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**MESSAGE TO UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON
ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
Vienna, 24 March 2010**

*Delivered by Mr. Maxwell Gaylard,
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It is my pleasure to send greetings to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People held under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I have just returned from a tour of the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel, and seen for myself the situation on the ground and the work that is being done to build the institutions of a future Palestinian state. I met with both Palestinian and Israeli leaders and discussed the political process and the path ahead. My visit followed an important meeting of the Quartet Principals in Moscow, in which the Quartet reiterated its strong commitment to the two-State solution and the need for resumed negotiations to move quickly to achieve that goal.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains of concern, particularly in Gaza and East Jerusalem. More than a year has passed since the end of the conflict in Gaza and southern Israel. While there has been a substantial decrease in violence, widespread civilian recovery has not yet begun in Gaza. Reconstruction of destroyed and damaged buildings and infrastructure remains nearly impossible due to the continuing Israeli closure and the resulting lack of materials.

UNRWA and other relief agencies in Gaza continue their work in a very challenging environment to aid those in desperate need, in particular Gaza's children and youth, who make up half the population.

While in Gaza, I was able to inform the people that the Government of Israel had approved a number of UN civilian recovery projects involving water and sanitation, the repair of a flour mill, the provision of containers to temporarily accommodate UNRWA schools, and the completion of a UN housing project. The Government of Israel has also agreed to expand the list of imports into Gaza to include aluminum for window frames. It is vital that these steps be implemented as quickly as possible. The needs in Gaza are enormous and this package of recovery projects, while positive, represents only a first step. More broadly, the closure is unacceptable, unsustainable and counter-productive. As the Quartet stressed in its statement, a

durable solution requires the opening of the crossings for both humanitarian and commercial goods to and from Gaza, with measures in place to end weapons smuggling.

Palestinian actors must do their part, including by bringing an end to violence and rocket attacks and rising above partisan interests to pursue the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank. I reiterate my condemnation of rocket fire from Gaza, which indiscriminately targets civilians, and while in Gaza I called publicly for a prisoner exchange so that Gilad Shalit and Palestinian prisoners can be released.

I also visited East Jerusalem and the West Bank. While the Israeli Government's policy of settlement restraint is a step beyond previous governments' positions, settlements are illegal under international law and the Roadmap calls for a full settlement freeze, including in East Jerusalem. I conveyed the position of the United Nations on these issues to Israel's leaders.

In recent weeks, I have also expressed my concern at a number of activities by the Israeli authorities, including an announcement concerning holy sites in the West Bank and provocative actions in East Jerusalem such as home demolitions, evictions and the advancement of plans for new settlement construction. Such actions have sent the wrong signal as we work to restart negotiations. At this critical juncture, all sides need to observe calm, show restraint and refrain from inflammatory rhetoric.

I was pleased to see that, despite difficult political and economic circumstances, Palestinian efforts towards reform, institution-building and development have continued under the leadership of Prime Minister Fayyad aimed at establishing a Palestinian state. It is vital that the Palestinian Authority continue to advance this statebuilding agenda while striving to meet its other Roadmap obligations in full, including an end to incitement against Israel.

In the West Bank, Prime Minister Fayyad showed me the vista of Area C, where the Palestinians cannot build or govern, and where the landscape is filled with illegal settlements and the Barrier. The UN country team briefed me on the important work they are doing to bring assistance to communities isolated by the Barrier or other obstacles, and to support state-building in general.

I encourage key contributors to Palestinian state-building to channel their assistance first and foremost through the PA's single treasury account, and to support the priorities articulated by the Palestinian Authority for 2010. I welcome recent transfers that are vital to supporting the 2010 budget, and strongly encourage those donors who have not yet done so to frontload financial support.

Palestinian reform efforts have contributed to an increase in gross domestic product of 6.8 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory during 2009, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Israel's lifting of restrictions and easing of movement also represents a positive step in encouraging growth in the West Bank. A further easing of restrictions that increases the predictability of movement and facilitates trade will be central to ensuring future economic growth.

Negotiations do not take place in a vacuum; the situation on the ground must support talks. The international community remains fully committed to advancing the political process with a view to ending the occupation that began in 1967 and achieving a negotiated solution to all permanent status issues. For my part, I shall continue to engage all concerned to realize the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.