

**Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General on Gaza escalation**

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned over the serious further escalation today in Gaza, including the launch of an Israeli ground operation into the Strip, use of heavy artillery and continued rocket fire.

The Secretary-General has spoken with Prime Minister Olmert and conveyed his extreme concern and disappointment. He is convinced and alarmed that this escalation will inevitably increase the already heavy suffering of the affected civilian populations. He called for an immediate end to the ground operation, and asked that Israel do all possible to ensure the protection of civilians and that humanitarian assistance is able to reach those in need.

Today's developments complicate the efforts of the Quartet and others to end the violence. The Secretary-General reiterates his call for an immediate cessation of all violence, and urges regional and international partners to exert all possible influence to bring about an immediate end to the bloodshed and suffering.

New York, 3 January 2009