

Israeli and Palestinian leaders must move beyond words and take concrete action on final status issues, Ban tells UN meeting

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Welcoming renewed international engagement in the Middle East peace process, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today said that building on that support required Israeli and Palestinian political leaders to “move beyond words” and tackle final status issues in a constructive spirit.

“The status quo is unsustainable, both politically and economically,” the Secretary-General said in a [message](#) delivered on his behalf by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Carlos Lopes, to the United Nations [International Meeting on the Question of Palestine](#), which began today in Addis Ababa. “There is an urgent need for a concerted push for peace this year if we are to salvage the two-State solution, he said.

The two-day meeting, organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, is on the theme “African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights, including the sovereignty and independence of the State of Palestine”. In his message, the Secretary-General said that the accomplishments of the Palestinian State-building programme and donor funding will be difficult to maintain in the absence of concrete progress on the political track.

Again emphasizing the belief that 2013 would be a critical year for the peace process, he outlined his five priorities: collective international engagement, meaningful negotiations, stability in Gaza, Palestinian reconciliation, and preventing the financial collapse of the Palestinian Authority. “These goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing,” he said.

“A window of opportunity for renewed international engagement has opened following the visit of President Obama to the region. I am also encouraged by the subsequent visits by Secretary of State John Kerry,” he said. In his recent meeting with President Obama, Secretary-General Ban

reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to support any serious initiative that presents a credible political horizon, including multilaterally, through the diplomatic Quartet and key regional partners. “Now is the time for concerted action,” he said.

He said that the decision by the United States to restore aid to the Palestinians was highly welcome, as was the decision of the Israeli Government to resume the monthly transfers of clearance revenues. “I call on donors, especially those from the region, to accelerate the provision of timely and predictable assistance to stabilize the finances of the Palestinian Authority.”

Meanwhile, he stressed the crucial need to defuse tensions on the ground and to preserve the calm. The Secretary-General was concerned by renewed violence, particularly over the situation of Palestinian prisoners and violations of the November 2012 Gaza ceasefire.

Israel’s decision to close key crossings in Gaza had only exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation, he said, urging the parties to refrain from actions and rhetoric that aggravated tensions and diminished the prospects for negotiations, “which remain the only way towards the two-State solution.”

Recognizing the importance of the prisoners’ issue, he said that prisoner deaths should be promptly investigated by an independent authority. “A solution must be urgently found for the long-term hunger strikers,” he said, adding that administrative detainees should be charged and face trial, or released without delay. Israel must respect the right to peaceful protest and act with restraint, and protests should be kept non-violent.

He said that the United Nations would continue its efforts to solidify the Gaza ceasefire and he condemned the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza. At the same time, Gaza borders should be fully opened for the legitimate movement of people and goods. That was especially important given the humanitarian situation, he said, with much of Gaza’s population relying on assistance from the UN and its partners, and given the major investments required for Gaza’s water resources and other critical development needs. “I am deeply troubled by Israel’s continued settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, all of which is illegal under international law,” the Secretary-General said, emphasizing that those actions constitute ever-

greater impediments to peace and must not be allowed to prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations. At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns must be recognized and addressed, especially on the issue of arms smuggling and rocket fire.