



## **Press Release**

### **United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process** **Robert Serry - Briefing to the Security Council**

**New York, Wednesday 22 May 2013**

As the Middle East continues to undergo a period of turmoil with uncertain outcome, especially given the situation in Syria, UN Special Coordinator Robert Serry stressed to the Security Council today the importance of “advancing the prospects for the resumption of meaningful talks towards the realization of a two-state solution”. He is encouraged by the renewed US effort and sustained personal engagement of the US Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry.

Serry noted the renewed interest of regional stakeholders and reaffirmation of the validity of the Arab Peace Initiative, as evidenced by the important visit of an Arab ministerial delegation to Washington on 29 April. Serry said he hoped the visit “revived prospects that its promise of regional stability can become an important part of developing peace efforts.”

Against the backdrop of intense diplomatic efforts to revive the Peace Process, Serry warned that it was “crucial that both sides reverse negative trends on the ground to restore confidence in each other and in the possibility of a solution.”

Serry was troubled by “recent tensions around the sensitive issue of Jerusalem, particularly when it came to restrictions of access to holy sites”. He echoed the UN Secretary-General’s call to respect religious freedom for all worshippers of all faiths to have access to their holy sites, and called on religious and other leaders to refrain from inflammatory statements. Serry reported on the dangerous friction especially on what Israelis call “Jerusalem Day” and on what Palestinians refer to as “Nakba Day”.

On Gaza, Serry warned that the ‘understanding’ brokered by Egypt six months earlier had brought a marked improvement during the first three months of its implementation, but that subsequent developments over the past three months risked jeopardizing the security and humanitarian improvements made. He called on all to exert maximum efforts to preserve the understandings and to adhere to a full calm and lifting the remaining closures on Gaza.

Serry briefed the Council on the ongoing UN work in Gaza, including reconstruction projects which totaled some US\$450 million worth of projects and installing 13 desalination plants.

Serry concluded that the efforts to “achieve the negotiated two state solution are likely to reach a critical point in the coming weeks ahead.” He hoped the leaders on both sides will demonstrate their commitments and will seize the opportunity.

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