

Tony Blair visits Gaza

عربي

Sunday, Feb 15, 2015 in Office of Tony Blair, Office of the Quartet Representative

Tony Blair has today been in Gaza for a series of visits. He met with Ministers, local business and community leaders, families and workers at the UN supported emergency accommodation for Internally Displaced Persons, and also visited a UN-supported furniture manufacturing business which the Office of the Quartet Representative is assisting to export its products. He also saw scenes of recent destruction as well as an area of development.

Mr. Blair said "The last conflict left Gaza devastated and its people worn down and impoverished. 20 years after Oslo we need a new approach to Gaza and a new approach to peace." Read his article here:

The present state of Gaza is a rebuke: to those of us in the international community who over the years have made so many promises unfulfilled; to those who have offered leadership and failed to provide it; to the politics both Israeli and Palestinian which have been unable to create the circumstances for peace. The people of Gaza have been the casualties of this failure.

The last conflict left Gaza devastated and its people worn down and impoverished. 20 years after Oslo we need a new approach to Gaza and a new approach to peace.

The problem is not – as is often thought – locking negotiators in a room long enough to make an agreement. At present, you could lock them in such a room for eternity and peace would still not come. The truth is that if the on the ground reality was conducive to peace, negotiators could find a way through the issues of borders and land swaps, and even Jerusalem, refugees and security guarantees.

And there is the rub. The on the ground reality is not conducive to peace; indeed the opposite. Gaza is the living proof. Even on the West Bank the economy is stalled, the GDP per Palestinian head is less than a tenth of an Israeli head a short and visible distance away. In Jerusalem the tension is palpable and dangerous.

However, in all this darkness there is one potential ray of hope. The region is changing dramatically around us. As the threat of extremism throws up new risks, it also offers new opportunities for all those who believe in peace to unite in achieving it. So we should not give up but re-double our efforts.

The pre-conditions to a successful peace process are threefold: first, a dramatic and broad improvement in the daily lives of Palestinians; second, a unified Palestinian politics on a basis that explicitly is in favour of peace and two states, meaning a sovereign State of Palestine and a secure, accepted State of Israel; and third, an enhanced role for the region, in alliance with the international community, which must step up to share leadership of the issue.

We should start with Gaza. Gaza is a metaphor for all that is wrong. Its people suffer hugely in their daily lives. It is separated from the West Bank not just physically but politically, with the reconciliation process apparently broken down. And at present Egypt, because of the impact on its own security and worries about Hamas links with the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism in the Sinai, is – understandably – seeking reassurance before it can fully engage with any Government there.

The Cairo conference, under Egypt's leadership, agreed a big programme of support for Gaza. But so far progress has been limited and even the money for salaries – essential for many Gazan families – has not been paid.

We need change in Gaza to open it up and reconnect it with the world. For that to happen, we need reconciliation in Palestinian politics. And for reconciliation to happen, we need unity to be on a basis which supports peace.

The following elements should govern our approach:

Payment of the salaries and agreement on some of the basic infrastructure necessary for Gaza – power, water, housing (significantly beyond the existing UN programmes), with funding from the Cairo conference to match.

The international community need clarity from Hamas: are they a Palestinian nationalist movement dedicated to the achievement of a Palestinian State or part of a broader Islamist movement with regional designs that impact Governments outside of Gaza? Are they prepared to accept a Palestinian State within 1967 borders or not, with such a State being a final settlement to the conflict? If they are that would allow the international community to promote reconciliation alongside reconstruction.

Egypt has to be given credible guarantees about its own security as it is affected by Gaza with assurances that Gaza will not be used as a base for terrorist activity in Sinai and that there will be cooperation with the Government of Egypt to prevent it.

The Gaza crossings should be opened in such a way to facilitate the movement of people and goods so that Gaza can be reunited with the outside world and its economy able to grow.

Israel should also do all that it can to assist reconstruction and to open up Gaza crossings to allow the maximum amount of material in; and to avoid returning to the destruction of three conflicts in six years.

Egypt should then lead the negotiation about the long term future of Gaza including around issues such as the airport and seaport as was envisaged by the agreement to end the recent conflict.

This Gaza plan should be part of a wider agreement after the new Government of Israel is established which should have at its core the dramatic improvement of Palestinian life on the West Bank.

This in turn could pave the way for Palestinian elections and the resumption of a proper negotiation for the resolution of the peace process.

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movement with regional designs that impact Governments outside of Gaza? Are they prepared to accept a Palestinian State within 1967 borders or not, with such a State being a final settlement to the conflict? If they are that would allow the international community to promote reconciliation alongside reconstruction.

3. Egypt has to be given credible guarantees about its own security as it is affected by Gaza with assurances that Gaza will not be used as a base for terrorist activity in Sinai and that there will be cooperation with the Government of Egypt to prevent it.
4. The Gaza crossings should be opened in such a way to facilitate the movement of people and goods so that Gaza can be reunited with the outside world and its economy able to grow.
5. Israel should also do all that it can to assist reconstruction and to open up Gaza crossings to allow the maximum amount of material in; and to avoid returning to the destruction of three conflicts in six years.
6. Egypt should then lead the negotiation about the long term future of Gaza including around issues such as the airport and seaport as was envisaged by the agreement to end the recent conflict.

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