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## **Palestinians ready for upcoming Middle East peace meeting, leader tells UN**

The Palestinian Authority is committed to the success of an upcoming Middle East peace meeting, its President, Mahmoud Abbas, told the United Nations General Assembly today.

"There is not the slightest obstacle to promoting the holding of a peace meeting, which will take place shortly," President Abbas said as the Assembly continued its annual high-level debate.

He voiced hope that all parties would be able to negotiate, and declared that the basis for a solution lies with the many UN resolutions and decisions that have been taken on the matter.

President Abbas said he had recently met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to discuss pressing issues, adding that the upcoming conference offers an opportunity to be able to settle all matters, including those having to do with Jerusalem, the return of refugees, water and security.

"I reaffirm the full readiness of our people to truly come on board a peace process which will lead to a comprehensive full agreement with respect to all of the issues related to a final settlement," he said.

He said the Palestinian Authority would put the proposals to a popular referendum "involving the entire Palestinian people so that they can give their view with respect to the outcomes of the conference."

Experience showed that the policy of trying "half-solutions" only further complicates matters to the point where today the threat is a real one: "there could be an explosion of civil war, of regional war, and the creation of a climate conducive to terrorism," he said.

He also spoke about Islam, saying it is a humane religion and objecting to any attempt to portray Islam in an unfair manner. "Islam is a religion that opposes killing, terrorism and murder. It is against extremism; it is against closing inward. Attempts to create a conflict among religions is one of the methods of terrorists today."

To counteract this trend, he emphasized the importance of the dialogue among civilizations.

The Foreign Minister of Egypt, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, agreed that the planned meeting could spark progress. "If well-prepared, the meeting called for by President Bush [of the United States] this fall may, if well-prepared, provide an important opportunity for long-awaited progress."

Addressing the problem "requires leadership. It requires courage from all parties. It also requires a clear and correct vision that the lack of a peaceful settlement to this conflict not only denies the right of a whole people to freedom and dignity, but it also feeds directly the calls for violence, extremism and the relinquishing of peaceful and political negotiation as a means to achieve the objective," he said.

He said Egypt would work unsparingly for a peaceful solution. "Our purpose is to achieve the resumption of serious political dialogue which would lead to a settlement within a specific timeframe."

Egypt, he added, would work for "the liberation of the rest of the occupied Arab territories in Syria and Lebanon because we are committed to the objective of achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East."

Jordan's Foreign Minister, Abdelelah Al-Khatib, said the meeting being convened by the US "may be the last chance to achieve progress, which makes it imperative to be well prepared by the US and by members of the Quartet" – which also includes the UN, the Russian Federation and the European Union – as well as regional parties.

It must "ensure that the real issues, involving final status between Palestine and Israel, are seriously discussed, leading to real progress on these issues, allowing for reaching a lasting agreement on them during a short period of time and implementing it within a timeframe agreed to by the two parties," he added.

"The situation in being experienced by Palestinian territories is not at all in harmony with a wish to achieve peace," he said, calling for an end to settlement activities, the tampering with the status of East Jerusalem, excavations in the Jerusalem Holy Mosque area and all other practices which contradict international law.

He also spoke about the situation in Iraq and its impact on Jordan. "While we call on the international community to stand by us in confronting this huge burden, we believe that the lasting solution to this problem is to restore stability in Iraq, so that its citizen can return to their country and contribute to its reconstruction."

The Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Abdulla Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, called on the UN and the Security Council in particular to play a more active role in the Middle East peace process.

"As we await the Middle East peace conference this autumn, we look forward to a comprehensive, balanced and fair management of the peace process as well as putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict in all spheres based on the engagement of all concerned parties in serious negotiations founded on the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map [outlines a peace plan for a two-State solution] and UN Security Council resolutions, as well as international rules and legitimacy."

He also called on the UN to put pressure on Israel to comply with resolution 1701, which ended last year's war in Lebanon.

Tunisia's Foreign Minister, Abdelwaheb Abdallah, welcomed the initiatives of "certain parties" to revive the peace process. Stressing the importance of an international peace conference, he said it should "yield concrete proposals for achieving a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East that ensures the restitution of all occupied Arab territories and guarantees security and stability to the countries and peoples of the region."

He also called for concerted international efforts to address the situation in Iraq, emphasizing the need to achieve a "consensual political settlement among all segments that preserves the unity and sovereignty" of the country.

On Lebanon, he emphasized that dialogue is "the sole way to prevent the scourge of dissension among the Lebanese people."

Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al-Khalifa, joined others in welcoming the initiative of President Bush to convene a Middle East peace conference this year, voicing hope that it would usher in "a new stage in dealing with the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict in a fair and just manner that would put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and to the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories from 1967, and the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital."

He also decried the situation in Iraq and urged support for the country's leadership. "In order to enable the Iraqi people to succeed, there must be no interference in Iraq's internal affairs, and its borders must be respected," he said.

"We stress here the importance of continuing the assistance and support of neighbouring States, the Arab League and the United Nations for the legitimate Iraqi Government in its efforts to maintain security and stability in Iraq, and to preserve its Arab and Islamic identity."

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