
UN envoy stresses inclusion of Syria and Lebanon in Middle East peace process

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A senior United Nations envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen, arrived today in Beirut for the start of a regional tour that follows-up on Sunday's meeting of the diplomatic Quartet in Jordan, stressing again the importance of including Syria and Lebanon in the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Roed-Larsen, the UN Special Co-ordinator, held separate meetings with Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and Foreign Minister Jean Obeid.

Afterwards, he reiterated Secretary-General Kofi Annan's statement on behalf of the Quartet - the UN, European Union, Russian Federation and United States - concerning the importance of including Syria and Lebanon in the current process, which is essential for the Road Map's goal of building a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Following their meeting Sunday on the shores of the Dead Sea in Jordan, the Quartet members issued a statement hailing positive developments in the peace process and urging further efforts by both Israel and the Palestinian authorities to consolidate the gains achieved so far.

The Quartet also hailed the appointment of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and the "strong start he and his Government have made in difficult circumstances," as well as the acceptance by both sides of the Road Map which envisages, in 2005, two States - Israel and Palestine - living side by side in peace and security.

Today, Mr. Roed-Larsen also noted his satisfaction with the current calm along the so-called Blue Line in southern Lebanon while emphasizing that the Lebanese army needs to further deploy forces in the south. He expressed concern about the recent increase in Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory.