



**Statement by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process,
Mr. Robert Serry, on his final visit to Gaza**

Gaza, 2 March 2015



Photo by: Yih-Peng Chia/UNSCO

Special Coordinator Robert Serry visiting a refugee family in Shejaiya neighbourhood in Gaza on 2 March to witness how the temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism and UNRWA cash assistance are helping the family in rebuilding their damaged home.

During my final visit to Gaza on 1-2 March in my current capacity as United Nations Special Coordinator, I met with many of the people I have worked with during my tenure. After seven years and three wars in Gaza -- with the last one leaving the Strip devastated -- I can honestly say that for the UN and for myself, Gaza has always been a top priority. I wish I could say the same for everyone. After each war, we have had to pick up the pieces. Three times UN agencies, with UNRWA and UNDP in the lead, have been providing vital humanitarian and development assistance to the people of Gaza.

I am encouraged that some progress is now being made as part of the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM). To date, over 72,000 households have been cleared to receive construction material -- this means that almost three quarters of the estimated 100,000 households in need are being helped -- and around 55,000 have actually purchased material to rebuild their homes. I visited today a refugee family in Shejaiya neighbourhood and personally witnessed how the GRM is helping the rebuilding of their home.

However, I fully understand the frustration of people in Gaza with the overall slow pace of reconstruction. Many of those who now have access to building material lack the money to buy them or to carry out the works. One month ago, UNRWA had to suspend cash payments to refugee families because of the lack of donor support. The situation for non-refugees is even worse. Only a small percentage of the USD 5.4 billion pledged at the Cairo Reconstruction Conference has actually been disbursed. This is, frankly, unacceptable.

I am worried that Gaza is more isolated than ever, with many restrictions still in place at Israeli crossings for both goods and people and with the Rafah crossing practically closed. The GRM is only a temporary measure to relieve acute needs and we, in the UN, have always been in the forefront in calling for an end to the blockade as a prerequisite for a stable, functioning economy in Gaza. You also cannot have a stable, functioning economy without a more durable ceasefire and a recognized, legitimate and inclusive Government leading Gaza's recovery.

During the last years, I have been closely involved in efforts to preserve calm and de-escalate tensions, in particular during the last war. The UN has been among the first to welcome and support the Government of National Consensus (GNC) in assuming its rightful responsibilities in Gaza. However, six months after the ceasefire that ended the last war, I am deeply concerned that not enough progress is being made to address Gaza's underlying issues.

The rehabilitation of Gaza will take years and for that we need time and a commitment from all concerned parties for a long-term "reconstruction hudna", under the umbrella of the GNC, to which all Palestinian factions should be committed. During my visit, I have been urging my counterparts in Gaza to commit themselves to what will be needed from their side -- a multi-year freeze to military activities above and below ground. I have received indications that they are willing to consider this, provided the other parties respond in further opening crossings to enable Gaza's full and accelerated recovery and reconstruction.

I urgently call on all stakeholders, including the GNC, Palestinian factions, Israel, Egypt, the international community and donors, to change their failed policies and adopt a "Gaza first" strategy. Gaza is a political problem which must be addressed as part of ending the occupation and achieving a two-state solution. I am convinced that there can be no peace without addressing Gaza's needs first. I will brief the Security Council in late March for the last time and underline the need for prioritizing Gaza.

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