



**UNITED NATIONS ROUNDTABLE ON LEGAL  
ASPECTS OF THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE  
CONVENED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE  
OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF  
THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

United Nations Office at Geneva, 24 and 25 April 2014

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**OPENING SESSION**

Message of

**H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon**  
United Nations Secretary-General

Delivered by

**Mr. Michael Møller**  
Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

Your Excellency, Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Your Excellency, Mr. Issa Qaraq, Minister of Prisoner Affairs of the State of Palestine.

Mr. Anders Kompass, Director of the Division of Operations and Technical Cooperation of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights.

Distinguished Committee Members, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour to be here to represent the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon. We are here today to build on numerous previous events that highlighted the significance of the provisions of international law in efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine.

The last such meeting was held here in April 2012 on “The question of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities: legal and political implications”.

Two years later, after the historical General Assembly vote, we now welcome the State of Palestine as an Observer State. Thus, this Roundtable, will discuss two key issues; the legal status of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in international law, and also consider the issue of Palestine’s admission to the United Nations as an Observer State and the general legal implications.

We are privileged once again to host such a gathering of renowned experts, Committee Members and Observers, in this Roundtable and it is now my honour to deliver the message of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

Message of the Secretary-General

“ I am pleased to send greetings to all the participants in this Roundtable on the Question of Palestine. I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this discussion.

The round of peace negotiations being led by the United States offers an opening to advance the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Most importantly, the Israeli and Palestinian leadership committed themselves to nine months of focused talks on all core permanent status issues.

However, given the complexity of the issues, nine months have proved to be insufficient to complete the task. I urge the parties to continue the talks on a substantive basis beyond 29 April. The costs of walking away from the negotiating table would be exponentially higher than the pain of the compromises required to resolve the conflict. No lasting peace can be achieved away from the negotiating table, and the current situation is not sustainable for both parties, the region and the international community.

The establishment of an independent State of Palestine based on the borders of 1967, alongside a secure State of Israel, is long overdue. The suffering of millions of Palestinians under occupation has lasted far too long. I remain deeply troubled by Israel’s continuing settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which is illegal under international law. Settlement activity is deepening the Palestinian people’s mistrust in the seriousness of the Israeli side about achieving peace; it also risks rendering a two-State solution impossible. The peace efforts are also being hindered by violence and incitement from all sides. I am concerned over the rising tension with respect to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem, and call on all parties to show utmost restraint as well as full respect for the sanctity of holy sites of all faiths.

The deteriorating condition of Gaza’s civilian population remains a source of alarm, as the seven-year-old closure continues to cause serious humanitarian consequences. More than 80

per cent of all families in Gaza are dependent on aid, yet Gaza remains subject to severe restrictions on imports, exports and the movement of people by land, air and sea.

I call for a complete opening of crossings into Gaza, including Rafah, to allow legitimate trade and movements of people. At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns must be addressed by continuing to thwart militant attacks and preventing the smuggling of weapons.

I also reiterate my condemnation of indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza, which contravene international law. Israelis have a right to live free of cross-border violence.

I welcome the desire of the organizers of this conference to highlight some of the legal aspects of the Palestinian question. I have repeatedly expressed concern for the more than 4,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, and have also called for ending the practice of prolonged administrative detention. I have also called on Israel to abide by its legal obligations as expressed in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the wall and the settlements.

I will continue to do my utmost to support the realization of a two-State solution.

I am pleased to continue to be assisted in this endeavour by Mr. Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We urge the international community to support both sides in continuing their negotiations with the aim of reaching a final peace settlement.

I wish you success in your deliberations.”

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