
Ramallah, 20 March 2010 - Secretary-General's press conference with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad

Mr. Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, Senior Advisors, salam alaykim, shukran jazeeelan.

It's a great pleasure for me to visit Ramallah for the third time as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I thank Prime Minister Fayyad, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people for such a warm welcome and hospitality.

Even though this time I am not able to meet President Abbas and like to ask to convey my warmest regards and best wishes for his early recovery and I'm looking forward to meeting him in Libya at the League of Arab States Summit meeting.

The Prime Minister and I have had very good discussions on all the matters pertaining to the Middle East Peace Process and how the United Nations, the Members of the Quartet and the international community as a whole can help the Palestinian people and authority to promote socio-economic development and how [interruption] so we are committed to work together with the Palestinian people and help your cause to complete negotiations on a settlement of all core issues within 24 months. Yesterday in Moscow, the Quartet sent a number of very clear messages which I have just conveyed to Prime Minister Fayyad.

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for bringing me to Maysoun this morning where I realized how difficult life is and the challenges you have when you are not able to develop your own territory as your priority requires.

Q. [Inaudible] are you [inaudible] some kind of sanctions if either party does not adhere to your demands?

SG: I agree with your assessment that there have been lots of ups and downs and frustrations felt by, not only by the Palestinian people, but the whole international community, and there have been many initiatives many of which have not been realized. This time, despite a lot of political challenges and again ups and downs, the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority have agreed to engage in to proximity talks with US facilitation, that is important and that was supported and welcomed by the Quartet and this is what the international community wants to see happen as soon as possible. Our goal is to encourage those proximity talks which should be launched very soon, I hope, but this is not the end result, this should end lead eventually to direct negotiation between the two parties. The international community and region powers have a role to play, and the United Nations together with the members of the Quartet, together with the Arab leaders in the region will work hard to facilitate and to encourage so that this will have positive results. It has been too long and it is high time now that Palestinians and Israelis should be able to live side by side in peace and security. That is the aspiration of the Palestinian people and that's the wish of the international community, so let us work hard and let us support the leadership of the Palestinians and Israelis so that they can sincerely sit down together and resolve all these issues.

Q. Secretary-General, you have said many times that settlements are illegal and Israel should stop building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories including East Jerusalem, so far the Israelis have said no, what's different about this visit, will you be bringing a new message to them and do you have anyway of exerting leverage or pressure on the Israelis to actually get them to stop building settlements?

SG: I am sure that the Israeli authorities must have heard clear and loud the call by the international community and the Quartet issued collectively in a strong statement condemning such settlements. We have repeatedly said that settlements are against international law and against the Road Map. The Quartet has previously stated that all these settlement activities should cease, including natural growth. That was reaffirmed again in Moscow. I sincerely hope that the Israeli authorities refrain from taking such unilateral actions which may undermine and prejudice the final outcome of the negotiations. The politically conducive atmosphere should always be encouraged and facilitated and created so that negotiations itself can move on the basis of mutual understanding and with a sense of and sincerity. That's what we hope to see and I will discuss and press hard the Israeli authorities.

Q. [Inaudible] Palestinian will ask you to support them to establish a Palestinian state, if indirect talks doesn't achieve?

SG: As I said, indirect talks are not the end result that should be lead to direct negotiations, that's the best way, there are no other alternatives. Now, the United Nations will work very closely, first of all, with the Quartet members to help the negotiations proceed as smoothly as possible. Both parties should engage with sincerity and flexibility, that's the best way. I do not envisage any strong failure of this. I sincerely hope this time that they will be able to agree on major issues. President Abbas and former Prime Minister Olmert of Israel and even the current Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel have had very sincere negotiations until a year and a half ago. I understand that they have come quite substantial and they have to build upon what they discussed at that time before negotiations were stalled. Now is good timing with full support of the international community that they engage in proximity talks first then move forward to direct negotiations for a final settlement of all these issues.