

Recent developments give 'glimmer of hope' to Middle East peace process - UN envoy



Terje Roed-Larsen

20 May 2003 – Although living conditions in both Israel and the Palestinian areas were worsening, there has been significant and historic political developments in the Middle East peace process that provided a "ray of light and a glimmer of hope," the senior United Nations envoy for that region, Terje Roed-Larsen, said today.

In a [press briefing](#) at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Roed-Larsen noted the region has seen two paradoxical and contradictory developments - on the one hand, the worsening economic situation faced by Palestinians as well as the spate of terror attacks on Israelis, and the recent appointment of a Palestinian Prime Minister and the presentation of the Road Map by the diplomatic Quartet on the other.

The UN envoy told reporters that in Palestinian areas there was an unemployment rate of 50 per cent and in Gaza alone, 75 per cent of the people lived in below the poverty level. "These simple figures illustrate how horrible the situation is," said Mr. Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. "At the same time, the murderous terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens are continuing [and] emanating from the Palestinian territories."

Meanwhile, there had been significant and historic developments in the diplomatic arena, he said, starting with the appointment of Abu Mazen as the first Palestinian Prime Minister, who was seen as a credible partner by both Israel and the United States. A second key sign of progress had been the presentation of the Quartet's Road Map based on US President George W. Bush's vision of the establishment of a Palestinian state living peacefully with Israel within secure borders. The Quartet comprises the Russian Federation, United States, European Union and the UN.

"All this produces a situation where for the first time there is a ray of light, a glimmer of hope," Mr. Roed-Larsen said, adding that what he and Secretary-General Kofi Annan hoped was for Israel to move forward to the negotiating table, as had been stated by the new Palestinian Prime Minister, who said that he accepted the Road Map and would start implementing it.

"Within the next few weeks, we will see where we are heading. We can head back to the negotiating table and have a real peace process once again, or everything can be derailed," Mr. Roed-Larsen said. "Of course, the latest murderous suicide attacks on Israel are not helpful at all, and are also undermining the very possibility of Abu Mazen to implement his anti-terrorism programme and his intentions and efforts to implement the Road Map."