

**PRESS RELEASE OF MEETING BETWEEN SPECIAL COORDINATOR
SERRY AND ISRAELI PRESIDENT SHIMON PERES**

24th February 2010

UN Special Coordinator Robert Serry met with today Israeli President Shimon Peres in Jerusalem to discuss efforts to resume Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the situation in the West Bank, and the continuing crisis in Gaza.

On Gaza, Special Coordinator Serry underscored the Secretary-General's deep concern at the situation in Gaza. He stressed that the blockade of Gaza was undermining legitimate commercial activity while empowering an illicit tunnel economy.

While President Peres suggested that there were no humanitarian shortages, Special Coordinator Serry highlighted the lack of materials coming through legitimate crossings for economic recovery and reconstruction for the civilian population. Despite erroneous press reports, Mr. Serry did not state at any point that there was 'no humanitarian problem in Gaza.'

Special Coordinator Serry appealed for Israel to respond positively to the long-standing proposal of the Secretary-General to complete stalled UN construction projects in Gaza, and urged that the UN be more empowered to help the civilian population.

On another issue of significant concern, Special Coordinator Serry and President Peres discussed the recent decision by the Israeli Government to declare two religious locations in Hebron and Bethlehem as national heritage sites. President Peres indicated that Israel intended to fully respect religious rights in places of worship. Special Coordinator Serry, who had criticized the Israeli Government decision in a statement on Monday, noted President Peres' reassurance and said he would convey it to the Secretary-General.

Special Coordinator Serry underscored UN efforts to support the resumption of meaningful negotiations. He and President Peres exchanged views on how best to ensure that negotiations could succeed.

Special Coordinator Serry and President Peres agreed on the importance of supporting statebuilding efforts in the West Bank. Mr. Serry appealed for further Israeli steps to enable expansion of Palestinian Authority control of areas of the West Bank.

Special Coordinator Serry and President Peres also discussed the regional situation.