Annan calls for focus on majorities for peace among Palestinians and Israelis

16 June 2004 – With opinion polls and other reports showing majorities among both Israelis and Palestinians ready for peace-making compromises, the leaders of both sides must not only listen to these people but must focus on them, according to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

"It would be especially helpful in the present climate for civil society on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to focus particular energy on countering the view that there are no serious partners for peace on either side," he said in a message delivered by Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor to the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East in Beijing.

The international media seminar, being held today and tomorrow, is the 12th since 1991 in a series organized by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) in response to General Assembly resolutions. The series discusses how civil society and the media can promote Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and the overall peace process, as well as the current state of the Road Map peace plan.

Private initiatives, though not a substitute for official diplomatic negotiations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, deserve praise as civil society's courageous effort to break the stalemate in the Road Map peace process, Mr. Annan said.

The Road Map, sponsored by the Quartet of the European Union, the Russian Federation, the UN and the United States, recommends reciprocal steps by the Israelis and Palestinians leading to the establishment of two states living side-by-side in peace by 2005.

Mr. Annan said he hoped civil society would continue to do what it did best in trying to end business as usual. "They will find in the United Nations a willing partner, equally dedicated to the just lasting and comprehensive solution for which we have all yearned for so long."

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