

New York, 29 November 2007 - Secretary-General's statement on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

This International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes at a time when Palestinians continue to suffer the indignities and violence of occupation and conflict, but also at a time when a new beginning has been made in efforts to achieve a two State solution to the conflict.

Two days ago in Annapolis, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, meeting under the auspices of President Bush and before a wide cross-section of the international community, including members of the Arab League, agreed to launch negotiations on all core issues without exception, in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues. They pledged to make every effort to do this in 2008.

Implementation is now paramount. What we do tomorrow is more important than what we say today. In Annapolis, I pledged the full support of the United Nations for the renewed effort. I stressed that for 60 years, the Organization has provided the broad parameters for peace, first in the partition plan, and then in Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and that today, the UN has few higher priorities than seeing this conflict resolved.

We all know the reasons why. The Palestinians have been deprived of their inalienable right to self-determination for 60 years. Palestinian society has been increasingly fragmented – territorially, by settlements, land expropriation and the barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory; socially and economically, by closure; and politically, between Gaza and the West Bank. They have begun to fear that the dream of statehood may slip beyond their grasp. This growing sense of despair must be reversed.

The process launched at Annapolis must change the lives of Palestinians, and secure their independence and freedom. The process must end the occupation and create an independent and viable State of Palestine, at peace with itself and its neighbours. It also must deliver on the vital interests of Israelis: a Palestinian State that is a true partner and not a source of terrorism, secure and recognized borders, and a permanent end to the conflict.

We cannot close our eyes to the profound doubt and mistrust on either side about the will and capacity of the other to achieve these goals. Despite several diplomatic landmarks, conditions on the ground have become harder, not easier, for most Palestinians, and for many Israelis too. Israel faces genuine security threats, and Israeli civilians have died and been wounded in rocket attacks. Palestinian civilians have been killed and injured in Israeli military operations. The Gaza Strip has been almost entirely closed, with tight restrictions on supplies and movements of people, leading to a grave humanitarian situation. Settlements have expanded throughout the West Bank. Checkpoints and a barrier have been erected on occupied land. Unemployment and poverty are rising.

The indignities, injustices, and fear on both sides make it difficult to build faith in the political process. But that is exactly what we have to do. We must abandon piecemeal approaches, and address all aspects of the conflict.

Final status negotiations need to begin in earnest, and address all the issues: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, security and water. The broad outlines of solutions to these issues are clear.

We must also help the Palestinian Authority to rebuild, reform and perform. I hope a wide range of donors will step forward with political and financial support at the upcoming Paris conference and beyond.

The situation on the ground must also improve, rapidly and visibly. Without implementing long-standing commitments under the Road Map and the Agreement on Movement and Access, the diplomatic process cannot succeed. Progress requires parallel actions and clear monitoring.

If peace is built on hope not despair, we must also reach out to the people of Gaza. They have suffered more than anyone else from conflict and poverty. Humanitarian aid is vital, and UN efforts need the support of donors. But such aid is no substitute for a functioning economy. The time has come for concrete initiatives to ease their suffering. The unity of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority will also have to be restored for a peace agreement to be sustainable.

The vision of an end of occupation, an end of conflict, and two States living side-by-side in peace is a vision of justice, security, and peace. It is still achievable. But it will only happen if all involved take responsibility for contributing what they can. Now that the Palestinian leadership has embarked on a new quest with Israel to end the conflict and secure a better future for their children, let us show our solidarity with the Palestinian people – and the Israeli people too – by giving our unyielding support to their efforts, and not resting until the goal is achieved.