



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY
WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
New York, 29 November 2006

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join the Committee in observing this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

I know I speak for all of us in expressing profound dismay that a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains so elusive.

In the past few days, with the announcement of a cease-fire in Gaza, we have had a glimmer of hope that the latest round of hostilities might give way to a period of calm. I call on both sides to adhere to this commitment, and to avoid any actions that could jeopardize further progress. I also encourage them to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

Indeed, an end to violence is absolutely essential. The most recent military operations in the Gaza Strip resulted in a dramatic rise in civilian casualties and in the destruction of property and infrastructure. It remains crucial for Israel to exercise maximum restraint and to uphold its responsibility to protect Palestinian civilians under international law.

Israelis, too, live in insecurity. They have rightly demanded that the Palestinian Authority take credible action to prevent attacks against them and their territory. The constant rocket attacks by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilian targets are unacceptable and should be stopped at once.

The Palestinian Authority itself faces a debilitating political and financial crisis. Palestinian institutions, hospitals and schools are in an alarmingly precarious state, exacerbating the acute suffering already being endured by the Palestinian people. Indeed, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza demands immediate attention, and I hope the donor community will continue to be generous.

The bloodshed of the past several months has been all the more tragic because we know that clear majorities of both Palestinians and Israelis want a negotiated, two-state solution -- one that would end the occupation that began in 1967, establish an independent State of Palestine, and ensure security for Israel. I also believe that the leaders of each side -- President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert -- are genuinely committed to lifting their peoples out of decades of pain and uncertainty.

The parties themselves continue to bear the primary responsibility for finding their way out of their predicament, by engaging in a viable political process that can lead to the peace their peoples both yearn for. No one can make peace for them, impose peace on them, or want peace more than they do. At the same time, the international community has also played an important part in this conflict from its very beginnings, and cannot escape its own responsibility to contribute to a solution.

The United Nations, of course, has always been in the forefront of that international role, deeply engaged in seeking peace and in efforts to relieve the suffering. We should not forget that this Day commemorates the General Assembly's first proposal for a two-state solution, in 1947. Today, Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515 remain the accepted guideposts for a just and lasting solution. The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process continues to work very closely with the parties, and with representatives of the international community in the region. And our humanitarian and development agencies continue to provide a lifeline to millions of Palestinians in need. I commend the work being done by the men and women of those agencies, who are carrying out their mandates under increasingly dangerous conditions.

On this International Day, let us commit ourselves to breathing new life into the peace process so that the goals of statehood for Palestinians, and security for the State of Israel, can be realized before this tragedy takes too many more lives.