

Announcement of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza should be welcomed – UN envoy



Terje Roed-Larsen briefs the Council

18 February 2004 – Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's announcement that Israel will withdraw the military and settlements from the Gaza Strip should be welcomed by all, as it sets the stage for the possible resumption of a "vigorous" peace process, the senior United Nations envoy for the Middle East, Terje Roed-Larsen, told the Security Council today.

In an [open briefing](#) on the latest developments in the region, Mr. Roed-Larsen noted that the proposed step – withdrawal from occupied territory in the Gaza Strip where Israel controlled about 40 per cent of the land – had already be welcomed by the Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei and others.

However, Mr. Roed-Larsen recalled, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had said the withdrawal from Gaza must be seen as a first step, to be made in the context of the Road Map and as part of a cooperative engagement between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the international community.

The Road Map is a plan sponsored by the diplomatic Quartet of the UN, European Union, Russian Federation and United States that calls for a series of parallel and reciprocal steps leading to two States – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace by 2005.

The announcement had set the stage for three possible scenarios, the UN envoy said. One is the resumption of a vigorous peace process. The second is unilateral Israeli disengagement from parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. The third centred on the inability of the parties to enact that withdrawal. "Such a scenario would be deeply against Palestinian and Israeli interests and could be a destabilizing element in the region," he warned. "The only viable long-term option for both peoples is the first: the resumption of the peace process."

Nevertheless, the cautiously positive view of the situation was tempered by the grim reality confronting Palestinians and Israelis, Mr. Roed-Larsen said. Since last month's briefing, 11 Israelis and 65 Palestinian had died. In all, nearly 10,000 people had lost their homes since October 2000. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation remained dire in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There was still high unemployment and widespread poverty.

He also called for Israel to cease construction of its Barrier on Palestinian land.

Mr. Roed-Larsen stressed that the parties had another chance for peace and the international community had another opportunity to make the Road Map process work. After repeated calls for the parties to take bold steps to build confidence and jumpstart the peace process, an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip had the earmarks of such a move.

"We anxiously await the details and timetable for the withdrawal and urge the Palestinians to meet the plan with meaningful reciprocal confidence-building measures – most imperatively in the area of security," Mr. Roed-Larsen said.

Warning that the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should not be allowed to deteriorate any further, he said, "The people of each side deserve to be free of violence, terror, fear and harassment."

[Video of Security Council meeting](#) [25mins]

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