

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Speech by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen,  
United Nations Special Co-ordinator to the Families Forum  
Ambassador Hotel, Jerusalem  
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Dear Yitzhak,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to join you today, for which I am both grateful and honored.

If I ever need to look for a reason as to why I have spent nearly a decade working toward peace in the region - then I have to look no further than this courageous gathering. All of you have had emotionally excruciating experiences that brought you together. The loss of a loved one is always hard, especially when he or she dies in a senseless, and entirely preventable, conflict. Whether it is from a terrorist's bomb or a soldier's bullet, the spilled blood of innocents - your innocents -- has come to define the Israeli-Palestinian relationship today.

This does not, indeed must not, be allowed to continue.

The dignity with which you handle your losses provides hope and encouragement to all those striving for peace in this troubled land. We all draw sustenance from your efforts, whether in the public squares of New York or the private homes of the Holy Land. The violence and despair that continues today cannot sully the sanctity of your message - the message of peace.

As I look out at you today, I see the people who have suffered the worst in the madness of the last two years, and I realize we not only can, we must move forward. As you said in your ad yesterday on the back page of Haaretz: "We're angry and we're in pain and the other side certainly feels the same. It's time to put an end to this."

Your voices, your efforts, your stoic determination and your courage to look beyond your grief so others will not be forced to grieve - all this is needed more than ever. And your help will be essential to get us through what could be even more difficult days, weeks and months ahead.

For I feel we are truly at a watershed, a moment of truth as outlined in the slogan on your newspaper ad, which says in Hebrew, Arabic and English: "The Road to Peace is Preferable Over the Path to War."

We are at the junction between these two routes, stuck in a very violent stasis that can't last much longer. This is seen very vividly in a widening chasm between the elegance of recent diplomatic efforts and the ugliness of the situation on the ground, particularly on the West Bank.

The diplomatic efforts are based on some remarkable developments over the last three weeks. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1435 clearly calls for an end to all violence by both sides. It provides us a strong basis to move down a roadmap for Middle East peace endorsed last month by the Quartet - the four main international actors involved here, including the US, EU, Russia and UN.

This is not the place to go into details about that plan, but in brief, the Quartet is working closely with the parties on a concrete, three-phase roadmap that could achieve a final settlement within three years. That settlement is a goal supported by the majority of both peoples, and one forcefully sought by the international community - two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The problem is that the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate rapidly. After two years of crisis, the Palestinian economy is in ruin, with overall unemployment around 50 percent and poverty levels nearing 60 percent. Hundreds of thousands are on food aid and international support is the only thing preventing a total collapse, and widespread hunger and disease along with it.

The Palestinian Authority's very promising attempts at institutional reform are grinding to a halt under the current conditions. There is almost a complete breakdown in central governance in the West Bank. This is leading to chaos and, some fear, anarchy.

Israel is suffering as well. The morally despicable terror attacks, the terror attacks that have so deeply shaken so many of you here today, have sown fear in every house and on every street in the country. No people should suffer such random killing of innocents; no society should ever promote its use. Moreover, insecurity is also driving Israel's economy into crisis, with rising unemployment and failing businesses all around.

In the midst of all this, settlement growth continues, cementing Israel's presence on the very land earmarked for the future Palestinian state. The result is that we could be reaching nothing less than the end of an era.

That era started with Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. Since then, every international peace plan, including the Quartet's roadmap I just mentioned, has been based on the principle of the two-state solution. We all know the numbers and words that are shorthand for this concept – 242... 338... Oslo. All are based on Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in exchange for real and permanent peace and security and freedom from fear.

But given what is happening today - the destruction of Palestinian institutions, the construction of Israeli settlements, underpinned by continuing terror and violence -- is it even possible to build a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza?

Are we, in fact, witnessing the death of two-state solution?

And if so, are we prepared to deal with the consequence of what that means?

We are not there yet. But I must admit we are on the edge, and it will take the concerted efforts of both Palestinians and Israelis to pull us back from the brink. In this, the Families Forum is essential.

Yitzhak asked me to address what your group can do to foster peace. I know that your forum respects and prizes privacy. Bereavement is a very personal matter. But if you allow me to be so bold, hold up this incredible gathering as a model for both peoples. Expand your group, for the broader societies of both people are also grieving. They also feel the losses.

Continue to show your friends and neighbors that in your grief you have forged dialogue, and that from your pain you seek hope. In plain language tell them that the madness must end. Tell them it is time to stop pointing fingers and apportioning blame. Tell them there are solutions, non-violent solutions, and if the victims of violence must show the way, then show the way you will. I can tell you the UN and the international community is standing here with you. It is time we are all vocal...before it is too late.

Last night, I read a poem which I profoundly feel embodies why we are here today. It's called Prayer for Peace, written by St. Francis of Assisi. I'd like to share part of it with you.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.  
That where there is hatred I may bring love,  
That where there is wrong - I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,  
That where there is discord - I may bring harmony,  
That where there is error - I may bring truth,  
That where there is doubt - I may bring faith.  
That where there is despair - I may bring hope,  
That where there are shadows - I may bring Your light,  
That where there is sadness - I may bring Joy.

Thank you.