
PRESS ENCOUNTER WITH U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN
New York, 9 February 2006

SG: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Q: Good morning, Mr. Secretary-General. We see that you are meeting with the new Israeli Foreign Minister [Tzipi Livni] today, and the Quartet just met in London, which you attended. But yesterday Hamas reiterated that it will not recognize Israel. What's going to be the focus of your discussion with the Minister, and what is your message to the Palestinians?

SG: I think we will discuss the situation on the ground, and the developments since the elections. And of course we have Israeli elections coming up in March. My message to the Palestinian people who voted and voted peacefully, in a calm and secure manner, is to pursue the effort that they have been engaged in with the Quartet in trying to implement the Roadmap. I think it is important for us to understand that the elections only just took place. Hamas won the elections but they have never been in government; they need time to organize themselves. The transitional government will stay in office for another three months, which hopefully will give Hamas time to organize itself for consultations to take place between President [Mahmoud] Abbas and the Hamas group. And there are discussions taking place in the region, in Egypt and in Saudi Arabia and others, with the group. I hope that, in the end, they will heed the Quartet statement urging them to honour all the obligations entered into by the Palestinian Authority, transform themselves into a political party, and accept the two state solution. I hope that eventually that is the direction they will go. They need desperately assistance on the financial and economic front, and we are doing whatever we can to help. Jim Wolfensohn, the Quartet envoy, is very busy talking to governments ensuring that the transitional government has the resources to carry out all its responsibilities.

Q: Even with Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel, you still want the money?

SG: We are at a very early stage of the game. As I said, there is a transitional government in place for three months. We are going to support that government to continue its work. I urge Hamas to listen to the appeals, not just from the Quartet, but from other governments in the region, asking it to transform itself into a political party. We must also understand that this is not the first time that an armed movement has transformed itself into a political party. There are lots of examples around the world. And I urge Hamas to go the same route.

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Q: ... And on Hamas, Hamas has obviously won the Palestinian elections. The Islamic Brotherhood made big gains in Egypt. Religious parties won in Iraq. What do you read in that for the region, and for the world at large?

SG: Let me start with your second question. I think, when you organize democratic elections, you can never anticipate the results, and you never know who wins or who emerges. I think the results you referred to, whether in Egypt or Hamas, indicate that the Islamic groups have been well organized. They have been able to organize themselves. You take the case of Palestine; Hamas has had a record of offering social services. They have had a record of being organized and disciplined, and of not being corrupt. What were the people voting for? Were they voting for a clean government? Were they voting for peace? Were they voting for a stable environment in which their kids could go to school? Or were they voting for a Hamas manifesto? My sense is that they were voting for a peaceful and stable and well-organized Palestine. So it is a lesson and a message for all rulers and politicians in the region, and everywhere in the world, that people want good government, and they will vote for people that they believe would offer that. Obviously, the question of organization and grass roots contacts also have played a role here.

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Q: With the victories of Hamas, the gains of the Muslim Brotherhood and religious parties in Iraq - do you think that at the end of the day, the region is kissing goodbye to secular government?

SG: I am not sure if the region is saying goodbye to secular government, or if the religious are better organized, and have acquired a reputation of being able to deliver. If that is the case, it is a message for ruling regimes, and for other parties, that this is what people are looking for. I am not ready to accept that it is a total rejection of secular movements and a total swing to Islamic parties. I think, if the regimes in power were seen to be delivering, were seen to be close to the people, I am sure the results would have been quite different.

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