
Prime Minister pledges Palestine assistance

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The UK will provide \$500 million in aid to help boost development in Palestine as part of a drive for a 2008 peace deal, the PM has said. Speaking at a Downing Street press conference with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the PM hailed the seven billion dollars pledged to Palestine at the Paris donors conference that concluded yesterday. A further investors conference will be held in Bethlehem next year, he said. Mr Brown said he hoped that settlement activity by Israel in Palestinian territories would end and that attacks on Israel, mostly through rockets launched from the Gaza strip, would also cease. Under these conditions progress could be made on securing economic development for Palestine and securing a peace deal in 2008 as envisaged in last month's Annapolis agreement, he added.

The PM said:

"2008 is a year of great opportunity - the creation of a viable state of Palestine alongside a secure state of Israel.

"We stand ready to do everything else that is necessary to promote investment in Palestinian areas to make it possible for unemployment to fall, for poverty to be reduced and for jobs to be created."

The Bethlehem investors conference will be co-hosted by the UK and the US in March/April next year. Mr Brown cited industrial parks, micro-credit and the provision of small business schemes as examples of initiatives that will be supported.