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PRESS RELEASE**Talks at Russian Foreign Ministry with Delegation of Palestinian Movement Hamas**

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A delegation of Hamas, led by head of the movement's politburo Khaled Mashaal, arrived in Moscow on March 3. It was received by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov. Consultations with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Alexander Saltanov took place.

The approaches devised in the Quartet of international mediators towards Palestinian-Israeli settlement problems were conveyed to the Hamas representatives. It was emphasized that the international community, respecting the democratic choice of the Palestinian people, expects of all the Palestinian National Authority structures the adoption of responsible and well-considered decisions corresponding to the basic interests of all Palestinians. Universally recognized principles envisaging a renunciation of violence as a means to achieve political aims, the observance of previous Palestinian-Israeli accords, the recognition of Israel's right to exist and the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state must be put at their core.

The importance of Hamas gradually transforming itself into a political party, focused on promoting democratic civil institutions and ensuring law and order in the Palestinian territories, was noted in this context.

Mashaal set out the approaches of Hamas to relations with Israel, and the prospects for Palestinian-Israeli settlement. He said that the aim of Hamas is not an escalation of violence and tension in the region, but the realization of the lawful rights and interests of the Palestinian people. The readiness of Hamas to maintain an inter-Palestinian cease-fire of March 2005 if Israel refrains from force was affirmed. It was noted that Hamas is mindful of the realities resulting from the conclusion of Palestinian-Israeli agreements and understandings.

Mashaal briefed on how the formation of a new Palestinian government has been proceeding. He stressed that the Palestinian authorities are going to focus on tackling economic and social problems, doing away with unemployment and poverty and creating worthy living conditions for the Palestinian people. Mashaal also gave an assurance that all of the international aid to the Palestinians will be used for these purposes and will be spent in

a transparent and accountable manner and under external monitoring.

The Russian side energetically backed the intention of Hamas to cooperate constructively with PNA Head Mahmoud Abbas, and work for continued inter-Palestinian consensus on the issues of national building, especially in the interest of creating an independent Palestinian state.

It was accentuated that the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process is a two-way street, and that its inalienable part is the sides' parallel fulfillment of the obligations assumed.

The exchange of views was useful, the talks' participants believed. It had contributed to a more profound understanding of the positions set out and the search of solutions which would help forge peaceful and stable relations between the PNA and Israel and work for the advancement of the settlement process and the establishment of an enduring peace in the region.

March 3, 2006