

PRESS RELEASE

UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS URGES, “A MEANINGFUL DIPLOMATIC PATH FORWARD” WARNING OF DANGER TO THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AND THE TWO STATE SOLUTION.

21st November 2011

In a briefing to the Security Council today, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, stressed the need for urgent political progress between Israel and the Palestinians through renewed negotiations in a conducive environment, warning: **“without a credible political path forward, accompanied by more far-reaching steps on the ground, the viability of the Palestinian Authority and its statebuilding agenda – and, I fear, of the two State solution itself – cannot be taken for granted.”**

He stressed his on-going efforts and those of the Quartet, **“to find a meaningful diplomatic path forward”**, recalling that the 23 September Quartet statement, **“reaffirmed the international legal basis for peace talks” and “continues to provide the framework for a way forward if both parties show flexibility and responsibility”**. He recalled the message from all Quartet members to the parties to, **“avoid provocations, develop serious proposals on borders and security, and discuss them directly with each other without delay or preconditions, with active Quartet support.”**

But Mr. Serry noted **“the lack of mutual trust and tensions on the ground”** that made resuming negotiations extremely difficult. The Special Coordinator set out a number of essential steps which need to be taken to de-escalate the situation and facilitate direct talks: **“in addition to acting on its settlement obligations, Israel should heed the calls of the Secretary-General and other international leaders to unfreeze transfers to the Palestinian Authority immediately in accordance with existing agreements. Donors should also unblock their funding to the Palestinian Authority. For its part, the Palestinian Authority should find ways to contribute to de-escalation of the situation and improving the prevailing divisive climate, including in the international arena.”**

Mr Serry noted the importance of VAT and customs revenues belonging to the Palestinian Authority, but withheld by the Israeli Government following the vote by UNESCO's General Conference in favour of Palestinian membership, **“if not immediately unblocked, this action threatens the state-building gains made by the Palestinian Authority, including the increased good governance felt by the Palestinian people and the development of the security forces that uphold law and order in the West Bank.”**

The Special Coordinator set out the increasingly worrying situation on the ground in the West Bank, noting that, **“Israel continues to engage in settlement activity, including in highly sensitive areas and demolitions of Palestinian structures are ongoing”**. He also referred to an increase of 40% in a year in attacks by settlers against Palestinians and their property. He noted continued stone-throwing both by Palestinians and Israeli settlers, as well as the desecration of Jewish Holy Site in Nablus.

Addressing the issue of Gaza, Mr. Serry condemned the **“indiscriminate attacks”** by Palestinian militants using rocket and mortar fire from Gaza into Israel, **“which must stop.”** He also highlighted continuing concerns about smuggling of weapons into Gaza. He further stressed that Israel must exercise maximum restraint and minimize the risk to civilians.

Mr. Serry welcomed four new approvals by the Israeli Government for construction projects and the beginning of pilot import of construction materials for the private sector in Gaza as positive steps, but stated that, **“with due consideration for Israel’s legitimate security concerns, I continue to call for further measures towards the lifting of the land closure on Gaza.”** The Special Coordinator also noted the on-going contacts between Fatah and Hamas and reiterated continued UN support for reconciliation efforts within the framework of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the positions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion Mr. Serry stressed the danger to the two-State solution and to the PA given current developments and the diplomatic stale-mate. He appealed to both sides to overcome the gaps between them and, **“to de-escalate, refrain from provocations and adhere to their obligations, enter direct negotiations, and come forward with concrete and negotiable proposals.”**

ENDS.