Violence Must Be Addressed at Political Level, Secretary-General Tells Organization of Islamic Cooperation Summit on Palestine

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Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message, delivered by Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to the Fifth Extraordinary Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit on Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in Jakarta today:

I am pleased to convey my greetings to this important Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif, under the theme:  “United for a Just Solution”.

The Middle East continues to endure violent upheaval characterized by terror, radicalism and sectarianism that threaten to undermine state legitimacy and reshape the region’s geopolitics.  In this changing and unpredictable context, establishing lasting peace and security for Palestine and Israel based on the two-State solution has never been more urgent.

Against this backdrop, however, the current spiral of violence in Palestine and Israel cannot be reversed by security means alone.  It must be addressed at the political level with leaders showing a horizon to their people, standing up to incitement and to the radicals among their own constituents.

Illegal Israeli settlements keep expanding and chipping away at the viability of a Palestinian State as thousands of Palestinian homes in the West Bank risk demolition because of obstacles that may be legal on paper but are discriminatory in practice.  Palestinians — particularly youth — are losing hope.  They see the impact of almost 50 years of conflict on the overall social fabric of their communities; they experience the daily humiliations of the occupation; they resent the fact that leaders have consistently failed to deliver on the promise of achieving a Palestinian State; and many feel an overwhelming sense of hopelessness at their inability to end the occupation that continues to drain their lives of opportunity.

Disillusionment, anger and fear cannot justify terror or violence.  The United Nations condemns all such acts.  Stabbings will not bring about Palestinian statehood just as denying the dignity of Palestinians will not bring about security for Israelis.

The recent wave of violence was sparked by a perception among Palestinians that the status quo at the Holy Sites in Jerusalem was violated.  I welcome the agreement reached in October 2015 between Israel and Jordan that reduced the tensions and I strongly encourage its continued implementation.  All efforts should be made to ensure the status quo is preserved in words and in practice.

Violence drives more violence, creates an even greater wedge between the two sides, and further empowers those determined to destroy the viability of a negotiated two-State solution.

Rhetoric, however, is no substitute for action.  Much greater efforts are needed to counter threats to the future of the people of this troubled land.

Over the past year, the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, as part of the Middle East Quartet, have stepped up their efforts to break the political impasse.  Quartet Envoys travelled to the region to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders and consulted with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Norway to explore how to both preserve the two-State solution and create the conditions that would allow the parties to return to meaningful negotiations.

We have collectively called for significant policy shifts by Israel, particularly in Area C, which are essential to transforming the current dynamics.  We have voiced our serious concern that current trends on the ground — including continued acts of violence against civilians, incitement, ongoing settlement activity, and the high rate of demolitions of Palestinian structures — are dangerously imperilling the viability of a two-State solution.

The United Nations supports all efforts undertaken to advance genuine Palestinian reconciliation on the basis of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] principles, democracy and non-violence.  I urge all sides to follow up on these discussions in good faith and implement previous agreements, in particular those brokered by Egypt.  The formation of a National Unity Government that abides by the PLO programme and the conduct of long-overdue elections are important elements of this process.  The Palestinian people deserve to see the West Bank and Gaza reunited under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian authority.

At its meeting last month in Munich, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Russia, the High Representative of the European Union and the Secretary-General of the United Nations decided that the Quartet is to prepare a report on the situation on the ground, identify the dangers to realizing a two-State solution, and provide recommendations on how to restore a political horizon.  Our goal is to work with key stakeholders, including regional countries and the UN Security Council, to stabilize the situation and to actively support a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The Middle East Quartet seeks to help shape a consensus within the international community for the way ahead and to complement international efforts to resolving the conflict.  Building a consolidated vision on the way forward is key.

I welcome Indonesia’s steadfast commitment to the establishment of a unified and democratic Palestinian State.  I strongly appreciate the strengthened cooperation between the OIC and the United Nations in support of the long-denied aspirations of Palestinians to achieve statehood.

The United Nations looks forward to continuing and expanding this cooperation in the cause of advancing the prospects for peace and ultimately establishing a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel — a goal that has remained elusive for far too long.