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**BECKETT INTERVIEW IN RAMALLAH (07/02/07)**

**TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH FOREIGN SECRETARY, MARGARET BECKETT, IN RAMALLAH, ON WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2006.**

**INTERVIEWER:**

You have now seen both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, what are your initial impressions from this visit?

**FOREIGN SECRETARY:** It's confirmed the feeling I had before I came here that we could potentially be at a turning point and of course although I shall be speaking to President Abbas a little later, I'd hoped to actually have a meeting with him but of course almost while we were on the way here a meeting was called in Mecca and I think everyone hopes that that is one of the hopeful signs.

**INTERVIEWER:**

FS you talked about a 'turning point', a window of opportunity, many people don't see that. They see factional violence in the Palestinian territories, seemed to be headed to civil war, they see a weak Israeli Government and no common ground?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

Well that is perfectly true but in a sense that doesn't weaken the point I've made about there being a potential opportunity and a turning point for two reasons; first of all one of the things that makes me say that is because for some months now it seems to me and I now learn to many others that we are at a point where the Palestinians believe that they need peace, the Israelis believe they need peace, moderate Arabs believe that peace in this region, in this area is needed. I am not sure that it has ever happened before that all of the different players felt they needed peace at the same time, and your right to say but there has just been this terrible violence in Gaza but in a sense that strengthens the case for saying things are getting really very harsh here, even more difficult here and it is a further drive for peace and again you are quite correct that governments here are weak, many of the players have weaknesses but then that means that they all have something to gain if they could move forward on peace. Sometime it's when people think their strong, even if that's an illusion, that they are not prepared to move.

**INTERVIEWER:**

You seem to be painting a picture of being right at the bottom of the slope and the only way you can go is up?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

Well, in this region it is dangerous to say the only way you can go is up. It is possible, certainly it is the case that more and more people feel the necessity and want to see a way up.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Everything seems to hang on a positive outcome from the talks within the Palestinian factions in Mecca, is that right that thing can happen unless they can settle their differences within the Palestinian political body?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

I don't think it's true that nothing can happen unless those talks come to a good conclusion. I think it is true though if they do come to a satisfactory conclusion, a Government of National Unity that is based on the Quartet principles that the International Community can accept that that will be enormously helpful and be a very encouraging sign.

**INTERVIEWER:**

If there is a positive outcome in Mecca, does that have to include a commitment of part of the Government of National Unity to recognition of Israel?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

It has to be based on Quartet principles. No doubt if there is an agreement reached in Mecca everyone will crawl all over the detail of exactly what words they use, but as of now we don't know yet whether there is an agreement.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Your going to be very cautious about an agreement, the whole of the international community is because they are going to want to see clear evidence that Hamas has signed up to recognition of Israel?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

Everyone is going to want to see evidence that everyone is working for peace.

**INTERVIEWER:**

From the Israeli side did you get an impression that they are really prepared to do something positive to get the peace process going?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

They certainly recognise the... I mean... Israel is permanently in a dangerous situation, permanently concerned about a security threat but I believe that it is understood and recognised in Israel both that the dangers of the position in which they find themselves are perhaps greater now than they have been for sometime. And second there is this potential opportunity if only a way forward can be found.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Did Prime Minister Olmert say anything that encouraged you because many people see him as being an extremely cautious Prime Minister?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

Well I think that if I were him I would be inclined to be cautious too. But he assured me that Israel also wants peace, that Israel is prepared to work for peace, that they want to find a way into a negotiating process and that is better than not saying that.

**INTERVIEWER:**

You said it would be a gross dereliction of duty if the international community did not use the current situation to push the process forward, do you fear that the international community isn't going to step up to the mark if there is a window that opens?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

I am not sure, it is not exactly that I fear that the international community won't step up to the mark, it's just that I hope that people will act with enough urgency, enough vigour to do everything that any of us can to smooth the way towards a peace process and negotiation's and sometimes the international community does not move with all the speed and vigour it can.

**INTERVIEWER:**

What is it specifically that the British can do to contribute to this process?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

Well one of the things that has encouraged me is that both the Israelis and the Palestinians are urging us to continue being involved, to get more involved, to help to strengthen... I mean... for example we are working to help build the capacity of President Abbas' team and office to govern effectively and they also tell me that they value our advice, our input and experience and knowledge of the region and we have undertaken to both to do anything we can to help to broker peace.

**INTERVIEWER:**

It's very clear from everything that Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, has said over a long period that he sees the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as central to trying to bring peace, stability and greater democracy to the entire region. He also wants some positive movement in what we know are his last months in office, is that why the British are talking up the prospects for peace when others are much more gloomy?

**MARGARET BECKETT:**

No, not at all. It is because, yes your right he has for as long as I can remember, all the time that we have been in Government this has been a goal that he has wanted to help to achieve and it's a goal to which he has urged others to make greater efforts and so in that sense of course he would love it if it were possible to move things forward. But no I think it's because of the report I gave him for example of the Security Council meeting in September (2006) and that mood which I felt that I had identified which many other, much more experienced in the region than I have confirmed to me is there, I think it is because he sees that there is, potentially, a real opportunity and he also sees if that opportunity goes by it may not come again for a long time, may be ever that's the urgency he sees.

**INTERVIEWER:**

Foreign Secretary, thank you very much.