

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

15 April 2004 - Following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Marie Okabe, Associate Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Question: I have a question concerning the Secretary-General's reaction on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. There's an article entitled, "Annan slams Bush for ignoring Palestinians". It says Mr. Annan criticized Mr. Bush Wednesday for ignoring the Palestinian's wishes and implicitly recognizing Israel's claim to some West Bank settlements. It says the United Nations spokesman says the U.S. policy shift seems to circumvent negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Could you clarify the Secretary-General's position?

Associate Spokesperson: Yes, we -- in response to two questions -- did respond last evening to the journalists who were asking about the Secretary-General's reaction to that subject. This is what we gave in response.

The Secretary-General welcomes the possibility of an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. He continues to believe that such a withdrawal should be complete and represent the end of the Israeli occupation of Gaza. He hopes that such a step would spark the renewal of the Quartet's Road Map to peace.

We also, in response to further questions, said the Secretary-General reiterates his position that final status issues should be determined in negotiations between the parties based on relevant Security Council resolutions. He strongly believes that they should refrain from taking any steps that would prejudice or pre-empt the outcome of such talks.

We can make that available to you as well.

Link: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/db041504.doc.htm>