongoing crisis in Gaza also undermines the Annapolis process. I deplore the all-too-frequent breaches of international humanitarian law -- including rocket attacks against civilians, excessive uses of force in civilian areas, and collective punishment of the civilian population. It is vital that Israel ceases actions of collective punishment, and allows all legitimate and necessary humanitarian and commercial supplies to reach the population. We must work towards resumption of normal economic life for the people of Gaza, including by supporting a resumption of stalled UN and other projects in Gaza, and the reopening of crossings as envisaged in the Agreement on Movement and Access. I particularly welcome the initiative of the Palestinian Authority to resume control of crossings, and the efforts of Egypt to find workable solutions. I believe this must include an end to rocket attacks, as well as incursions into Gaza, since solutions are unlikely to be sustainable without an atmosphere of calm on the ground.

The many United Nations agencies on the ground including UNRWA, OCHA, WFP, UNDP, WHO and UNICEF will carry on with their important work, to relieve humanitarian suffering where we must – especially in Gaza – and to support the Palestinian Authority's developments efforts where we can. I urge the international community to heed the Consolidated Appeal launched recently by United Nations and other humanitarian agencies. Let me also renew my call on all donors to continue to invest generously and step up their efforts at supporting Palestinian economic development and capacity-building.

I will continue to remind all parties that international law must be the basis for their actions on the ground, and for any sustainable solution. Only a permanent political settlement, which ends the occupation and gives Palestinians their independence, can fundamentally alter the economic and humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people and bring lasting security for Israel. While I am well aware of the challenges, I believe that with the right mixture of wisdom, realism and political courage – including a major intensification of efforts in the months ahead – we can make historic progress towards the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

In that spirit, please accept my best wishes for a successful seminar.