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Secretary-General

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ACTIVITIES OF SECRETARY-GENERAL IN EGYPT, 8-9 NOVEMBER

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, from Nairobi, Kenya, in the afternoon of Saturday, 8 November.

After meeting with his senior advisers -- Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry -- he had several bilateral meetings before the start of the Middle East Quartet meeting on the Red Sea coast of Egypt.

He met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, then with Javier Solana, High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union. That was followed by a working dinner for the participants hosted by the Egyptian Foreign Minister.

Two more bilaterals -- one with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and another with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority -- followed after the dinner.

The Secretary-General began Sunday by meeting with United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

He then chaired a meeting with the Quartet principals -- Foreign Minister Lavrov; Secretary Rice; Mr. Solana; European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner; and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner. The meeting was unique since it was the first time that the Quartet was briefed by the parties themselves. The two parties were represented by Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. They were joined by Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

The parties briefed on Palestinian and Israeli negotiating efforts since the 27 November 2007 international conference in Annapolis, Maryland, that formally launched bilateral negotiations to bring an end to the conflict by achieving the goals of two States -- Israel and Palestine -- living side by side in peace and security.

The Quartet then met as a group without the parties, before holding a joint [press conference](#) at which the Secretary-General summarized the meeting by reading the joint statement.

In the statement, the Quartet reiterated its commitment to supporting the parties' efforts, underlined its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations, pledged to respect the bilateral and confidential nature of the negotiations, and called on all States to adhere to these same commitments.

The Quartet also renewed its call on relevant States and international organizations to assist in the development of the Palestinian economy and maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority.

In addition, the Quartet stressed its determination to keep working with Israel and the Palestinian government to facilitate access and movement and an improvement in conditions on the ground.

The Quartet also reiterated its call to the parties to fully implement their obligations under phase one of the Road Map, including in relation to freezing settlement activity and the dismantlement of the infrastructure of terrorism.

The Quartet agreed that the spring of 2009 could be an appropriate time for an international meeting in Moscow.

In response to a question at the press conference, the Secretary-General said he was "deeply distressed" about the plight of the civilian population in Gaza. He added that, through its humanitarian work, the United Nations was standing by the people of Gaza and helping them in these difficult times.

The Secretary-General also said that the closure of crossings, roadblocks, settlement issues and the demolition of houses were not desirable for the ongoing peace process. He had discussed such matters with Israeli officials, he added. The Secretary-General noted that the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the ongoing peace process was extremely important.

Stressing that the calm brokered by Egypt needed to be respected, he also said that he was concerned about recent violence and called for it to stop immediately. He added that the Palestinian factions must work together towards national unity and reconciliation.

Following the press conference, the Secretary-General left Sharm el-Sheik on Sunday afternoon for his return journey to New York.

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