



**Remarks by Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman
at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC)**

New York, 18 September 2017

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

We are grateful to Norway for convening and chairing this important forum.

Last month, I accompanied the Secretary-General in his first visit to Israel and Palestine in his new capacity. In the visit, he had the chance to speak with Palestinians and Israelis and with their leadership about their concerns, hopes and aspirations. The Secretary-General came away more convinced than ever that there is no alternative to the two-state solution that can bring an end to the conflict and meet the legitimate national aspirations and security needs of both sides.

The evolving situation in the occupied Palestinian territory these past few months is deeply worrying. A man-made humanitarian crisis in Gaza is rapidly deteriorating, somewhat slowed by the United Nations delivery of fuel to key infrastructure facilities. The situation also remains volatile in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with little hope for a political breakthrough on the horizon.

The development needs of the Palestinian people, however, cannot be held hostage to the political stalemate. Israel, the Palestinian Leadership and the international community must each take tangible steps to improve socio-economic conditions on the ground and to protect human rights.

However, economic development, critical as it is, is no substitute for sovereignty and statehood. Efforts aimed at achieving both must proceed in parallel. We must simultaneously pursue a three track approach — a political process with the clear objectives of two states living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition; a substantial effort to improve the socio-economic conditions of Palestinians that would reduce the vast discrepancies between the two societies; and an active engagement with the region to support the process.

This approach also requires dealing with the obstacles to meaningful engagement.

Settlement activity remains a substantial impediment to the implementation of the two-state solution. It is illegal under international law and needs to stop. Violence and incitement, as well as the political divisions between Gaza and the West Bank also present substantial challenges to peace.

Let me address also the situation in Gaza which is rapidly deteriorating and remains of grave concern for all of us. Hamas' rule and militant buildup have continued for ten years.

Israel's restrictive closures also remains a key impediment to Gaza's development. This long-standing reality is further exacerbated by the internal political divide between Fatah and Hamas.

In this regard, I welcome the recent statement by Hamas announcing the dissolution of the Administrative Committee in Gaza and agreement to allow the Government of National Consensus to assume its responsibilities in the Strip.

I commend the Egyptian authorities for their tireless efforts in creating this positive momentum and I encourage all parties to seize this opportunity to restore unity and open a new page for the Palestinian people. This should facilitate the removal of Israeli closures on Gaza, in line with Security Council Resolution 1860.

The United Nations stands ready to assist all efforts in this respect, most notably to address the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and crippling electricity crisis.

When I visited Gaza with the Secretary-General, I saw firsthand the deep sense of isolation within the population.

Let me be clear - the risk of a major humanitarian breakdown is very high today as essential services are largely operating on back-up generators and with fuel provided by the UN.

Today, our first priority should be to urgently stabilize the electricity supply by restoring the electricity coming from Israel to at least to pre-crisis levels. Once this is done we can seize the momentum and create a facility to finance the necessary infrastructure upgrades and increase electricity supply without a negative effect on the already strained Palestinian budget.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, on the occasion of this AHLC, as we renew our commitment to support the development of the State of Palestine, we must take stock of the progress achieved to date. The formidable challenges notwithstanding, the Palestinian Authority has made tremendous strides in its ability to deliver services and expand its economy. These are laudable achievements, absolutely, but not an end goal. For more than 20 years, we have told Palestinians that they need to focus on institution building and socio-economic development. We have encouraged and supported them in preparing for statehood. The time has come for us to deliver on that promise.

In this context, I want to express the steadfast commitment of the United Nations to do everything in its power to realize the two-state solution, to protect human rights and to advance the development aspirations of the people of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Today, I hope that we can together commit to systematically easing the political constraints to Palestine's development and statehood. I hope you will all take back to your capitals the urgency of the situation and a clear vision of the way forward.

I wish you the very best in your endeavors.