Secretary-General, Concerned by Slow Pace of Gaza Reconstruction, Urges Donors at Vienna Seminar to Honour Aid Commitments for Palestinians

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I am pleased to send greetings to all participants at the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for shining an international spotlight on this important subject. I welcome the focus of this Seminar on the energy and water needs of the people in Gaza. These pressing concerns take on even greater urgency in the context of a humanitarian catastrophe. Bringing together donor countries, the Palestinian government, international experts and organizations, and the various parts of the UN family, you can help raise awareness and advance efforts to tackle the many reconstruction challenges in what remains a dire humanitarian situation.

This Seminar takes place over seven months since the end of the Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014. The temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism brokered by the United Nations has to date enabled access to construction material for over 60,000 Gazan homeowners in support of shelter repairs. In addition, some 42 construction and infrastructure projects funded by the international community and the private sector have been approved so far. The operations of the mechanism are ready to be scaled up to facilitate the swift implementation of major large scale projects.

In October, at the International Conference on Palestine and Reconstructing Gaza in Cairo, the international community came together to mobilize immediate support within a framework of longer-term sustainable development of Palestine as a whole.

I commend the governments of Israel and Palestine for their continued adherence to the temporary mechanism, and their statements of commitment to a durable solution for Gaza. I also express my deep appreciation to the international community for its generous pledges of support for reconstruction.

However, I remain concerned at the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza and the suffering of the people there in the aftermath of last summer’s brutal conflict. Tens of thousands of Gazans – men, women, children and the elderly – are still living in temporary shelters or UN facilities because their homes have not yet been rebuilt. The dangers are underscored by the fact

that during the winter storms in January, four children died due to inadequate housing.

The Government of National Consensus has still not fully assumed control over Gaza and the majority of the donor funds have yet to be received.

I urge the Palestinians to overcome their divisions, which are hurting the people of Gaza.  I also reiterate my urgent appeal to donors to honour their financial commitments.  This support should also include funding for United Nations agencies that are carrying out vital operations in Gaza, in order to prevent a further deterioration.  I repeat my call on all sides to take immediate steps to improve living conditions and ensure a full opening of the crossings into Gaza, including Rafah, to allow for legitimate trade and movement of people.  This will serve the interests of all.

At the same time, I again stress that only a comprehensive peace agreement leading to a viable and independent Palestinian State living alongside Israel in peace and security will durably resolve the conflict.  I urge both parties to refrain from any action that could further exacerbate the situation and to demonstrate the necessary leadership for reaching and implementing the difficult decisions that lie ahead.  We must break the cycle of build-destroy, build-destroy, build-destroy, which has caused so much needless suffering and waste.

I welcome initiatives by Member States and regional groups, including the Arab League, in the search of a way out of the impasse.  I also expect that the new Government of Israel will extend its full cooperation to the efforts of the international community and reaffirm its commitment to the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security.  With the Quartet and all other stakeholders engaged, we may have a better chance in 2015 at addressing issues that seem intractable.  We must resolve to do everything possible to advance progress.

In this spirit, please accept my best wishes for a successful event.