‘What Happens in Jerusalem Reverberates around the World,’ Secretary-General Tells Jakarta Meeting, Warning Attempts to Change Delicate Balance Risk Conflict

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Secretary-General

Press Release

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Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message, delivered by Douglas Broderick, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Coordinator in Indonesia, to the Meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the Question of Jerusalem, in Jakarta today:

I am pleased to send greetings to all those taking part in this event organized jointly by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This meeting takes place against the backdrop of one of the most serious eruptions of Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years. It is no coincidence that Jerusalem was one of the sparks that lit the fuse of this latest escalation, as it did in the early 2000s, when the intifada took so many Palestinian and Israeli lives.

Jerusalem, one of the oldest cities in the world, holds shrines sacred to billions of people worldwide — Muslims, Jews and Christians alike. What happens in Jerusalem reverberates around the world. Any action which could be interpreted as attempting to change the delicate balance, and particularly the status quo of the holy sites, carries with it the risk of conflict.

I welcome the understandings reached in October of this year between the Governments of Israel and Jordan to stabilize the situation around the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Israel’s reaffirmation not to seek to divide the site and the commitment to enforcing the long-standing policy in which Muslims pray and non-Muslims visit the holy sites must be strictly upheld. I hope that increased coordination between the authorities concerned will help to ensure respect for the sanctity of the area.

I conveyed these messages to officials during my emergency visit to the region in October.

To address the wider escalation of violence, I also underlined the urgent need for leaders to rein in incitement, for Israeli security forces to ensure a calibrated use of force in response to incidents, and for all of us to address the prevailing lack of a political horizon to end the occupation and achieve a negotiated two-State solution.

Continued security cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli authorities remains integral to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, the violence cannot and will not be addressed by security measures alone. The anger we are witnessing is bred from nearly five decades of Israeli occupation. It is the result of fear, humiliation, frustration and mistrust. It has been fed by the wounds of decades of bloody conflict, which will take a long time to heal. Palestinian youth in particular are tired of broken promises and they see no light at the end of the tunnel.

This is at heart a political conflict that will require serious negotiations by parties willing to make the necessary compromises, supported by regional partners and the international community. Only through a negotiated solution can a sustainable Palestinian State be established and Jerusalem emerge as a capital of two States, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all.

As the current situation continues to deteriorate, and the settlement enterprise continues to expand, a growing one-State reality threatens to close the window of opportunity to reach the two-State goal.

In such a critical context, all parties must refrain from attempts to establish facts on the ground that alter the character of the Holy City or the demographics of the West Bank. Settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. Demolitions of houses and other measures of collective punishment are in contravention of Israel’s obligation to protect civilians.

The violence and attacks against civilians, including rocket fire from Gaza, are unacceptable and must stop.

Let us empower the voices of all those on both sides who want peace to prevail. Let us stand up against extremists seeking to exploit the bloodshed.

I look forward to the revitalized Quartet realizing its full peacemaking potential, strengthened by its cooperation with regional partners and the international community, to create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations.

The United Nations, and I personally, remain committed to helping the parties bring the occupation and this long-standing conflict to an end, in pursuit of the lasting vision of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

In this spirit, please accept my best wishes for a successful event.