

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF CALLS FOR A CESSATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

(Jerusalem/New York, 15 May 2011): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) Valerie Amos today visited Ramallah, East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank on a day of violent protest in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In Ramallah, Ms. Amos met with President Mahmoud Abbas and also with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The ERC reiterated the determination of the United Nations and the humanitarian community as a whole to continue to assist those in need in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in areas where the Palestinian Authority cannot fully operate. She expressed her support for the Palestinian Authority and reaffirmed the United Nations' commitment to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, statehood, sovereignty and freedom from occupation.

Ms. Amos visited a school in Khan Al Ahmar, in the Al Jahalin Bedouin community in Area C. Area C comprises 60% of the West Bank but is still under full Israeli military and civilian control. The Al Jahalin school is scheduled for demolition, because the community have not been able to obtain a building permit due to restrictive and inadequate planning policies in Area C. Ms. Amos stressed that there can be no justification for depriving children of an education.

“Palestinians are utterly frustrated by the impact of Israeli policies on their lives. They can't move freely around their territory. They can't plan their communities. They are evicted from their homes. Their homes are regularly demolished,” said Ms. Amos. “I don't believe that most people in Israel have any idea of the way planning policies are used to divide and harass communities and families. They would not themselves like to be subjected to such behaviour.”

Ms. Amos also visited the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. In Sheikh Jarrah she met with families evicted from their homes to make way for settler communities. In Silwan, Ms. Amos saw first hand the impact of restrictive planning policies and the growing Israeli settler presence in the area. She also heard reports of increasing settler violence. Over 1,000 Palestinian residents in Silwan are currently threatened with displacement. Residents live in an atmosphere of constant friction and tension as a result of settlement activity and building in the heart of Silwan. Silwan has been a centre for violent activities in recent days.

Commenting on the day's events, Ms. Amos said, “I am extremely concerned at the level of violence today, and at the number of deaths and injuries in the region. The situation cannot continue in this way. It is innocent people who are losing their lives.”

On 16 May, the third day of her visit, Ms. Amos plans to visit the Gaza Strip, where she will meet with Palestinians affected by the Blockade.

For more on ERC Amos' mission and on oPt, please visit www.unocha.org

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