

Middle East clashes persist but Gaza pullout could spark peace, UN envoy says



Terje Roed-Larsen
briefs Security
Council

13 July 2004 – The political stalemate and accompanying violence in the [Middle East](#) continue to take a heavy toll, but Israel's planned withdrawal from Gaza, if executed properly, could constitute a breakthrough, the United Nations Middle East envoy told the Security Council today.

Painting a grim picture nevertheless tinged with elements of hope, Terje Roed-Larsen opened his [briefing](#) by offering two examples of "the dreadful log of blood and tears" caused by the conflict: Ruth Zahavi, who watched her young son get killed by Qassam rocket fragments, and Dr. Khaled Saleh, who died - along with his son - after they were wounded during a shootout and Israeli troops would not let medics in because of the ongoing gun battle.

Mr. Roed-Larsen said only a political settlement would end the violence, and echoed international calls for the parties to implement the [Road Map](#) - an outline peace plan aimed at achieving a two-State solution.

Unfortunately, he said, the sides showed no signs of action. "The Palestinian Authority, despite consistent promises by its leadership, has made no progress on its core obligation to take immediate action on the ground to end violence and combat terror and to reform and reorganize the Palestinian Authority."

At the same time, "The Israeli Government has made no progress either on its core obligation to immediately dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001 and to move towards a complete freeze of settlement activities," he said.

Mr. Roed-Larsen hailed progress by the Palestinian Authority in reforming finance and public administration, but emphasized the need for more action in the security arena. "The President of the Palestinian Authority has lent only nominal and partial support to the commendable Egyptian efforts aimed at reforming the ailing Palestinian security services, consistent with the Road Map," the envoy observed, calling these the "best and probably last" chance to salvage Palestinian security capabilities.

He voiced equal frustration over Israel's lack of compliance on the issue of settlements. "Territory lies at the heart of this conflict," he declared, calling for a full and comprehensive freeze on settlement activities.

The envoy sounded the alarm about the economic despair looming in the occupied Palestinian territory, citing a recent World Bank study which termed the current recession there "the worst in history."

Violence has also taken a toll on the Israeli economy, he said, noting that peace brings economic recovery. "Interestingly, growth was particularly strong during the first nine months of [2000] and began reversing in the last quarter - once the Intifada had started," he observed.

Mr. Larsen pointed to polls showing that a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians want peace, and emphasized that a proper pullout from Gaza could spark greater stability. "If the withdrawal is implemented in the right way, it could lead to the achievement of our shared goal," he said.

Defining this optimal course, he said, the withdrawal should be "full, clean and complete;" lead to an end of the occupation of Gaza; be accompanied by similar steps in the West Bank; take place in the context of the Road Map and the two-State vision; and be fully coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and the diplomatic Quartet of the UN, United States, Russia and the European Union.

"An end of the occupation of the Gaza Strip would free half of the Palestinians from occupation, and demonstrate to the Israelis that evacuating settlements is both possible and compatible with Israel's interests," he said.

[Video of Security Council meeting](#) [48mins]