

**Secretary-General's remarks at opening of the 2011 Session of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
New York, 21 January 2011**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I congratulate you and your distinguished colleagues on your re-election to the leadership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

As we enter a new year, I am very concerned at the lack of progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

I have repeatedly expressed my regret that Israel has not frozen settlement activities, as have the Quartet, the European Union, the United States, numerous other Member States, and this Committee.

I have also stated my position on settlements, both publicly and in one-on-one conversations with leaders. Settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory are illegal under international law, contravene the Road Map obligations of Israel, undermine confidence, prejudice the outcome of the permanent status negotiations, and hamper efforts at bringing the parties back to the negotiating table. I deplore the recent demolition of the Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem, and I am concerned at continued house demolitions and evictions of Palestinian families in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, which heighten tensions. I reiterate my call on Israel to freeze all settlement activities.

We need to move beyond the current stalemate and return the parties to meaningful negotiations aimed at resolving all permanent status issues and achieving a historic agreement.

The target dates supported by the Quartet for reaching an Israeli-Palestinian framework agreement on permanent status, and for completion of the Palestinian Authority's two-year statebuilding programme, will be upon us in eight months. We cannot afford to lose any further time.

The Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative have important roles in this regard. I look forward to fruitful discussions with my Quartet counterparts in Munich on February 5th.

The Palestinian people have the right to an independent and viable State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security. Similarly, there should be no doubt about the legitimate right of Israel to exist in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, and to be fully integrated into the region, as suggested by the Arab Peace Initiative. We must find a way for Jerusalem to emerge as a capital of two States, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all. There is no place for irresponsible rhetoric that calls into question these fundamentals, seeks to de-legitimize the others' heritage or incites hatred and violence.

The past year has brought renewed confidence within the international community in the ability of the Palestinians to govern themselves. The Palestinian Authority has made major strides in strengthening its institutions. It continued to deliver improved governance, transparency, economic opportunity and security to the Palestinians in areas under its control. It deserves recognition as a dependable partner. I am encouraged by the World Bank's assessment that the Palestinian Authority is well positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future. I call on donors to continue their crucial support for the Palestinian State-building plan.

I remain concerned by the situation in and around Gaza. Even though the year 2010 saw reduced levels of violence overall, the recent escalation of rocket attacks by Palestinians and Israeli air strikes have the potential to spiral out of control. The shootings of unarmed Palestinians in the

vicinity of the Gaza border are also unacceptable. My representative on the ground and his colleagues are working hard to promote calm. While Israel's legitimate security concerns are not in doubt, I call on all parties to demonstrate responsibility, to de-escalate tensions, and fully ensure the protection of civilians. The provisions of Security Council resolution 1860 should be fully respected. The residents of Gaza and southern Israel deserve to live in an atmosphere free from fear of rocket and air attacks.

Gaza's civilian population deserves better living conditions. Frustration at the humanitarian situation and the lack of opportunity is especially acute among Gaza's young people. Israeli measures to ease the closure go in the right direction, but much more needs to be done to enable full-scale reconstruction and recovery. The United Nations will continue to work to that end. Continued support of donors for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) will be critical.

Regrettably, yet another year has passed without progress towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Efforts to move forward on this important issue must be pursued further. I also regret that Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit is still in detention, and I continue to call for his release. The issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israel is also of critical importance. Israel should release prisoners as called for by the Palestinian Authority. This would serve as a significant confidence-building measure.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know we all share the hope that this year will see a decisive upsurge of efforts to bring an end to the conflict and to the 43-year-old occupation -- through the creation of a State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security, and through comprehensive peace in the region, consistent with Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the Madrid framework, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

This Committee can make a positive contribution to this mission. For my part, I will continue to pursue a just and lasting peace with all the means available to me.

Thank you very much.