



Press Release

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'TENTATIVE BUDDING' OF NEW AND FRAGILE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

BEING WITNESSED, UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

Cites 'Road Map' as Best Plan for Peace

There had been a tentative budding of a new and fragile Middle East peace process, Terje Rød-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, told the Council this morning.

In his monthly briefing to the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, he said the events that led to that new beginning were the confirmation by the Palestinian Legislative Council of Abu Mazen as the first Palestinian Prime Minister and the subsequent presentation to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority of the Quartet's (European Union, Russian Federation, United States and United Nations) "[Road Map](#)" for Middle East peace.

Although the Road Map was not a flawless document, he said, it offered the best available plan for peace. Also, it was possibly the last chance for the parties involved to achieve a two-State solution. He noted that before the creation of the Road Map, no other Middle East peace plan had enjoyed such wide regional and international backing. It, therefore, deserved to be followed and implemented by the parties.

Success of the process would depend upon the good faith and performance of the parties and on the determination of the Quartet, key regional actors like Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and the broader international community, he continued. What must be kept in view were the Road Map's goals: a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestine; a secure and prosperous Israel; and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region. The obstacles to those goals were numerous. Since 19 April, 79 Palestinians and 16 Israelis had lost their lives to the conflict. That raised the total death toll since September 2000 to 2,648 Palestinians and 751 Israelis.

Referring to suicide bombings on 24 and 29 April, and noting with sadness the three recent suicide bombings against Israeli citizens in a 24-hour period, he said the Palestinian Authority must bring those involved in planning and carrying out those attacks to justice, as it was obligated to under the first phase of the Road Map. Recognizing that Abu Mazen and Minister of State for Internal Security Mohammed Dahlan needed assistance, he also stated that support from the Israeli Government was necessary to carry out that task. Reciprocal confidence-building measures were essential in order to create legitimacy and popular support for anti-terror policies.

Under the first phase of the Road Map, Israel was required to take no actions undermining trust, including attacks on civilians and demolition of Palestinian homes as a punitive measure. Only hours after the presentation of the Road Map on 1 May, Israeli military operations in Gaza City resulted in 13 Palestinian deaths. Destruction of property continued. The United Nations did not question Israel's right to self-defence, but repeated its call on Israel to abandon the use of excessive force, to protect the safety of civilians and preserve their property. However, illegal elements in Palestinian areas had based themselves in civilian areas, he pointed out. Restating his opposition to extrajudicial killings, he said the best way to ensure the security of Israelis was by resolving the conflict through the Road Map.

Movement in and out of the West Bank continued to be restricted, preventing people from reaching medical facilities and schools, he continued. Poverty in Palestinian areas had increased to 60 per cent, and unemployment rates to 53 per cent. Closure continued to dominate the day-to-day reality of most people in the West Bank. The water and hygiene situation continued to worsen. More than \$1 billion in donor assistance annually had prevented complete economic collapse, but such aid was merely slowing the decline and creating a system of dependency. It was essential that the closure regime be lifted in a way that met Israel's security needs. Such measures, however, might lead to an increase in terror attacks. The Road Map provided the best way to bridge those concerns.

The grim situation was exacerbated in the Gaza Strip by the "draconian closure regime" recently instituted by the Israeli authorities, resulting in the closing of Gaza to all but those with diplomatic passports, Mr. Rød-Larsen continued. On 8 May, the Task Force on Project Implementation -- the donor grouping -- had been informed of a new set of rules in which all international staff not holding a diplomatic passport and visa would be subject to a car search, among other things. Those policies were violations of the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel and ran counter to Israel's international humanitarian law obligations as the occupying Power.

He said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel had agreed to meet with him and head of United Nations funds, agencies and programmes to hear concerns and recommendations. He hoped that that meeting would lead to the creation of mechanisms that would avoid such fundamental obstruction of United Nations operations.

He acknowledged that the humanitarian situation could only complicate the work ahead for Prime Minister Abu Mazen. Nevertheless, Mr. Mazen had already taken an important first step by endorsing the Road Map. Examples of his commitment to the plan included the following: appointment of a prime minister with empowered executive authority; immediate action on a credible process to produce a draft constitution for Palestinian statehood; continued appointment of Palestinian ministers empowered to undertake fundamental reform; and establishment of an independent Palestinian election commission.

He highlighted Mr. Mazen's two main tasks in the area of security. First, he would have to restore law and order in the Palestinian areas and reverse the breakdown in internal security. Second, he would need to take immediate steps to curb terrorism and bring to justice those carrying out terrorist attacks. He would be helped, in that regard, by Egypt's commitment to establishing a ceasefire among all Palestinian groups.

Lauding the support of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia for the Road Map, Mr. Rød-Larsen noted that Israel had not yet offered its endorsement. In that context, he expressed hope that, in light of the Israeli public's support for the plan, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would become more willing to back the peace process. He said that Mr. Sharon's endorsement of the two-State solution and acceptance of United States President George W. Bush's vision of an end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories was a good first step.

Turning to the 'Blue Line' between Israel and Lebanon, he stated that despite the existing tense situation, the parties involved were acting with restraint and maintaining order. Nevertheless, he criticized Israel for its air violations of the Blue Line and Hezbollah for its anti-aircraft fire. In addition, noting that one of Hezbollah's anti-aircraft guns was located in Lebanon, he called upon that country to ensure the safety of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) personnel.

The meeting started at 10:20 a.m. and was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

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