



PRESS RELEASE FROM THE SPOKESMAN OF ROBERT SERRY
UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

“CHANCE TO CHANGE THE CONFLICT-FRAUGHT FACE OF THE MIDDLE EAST”, UN ENVOY TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

Jerusalem, 28th May 2008.

For Immediate Release

In his briefing to the Security Council in New York on 28 May 2008 on the situation in the Middle East, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry welcomed the regional **‘processes underway that have the potential to lastingly change the conflict-fraught face of the Middle East.’**

Mr Serry welcomed the active role regional countries are playing, including Turkish efforts on the Syrian-Israeli track, Qatari mediation in Lebanon, and Egypt’s efforts on Gaza.

But he said, **‘they all remain fragile... (and)... must still be addressed through further political progress and action on the ground’**, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

On the positive side, the brief notes:

- Some economic progress for the PA, including additional budget support from some Arab countries, (with more required to address the budget shortfall), the finalization of the PA development plan, and ongoing implementation of 200 projects. Additional hopeful economic signs are the \$1.4 million of investments pledged at the Bethlehem Investors Conference, and the package of measures announced by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.
- Some progress on security, with further improvements in the performance of the PA security forces along with the deployment of 500 personnel in and around Jenin, and additional approval from the Israeli authorities for the opening of 20 Palestinian police stations in the West Bank.
- Some progress on improving movement and access, with three significant roadblocks removed.

However, the brief stresses that **“much more remains to be done”**, in particular:

- Further steps are vital on movement and access, with the number of closures now over 600.

- The Quartet's call on Israel to freeze settlement activity and dismantle outposts as per the Road Map must be heeded.
- The PA must continue to enhance its efforts to meet its security obligations under the Road Map.
- Israeli-PA security cooperation must be enhanced, to overcome difficulties posed by continued IDF incursions in West Bank areas where the PA is deployed, and to secure equipment for the PA.

The brief also starkly warns of the dangers posed by the **“complex political, security, human rights and humanitarian crisis”** in and around Gaza, as evidenced by:

- Continuing attacks by Hamas and other militant groups on the crossing points in and out of the Gaza, which **“are totally contrary to the interests of the civilian population of the Strip, and run counter to all efforts to help them”**, as well as on-going indiscriminate rocket fire from the territory into Israel including a strike against a shopping mall in Ashkelon
- On-going IDF operations in Gaza including land incursions and air attacks, some of which have caused civilian casualties, underlining the need for Israel to **“exercise maximum restraint and comply with international law so as not to endanger civilians”**
- The grave humanitarian conditions in Gaza, whose population are **“caught between the closure of crossings due to militant attacks and Israeli measures amounting to collective punishment”**, with all sectors affected by the lack of fuel and vital resources.

Mr Serry stresses the UN's active support, backed now by the Quartet, for a new strategy for Gaza to end the violence and improve conditions, and he welcomes Egyptian diplomatic efforts to achieve calm.

Summing up Mr Serry said: **‘Progress must be intensified on the Annapolis track, both in the political negotiations and in action on the ground,’**

Mr Robert H. Serry of the Netherlands was appointed by the Secretary-General as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and his Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority in November 2007. In this capacity, Mr. Serry is the Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Quartet.

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