

Statement by UN Special Coordinator Robert Serry on the postponement of a planned concert in East Jerusalem

For immediate release

25 July, Jerusalem. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mr. Robert Serry regrets to announce that a planned concert in East Jerusalem by the West Eastern Divan Orchestra has been postponed. The United Nations was happy to present such an event, especially as the Special Coordinator is well aware that the reality of life for Palestinians living in occupied East Jerusalem is difficult. Culture, recreation and every day activities suffer as a consequence of the occupation.

The internationally acclaimed West Eastern Divan Orchestra, co-founded by the late Palestinian academic Dr. Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim, has long sought to bring together young gifted Palestinians, Israelis and musicians from other Middle Eastern countries in their shared pursuit of musical excellence and understanding. Maestro Barenboim has worked ceaselessly to develop the Orchestra and to bring his musical gifts to those suffering the consequences of the conflict. Last year the United Nations was pleased to facilitate his efforts to stage a unique performance in Gaza in support of the people there and with their backing.

The Special Coordinator had hoped to undertake a similar concert in East Jerusalem for members of civil society. But such efforts depend upon participation and support of Palestinian civil society. Noting the objections of some groups it was decided - with regret - not to proceed with present plans for the concert. Rather than “accepting” the occupation, as some critics said, such an event would in his view have sent a strong message that Palestinians must be able to experience their cultural rights and freedoms in the unique city of Jerusalem, which the United Nations believes must emerge as the open capital of two states, living side by side in peace and security. Mr. Serry is disappointed that the concert will not go ahead at this stage and that Palestinians in East Jerusalem will not have the opportunity to enjoy such a unique cultural offering in their city.

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Richard Miron
Chief Public Information Officer
United Nations Special Coordinator's Office
Mobile: +972 54 5627825
Email: mironr@un.org
www.unsco.org