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MESSAGE TO THE JERUSALEM INTERNATIONAL FORUM

Doha, 26 February 2012

Delivered by Mr. Robert Serry, UN Special Coordination for the Middle East Peace Process, Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and the Secretary-General's Envoy to the Quartet

I am pleased to send my greetings to all those participating in this important international forum. Your presence today underscores the centrality and deep significance of Jerusalem to peoples around the world.

For Muslims, Jews and Christians, Jerusalem –is a place of faith and longing, as well as the symbol of intertwined national aspirations. It is a sacred space that must not be confined to one creed or community and must be open and accessible to all. Precisely because actions in Jerusalem are felt throughout the world, it must stand as a symbol of peace and opportunity for the region and beyond.

I hope this forum will inspire us to continue our work for a just and lasting peace in which the status of Jerusalem and other core issues are resolved through negotiations.

I visited Jerusalem earlier this month. While there, as well as in Ramallah, Tel Aviv and Gaza, I stressed how important it is for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to continue direct talks aimed at reaching an agreement for a two-state solution by the end of this year, as called for by the Quartet. I have encouraged them to resume bilateral negotiations without delay and preconditions.

Only through negotiations can Jerusalem emerge as the capital of two states, living side-by-side in peace and security, with arrangements for the holy sites that are acceptable to all. This is the road to fulfilling the vision put forward by Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and the hopes of all those yearning for peace. Both sides have a particular responsibility to create a conducive environment for meaningful negotiations. Palestinians should remain constructively engaged.

Unfortunately, Israel's continued settlement activity in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as in the rest of the West Bank, undermines that effort and prejudices final status issues, often with tragic human consequences. Home demolitions, forced evictions, and the revocation of permanent residency are also cause for continued deep concern. So, too, is the Government of Israel's recent forcible transfer of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council from East Jerusalem to Ramallah. I repeat the calls of the Quartet and the wider international community for Israel to freeze settlement activity and end the demolition of Palestinian homes. Settlement construction is contrary to international law, as is the forcible transfer of residents from East

Jerusalem. The international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Access into East Jerusalem remains severely restricted by checkpoints, permits and the barrier, whose route is contrary to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. Day after day, Palestinians are cut off from economic opportunity, family contact, basic services, and holy sites. In this regard, I note our deep concern about a rise in tensions and instances of violence surrounding holy sites in recent days. I call on all parties to safeguard the sanctity of highly sensitive religious locations.

The United Nations is present in East Jerusalem and will continue to support the human security of the Palestinian population there through health, education, employment and social protection initiatives. UN agencies, to the greatest extent possible, are working with Palestinian grassroots organizations and civil society to achieve these goals. I urge you to support this vital work through contributions to the PA-UN Trust Fund.

The quest for a just and lasting Middle East peace once again confronts significant challenges. All members of the Quartet, along with His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, are working to ensure that direct talks continue in an environment favourable to reaching an agreement on all final status issues. Your help will be critical. Only through the achievement of a negotiated two-State solution, and a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, will Jerusalem be fully restored to its rightful place as a symbol of sanctity, fraternity and peace for the entire world. For my part, I pledge to continue pursuing my efforts with all the means available to me.