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**STATEMENT TO THE PRESS IN GAZA
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Thank you, John. Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. You are very welcome here at UNSCO Headquarters.

You have just heard from John Ging about the grave fuel situation and the broader humanitarian distress facing the people of Gaza, and the immense challenges current conditions are also posing for UN operations. The facts he has briefed you on speak for themselves. The situation here is both unacceptable and unsustainable.

The killing of civilians, including many children here in Gaza, and also a cameraman. The destruction of the economy. Shortages of daily necessities. The lack of access to and from Gaza. The separation of Gaza's institutions from the Palestinian Authority. The danger of more and more escalation, with even more suffering for the Palestinians, and serious consequences also for Egypt and Israel. We are at a crossroads and the parties must make responsible choices to step back from the brink.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is extremely concerned at the humanitarian, human rights, security and political crisis here. He and I and the entire UN system are absolutely committed to averting a further worsening of the situation, and seeing Gaza return to better times.

The UN is leading the humanitarian effort to sustain the people of Gaza under conditions of great adversity. We are also very active, politically and diplomatically, pushing all parties, and the international community, to work for a different and more positive strategy for Gaza. We are giving our strong support to the current Egyptian efforts to calm the violence, and we call on all concerned to work with Egypt in that effort.

In this context, the recent attacks by Palestinian militants against crossing points into Gaza are deeply disturbing. I appeal to Hamas to immediately end attacks against the crossings, whether by it or any other faction or group. These attacks endanger both international and Israeli civilians, and cannot

possibly contribute to Palestinian efforts to ease the blockade of Gaza. On the contrary, they serve only to deepen and prolong it.

The United Nations has repeatedly condemned the killing of civilians by Israeli military operations here in Gaza, which is a depressingly and unacceptably regular occurrence. We have also repeatedly condemned deliberate attacks on civilians at crossings or by the firing of rockets into Israel. Not just because they bring nothing but misery to Palestinians, but because all attacks on civilians are wrong.

It is also wrong for Israel to punish a civilian population for such attacks. I call on Israel to restore fuel supplies to Gaza, and to allow the passage of humanitarian assistance and commercial supplies, sufficient to allow the functioning of all basic services and for Palestinians to live their daily lives. The collective punishment of the population of Gaza, which has been instituted for months now, has failed.

The path to true security and well being for Israel, the Palestinians, and Egypt is a different one. The immediate and common goal must be an end to violence and a reopening of crossings. This is a vital first step if other, broader goals are to be achieved – the stabilization of conditions in Gaza; the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority; genuine progress in negotiations leading to a final status agreement with Israel; the creation of a sovereign, independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

All Palestinians, no matter what faction, want and deserve these things to be achieved. As UN Security Council Resolution 242 stresses, these goals must be achieved through negotiation based on the principles of an end of occupation, an end of conflict, and a just solution to the refugee issue. That is why we strongly support the current political process, despite all the difficulties it faces, and why we hope that, when it comes to Gaza too, wisdom and restraint will prevail, for the welfare of all Palestinians and their neighbours.