

**Secretary-General's message to the United Nations International Meeting
on the Question of Palestine**
(Delivered by Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva)

It is a pleasure to send greetings to the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Intensive diplomatic efforts are under way to create what the Quartet recently called the conditions for the prompt resumption and early conclusion of negotiations. All of us want to see both parties committed to the two-State solution and to their Roadmap obligations, and an agenda of transformative change on the ground.

I urge the Government of Israel to commit fully to its obligations, including to freeze settlement activity and natural growth. If Israel continues settlement activity, it will not only be acting contrary to international law but also to a strong international consensus. By contrast, if Israel freezes settlement activity, it would facilitate a new environment of cooperation and common purpose from the countries in the region, building on the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative.

With its recent welcome measures to ease closures on important West Bank routes, Israel has shown that it is possible to change long-standing practices. Israel should also cease unilateral actions in Jerusalem such as house demolitions, and heed the five-year-old Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the wall.

I remain deeply concerned about conditions of the civilian population in Gaza, the unsustainable political situation there, and the potential for renewed conflict and instability. While there has been a decrease in violence and an attempt to halt rocket fire, all sides should commit to a complete cessation of violence. More must also be done to ensure that illicit weapons do not enter Gaza and to implement the other key elements of Security Council resolution 1860.

Most urgently, the United Nations reiterates its call on Israel to allow basic supplies, goods and reconstruction materials into Gaza through a sustained reopening of crossing points. The United Nations has also presented the Government of Israel with a proposal to begin a first phase of early recovery and reconstruction, which merits a positive response.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority must also intensify its efforts on the ground. I regret that Hamas, for its part, has not renounced violence and committed clearly to existing agreements and a two-State solution with Israel. This makes efforts to achieve Palestinian unity and statehood much more difficult. I urge Hamas to reconsider these stances.

Following the hostilities in Gaza and southern Israel, I established a Board of Inquiry into incidents that affected United Nations premises and personnel. The Secretariat is following up on the Board's recommendations, including compensation for damages to UN property.

I support and am following with interest the work of the Human Rights Council fact-finding mission led by Justice Richard Goldstone. Where civilians have been killed and there are allegations of violations of international humanitarian law, there should be thorough investigations, full explanations and, where required, accountability.

I also call on all parties to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law related to the treatment of detainees, including Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit, to whom neither the ICRC nor any other international body has been granted access.

Finally, I take this opportunity to express the appreciation of the United Nations to the Government of Switzerland, as depositary of the four Geneva Conventions that make up the core of international humanitarian law, and to the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their efforts to uphold the integrity of the Conventions.

The international community continues to have a crucial role to play in the search for peace in the Middle. Let us rise to our responsibilities, and thereby help the parties rise to theirs.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.

Geneva, Switzerland, 22 July 2009