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**MESSAGE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE
Malta, 3 June 2008**

*Delivered by Mr. Max Gaylard
Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process*

It gives me pleasure to convey my greetings to all the participants in this International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, which has been organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

You meet at a time when the international community has intensified its efforts to help Israelis and Palestinians reach a peace treaty. The goal, as agreed in Annapolis, is to resolve all permanent status issues before the end of the year. The parameters of this agreement are clear – an end of the occupation that began in 1967, an end to conflict, and the establishment of a sovereign, viable and independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel.

The willingness of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to continue their regular discussions on the major issues is another welcome development. I particularly commend President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert for their commitment to resolving the decades-old conflict, and for persisting with negotiations despite the difficulties. I urge them not be deterred by any obstacles, and to see this effort through.

To succeed, current efforts to achieve a peace deal need to be underpinned by visible progress on the ground. Last December's Donors' Conference in Paris already raised nearly eight billion dollars in assistance for the Palestinian Authority. The recent London meetings of the Quartet Principals and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee also demonstrated the need for a robust follow-up by the international community so as to build up political and economic support.

These meetings and pledges must now be translated into real results. Quartet Representative Tony Blair's announcement of a package of measures is a welcome start. His proposals seek, initially, to increase the movement of people and goods in the West Bank while accommodating Israel's legitimate security needs. If implemented, these steps can bolster the Palestinian economy, and lead to renewed confidence among the Palestinian people in the peace process.

Both sides must seize the current window of opportunity to push the peace process forward, especially by acting on their obligations under the Road Map.

Some actions have already been taken. The Palestinian Authority under Prime Minister Fayyad has acted to improve its security capabilities and to implement fiscal reform. Israel has agreed to remove some of the obstacles that hinder Palestinian movement in the West Bank. It has also consented to the issuance of entry permits to Israel for thousands of Palestinian workers.

These are welcome steps. But much more remains needs to be done. Continuing settlement activity contravenes both international law and Israel's obligations under the Road Map. Also, the construction of the barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory contravenes the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. These activities must cease at once.

On the Palestinian side, efforts to improve capacity and performance on security and the rule of law should continue. Next month at a conference in Berlin, donors will also have an opportunity to extend much needed to support to this process.

There is particularly urgent need to develop a different and more positive strategy for Gaza. The Palestinian people, especially the 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, endure punishing humanitarian conditions. UNRWA's aid operation in the area is drastically impeded. Low and inconsistent supplies of fuel hamper transport, water and sanitation. Two thirds of Gaza's residents subsist in poverty, and economic growth stood at zero last year.

Continuing Israeli air and ground operations only aggravate this situation, resulting in unacceptable casualties among Palestinian civilians in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Equally unacceptable and deeply irresponsible are the rocket and other attacks by militants against Israeli civilians and at crossings points. I reiterate my call for the cessation of all such condemnable acts of violence and for all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. In particular, measures of collective punishment should cease immediately.

In this context, I commend Egypt for its efforts to achieve calm in the Gaza Strip; these measures should lead to a reopening of the crossings and achieve greater security at the border. This is a first and vital step if Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are to be given the chance to succeed, and also for creating conditions to pursue the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. This reunification is essential because a Palestinian State must necessarily encompass both Gaza and the West Bank, as well as East Jerusalem.

I also welcome the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative, which is a central element in the quest for peace in the region. And I urge strong Arab support for the Palestinian Authority's efforts to negotiate a peace agreement, to build its institutions, and to advance Palestinian unity.

The coming months will be critical to our collective efforts to restore hope to the Palestinians. For my part, I will remain closely involved in the peace process both personally as well as through the Quartet and the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator. Together, we must do everything possible to help ensure a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on full implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions and the requirements under the Road Map.

In that spirit, please accept my best wishes for a productive meeting.