

UN optimistic about ceasefire

UN envoy to Middle East Robert H. Serry hails Gaza Strip truce, 'I believe ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas encouraging sign leading to quiet and security from both sides'

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In a conversation with Ynet on Thursday morning, UN envoy to the Middle East, Robert H. Serry praised the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

According to him, the three issues that must be emphasized in the near future are a complete ceasefire, opening the crossings, and prisoner-POW exchanges, including [Gilad Shalit](#) of course. "We find great importance in the release of Shalit, as part of the exchange," he said.

Serving in his position for six months, Serry said caution must be maintained. "I believe that a ceasefire agreement between [Israel](#) and the [Hamas](#) is an encouraging sign that will lead to quiet and security from both sides.

We are aware of the fact that both sides claim the ceasefire is frail. We need to be realistic and not expect that achievements will be immediate," he said.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also praised the ceasefire. In his official announcement he emphasized the importance of an ease on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the termination of terror attacks against Israeli targets.

He also said that he hopes that the Gaza border crossings will be open for humanitarian and commercial purposes and praised the [Egyptians](#) for their efforts to achieving a calm.

Serry said that "in the few times I visited the Gaza Strip I saw a very difficult humanitarian situation and when I visited Sderot I saw the residents suffering due to Qassam rockets. I believe that a ceasefire will allow both sides to proceed and the UN will be present to oversee and especially to assist, he said.

"In addition, we will discuss the smuggling between the Gaza-Rafah, border with the Egyptians, who are already taking measures on this issue. These are the essential issues which will surely bring about the success of this process," said the Middle East envoy.

Serry said that next week, Quartet representatives will meet in order to discuss additional steps to achieving a calm in the region. Amongst other issues, he said that he is encouraged by the "new Palestinian considerations for continued relations between the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas.

"This is a heartening sign, and when coupled with a calm in Gaza, will likely lead to political gains and stability in the region. However, just as we must be realistic regarding the ceasefire, we must also be realistic and not expect that this will all occur overnight," said Serry.