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SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS PREDICTS POSSIBLE

'MOMENT OF TRUTH' ON TWO-STATE SOLUTION IN 2014

Israel, Lebanon 'Cooperating' with UNIFIL over Shooting. He Tells Council

While 2013 had tested the international community's commitment to breaking the deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians, 2014 could see a moment of truth regarding a two-State solution, the United Nations official responsible for coordinating the peace process told the Security Council today.

"Leaders on both sides have taken courageous steps, despite domestic headwinds and public scepticism," said Robert H. Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as he briefed the 15-member body. The direct talks, brokered by the United States, were now in their fifth month.

He said Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had engaged quietly in some 20 rounds of talks, while Quartet envoys continued to consult with each other and engage with the parties as well as Arab partners. The European Union had offered "an unprecedented package of European political, economic and security support to both parties in the context of a final status agreement."

Noting the approach of another important timeline in the negotiations — the third release of prisoners, scheduled for 29 December — he urged both sides to refrain from steps that would increase mistrust. The situation on the ground remained fragile, and continued settlement activity could not be reconciled with the goal of a two-State solution.

During the reporting period, Israeli security forces had carried out some 217 search-and-arrest operations, he said, adding that a total of 352 Palestinians had been arrested and 206 injured. Violence between Palestinians and Israeli settlers continued and attacks by the latter had injured eight Palestinians, while Palestinian stone-throwing attackers had injured four settlers. Demolitions of unlicensed Palestinian structures in Area C and East Jerusalem were on the rise.

Turning to Gaza, he said that, thanks to a generous Turkish contribution, a safety net was in place to allow the most critical water, sanitation and related facilities to continue operating. However, heavy flooding had resulted in the displacement of approximately 10,000 people. The Organization was actively engaged with relevant parties to address the most urgent issues. Further, the Gaza power plant, which had ceased operations on 1 November, had resumed operations as of yesterday, aided by a donation from Qatar for the purchase of fuel.

The Government of Israel, he continued, had decided to resume the transfer of construction materials for United Nations projects in Gaza, under an agreed mechanism for the secure transfer and use of the material. Work had now resumed on critical construction projects, such as schools, social housing

and water and sanitation facilities. The security situation in and around Gaza had been relatively calm over the last month, he noted.

As for Syria, the warring parties continued to disregard their legal and moral responsibility to protect the civilian population, he said. As the Organization worked hard to prepare for the Geneva II conference on 22 January, all Syrian parties needed immediately to work towards a cessation of violence, unhindered humanitarian access, the release of detainees and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The situation in the Golan remained volatile, he said.

Highlighting a serious incident, he said that yesterday an Israel Defense Forces soldier had been shot dead by a member of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the vicinity of Naqoura. Both sides were cooperating with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to ensure that the incident remained an isolated one. Meanwhile, the political situation in Lebanon remained deadlocked and serious commitment was required to hold presidential elections on time in 2014 before the end of President Michel Sleiman's term.

The meeting began at 3:10 p.m. and ended at 3:25 p.m.

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