

UNITED NATIONS



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**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR
THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS SERRY'S REMARKS AT THE
CONFERENCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN
SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

Ramallah, 21 November 2014

Mr. President,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be with you today at this important conference of Local Authorities in Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I wish to thank President Abbas for hosting these discussions.

The International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was proclaimed by the UN last year to demonstrate the continued commitment and resolve of the international community to realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and statehood.

The Year of Solidarity has a number of important goals including to promote solidarity with the Palestinian people and contribute to international awareness of obstacles to the ongoing peace process, particularly those requiring urgent action such as settlements, Jerusalem, the blockade of Gaza and the overall humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Another critical objective is to mobilize global action towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just, and lasting solution of the question of Palestine in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

At its official launching ceremony, Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson stressed that, and I quote, "the coming year will be crucial to achieving the two-state solution and I urge all in the international community to work together to translate the solidarity and desire for peace into positive action for security and justice".

As 2014 and the Year of Solidarity draw to a close, we must face the unfortunate and stark reality that we are marking an anniversary of unfulfilled aspirations for the Palestinian people. Aspirations that have gone unrealized for far too long.

Let us recall that already in 1947 broad support for the creation of a Palestinian state was expressed by the United Nations through the adoption of Resolution 281 which proposed a solution based on the establishment of two states.

Sixty-five years later, on 29 November 2012, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of resolution 67/19, which upgraded Palestine from an "observer entity" to a "non-

member observer state". Today some 135 countries – 70 per cent of the 193 member states of the UN - have recognized the State of Palestine.

The journey has been long, and the setbacks have been many, but the collective goal remains the same today as it did in 1947, the establishment of two-states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

International actions in support of the Palestinian cause have gained renewed momentum of late. On Tuesday, the Spanish Parliament approved - by a large majority- a non-binding decision that calls upon the government in Madrid to recognize a Palestinian state. Last month, similar proposals were approved in the British and Irish parliaments and in a week from now French lawmakers are scheduled to be voting on the same issue. The Swedish government went a step further by officially recognizing a Palestinian state on October 30th.

These are significant developments and serve to highlight that many Governments are becoming increasingly impatient at the continued lack of real progress in achieving a two-state solution and must now listen to increased public demands to promote an end to the conflict once and for all.

The Secretary-General and I have consistently expressed our support for the goal of a negotiated two-state solution.

Yet, the most recent effort last spring resulted - once again - in failure. Despite his commitment to resolving the conflict, US Secretary of State Kerry's effort to negotiate a solution was another in a long line of initiatives that have broken down amidst accusations on both sides.

As I have warned in my briefings to the Security Council, the repeated failure to establish a peace process has created a political vacuum that is bringing the one-state reality ever closer to the doorstep. We must also be cognizant of the reality that in the absence of negotiations to resolve the conflict it may transform into a religious conflict that could quickly spiral out of control.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply troubled by the recent escalation of tensions in Jerusalem and the West Bank with almost daily clashes taking place between Palestinian youth and Israeli security forces. The attack inside a West Jerusalem synagogue was shocking in its brutality. The United Nations condemns all violence against civilians. During the past month alone, some 500 Palestinians, including women and children, were injured by Israeli security forces in the West Bank. We are also gravely concerned by punitive demolitions of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem which are also undermining efforts to calm the tensions.

The Secretary-General and I have strongly urged all sides to diffuse the tensions by demonstrating responsible leadership, refraining from using inflammatory rhetoric and avoiding unilateral provocations. We call on all parties to live up to their commitments made to Secretary Kerry in Amman and implement confidence-building measures that will translate immediately into a de-escalation of tensions.

On Gaza, Prime Minister Hamdallah and I, with the assistance of Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Muhammad Mustafa, have been working in close partnership to address the numerous challenges currently facing the territory, including helping the thousands of people who have lost their homes after the recent devastating conflict. As you know, the temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism began its operations earlier this month with the assistance of the United Nations. I would like to emphasize that in my regular cooperation with Palestinian authorities on Gaza I am guided by the principle that the Palestine Liberation Organization is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Now that the mechanism is operational, the aim is to steadily increase the amount of building materials coming into Gaza with a focus on addressing the immediate needs of Gaza's population. This requires a determined and united effort that must transcend any existing differences within the Palestinian factions.

In this regard I am pleased to announce that in the coming days some 25,000 additional home owners will be enabled to access building material for their damaged homes under the temporary mechanism. The Palestinian Government of National Consensus will shortly make a separate public announcement on the process for access to other required building materials.

I would like to use this opportunity to stress that, contrary to media and other reports, the mechanism is available to all affected residents in Gaza who have sustained damage to their homes. They will be able to procure the materials to repair or rebuild their properties in the same locations where they were located prior to the conflict. Special precautions have been taken to avoid the misuse of personal information of those wishing to access the mechanism. We will undertake every effort to assist the Government of Palestine in its lead role to reconstruct Gaza and I continue to believe that, if implemented in good faith, the temporary mechanism would represent a significant step forward towards the objective of lifting the blockade.

While we will be doing our part, the Palestinian factions have a critical responsibility to ensure that the situation in Gaza begins to improve. They must strengthen their cooperation to allow the GNC to assume full control over Gaza crossings, accelerate reconstruction and conduct urgent civil service and security sector reforms and ultimately to reunify Gaza and the West Bank under one legitimate authority led by President Abbas.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me commend your dedicated engagement on the Palestinian issue including in the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Rest assured that whether Palestinians are living in Gaza, Jerusalem or the West Bank or they are refugees or not, the UN stands ready to support you and your Government, led by President Abbas, in addressing your manifold needs on the ground and to advance your right to live in a state of your own, side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Thank you.