

Middle East: UN envoy presses efforts to defuse current tension

26 September – Continuing his efforts to defuse the current crisis in the Middle East, a senior United Nations envoy to the region met with Israeli and Palestinian officials today in Tel Aviv.

Earlier this week, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Terje Roed Larsen, visited Ramallah. According to a UN spokesman, the envoy has also talked on the phone with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, whose headquarters have been under siege for the past week.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday evening, Mr. Roed-Larsen called attention to the growing gap between diplomatic developments on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute – such as last week’s high-level meeting of the Quartet and the resolution adopted by the Security Council early Tuesday morning – and the situation on the ground, embodied by the siege of President Arafat’s headquarters.

The envoy cautioned that the international community’s attempts to foster a political process leading to a viable Palestinian State were being stymied, and warned that the coming period could lead to the death of the two-State solution. At the same time, he reiterated the UN’s unequivocal condemnation of terror.

Mr. Roed-Larsen echoed these themes in a speech on Tuesday to a meeting in Amman of the directors and deans of diplomatic academies and institutes of international relations. Rejecting terrorism “in simple and straightforward language” as murder, he said Israel had the legitimate right to defend itself, but questioned whether the current siege against President Arafat – or the broader one against the Palestinian people – would achieve that end.

Palestinians, he stressed, need hope. “They need to see that an end to occupation is palpable, that a viable Palestinian State is probable, and that it is possible to plan for a future for themselves and their children,” he said.

Recalling that the diplomatic Quartet – the UN, European Union, Russian Federation and United States – had outlined a roadmap for achieving a final settlement within three years, the envoy said both Palestinian and Israeli aspirations could be reconciled in one common vision. “What we need now, however deep our distress and pain, is to summon the will to turn our vision into a concrete reality,” he said.
