

**Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General
Settlement Expansion in the West Bank**

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned about today's reports of the Government of Israel's decision to approve the construction of 40 houses and a farm near the settlement of Efrat in the occupied territory near the Palestinian town of Bethlehem.

The Secretary-General calls again on the Government of Israel to freeze all settlement activity. Such activity is contrary to international law and the Roadmap, and prejudices final status negotiations.

These actions by the Government of Israel come at a critical juncture when the Quartet continues efforts to facilitate the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties. For this to succeed, the parties must refrain from provocative actions and help create a positive environment for negotiations.

New York, 12 December 2011