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**27 November 2007**

### Annapolis, Maryland - Secretary-General's speech at the International Meeting on the Middle East

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## Annapolis, Maryland, 27 November 2007 - Secretary-General's speech at the International Meeting on the Middle East

Secretary Rice, Prime Minister Fayyad, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we bear witness to a new beginning of the Middle East peace process. I am very pleased and moved to be a part of this historic meeting.

After years of failed hopes and terrible suffering, I commend Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas for re-dedicating Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization to resolving the conflict between them. They know the risks and sacrifices involved, and also know that there is no alternative to peace.

Let me thank and congratulate our hosts, President Bush and Secretary Rice, and, most importantly, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert. Their leadership and commitment has made this new beginning possible. The engagement of the United States has always been crucial to the peace process, and it remains so today.

I also want to thank the many members of the Arab League who are here today. Five years ago, the Arab countries made a historic strategic commitment to peace. Earlier this year, they renewed the Arab Peace Initiative. Their presence today shows their determination to participate actively in the search for peace in the region.

I pledge the full support of the United Nations family for the renewed effort. For 60 years, the Organization has provided the broad parameters for peace, first in the partition plan, and then in Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515. Today, the UN has few higher priorities than seeing this conflict resolved.

The Palestinians have been deprived of their fundamental right to self-determination for 60 years. Their society has been increasingly fragmented – territorially, by settlements, land expropriation and the barrier; socially and economically, by closure; and politically, between Gaza and the West Bank.

They have begun to fear that the dream of statehood may slip beyond their grasp.

We must reverse this growing sense of despair, and build a process that begins to change the lives of Palestinians, and secures their independence and freedom. The process must end the occupation and create an independent and viable State of Palestine, at peace with itself and its neighbours.

For its part, Israel faces genuine security challenges. The Israeli people have sought security and freedom from threat for 60 years. But this has proven elusive. Recently, they have felt anew the threat of attack, and their very right to exist has been questioned. Some have started believing that territorial withdrawal only brings new acts of terrorism.

We must reverse this loss of faith, and build a process that delivers on the vital interests of Israelis: a Palestinian State that is a true partner, secure and recognized borders, and a permanent end to the conflict.

The Middle East as a whole craves peace too. An Israeli-Palestinian peace, and indeed a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbours, would be the surest way to stabilize the region and stem the appeal of violence and rejectionism.

Excellencies,

Success depends not on what we say today, but on what we do tomorrow. There will be a steering committee and the Quartet will have its own role, complementary to a trilateral monitoring mechanism. To successfully implement the Road Map, we must abandon piecemeal approaches, and address all aspects of the conflict.

First, final status negotiations need to begin in earnest, and address all the issues: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, security and water. The broad outlines of solutions to these issues are clear. There is no reason they cannot be resolved in 2008.

Second, we must help the Palestinian Authority to rebuild, reform and perform. I commend Prime Minister Fayyad and his Government for the responsible reform plan it has developed, and the actions on security it has already taken. This must continue – and I hope a wide range of donors will step forward with political and financial support at Paris and beyond.

Third, the situation on the ground must improve, rapidly and visibly. Without implementing long-standing commitments under the Road Map and the Agreement on Movement and Access, the diplomatic process cannot succeed. Progress requires parallel actions and clear monitoring.

The Quartet will continue to provide international leadership and support for these efforts. I thank the Quartet Representative, Mr. Tony Blair, for the clear

vision and intense focus he has brought to ensure that these three tracks are advanced together and reinforce each other.

Excellencies,

The people of Gaza have suffered more than anyone else from conflict and poverty. We must reach out to them. Humanitarian aid is no substitute for a functioning economy. The time has come for concrete initiatives to ease their suffering, and replace despair with hope.

We will also have to work politically to restore the unity of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority. This will be vital if a peace agreement is to be sustainable.

Let us also hope that today's meeting heralds an easing of regional tensions, and opens the door to exploring possibilities for comprehensive peace. I am committed to a peace between Israel and all its Arab neighbours, including Lebanon and Syria.

Above all, today marks a beginning, not an end. I know that different expectations exist. But I ask you all to approach this effort with flexibility, patience and resolve. Let us base expectations on a realistic assessment and take responsibility for the things we each can do, without losing faith. As we re-embark together on this quest, there can be no second thoughts, no half-measures, no going back. This time, come what may, let us see it through.

Thank you.