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Mikhail Kamynin, the Spokesman of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Answers Media Questions Regarding Upcoming Regular Ministerial Meeting of Quartet of

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Question: On May 9 a regular ministerial meeting of the Quartet of international mediators for Middle East settlement, Russia, the US, EU and UN, will take place in New York. What can you say in this connection?

Answer: The Quartet meeting attracts heightened attention in the world, since it is to be held at a very crucial time for the peace process in the Middle East. The acuteness of the moment is determined by the fact that an extremely grave situation has evolved in Palestinian-Israeli relations. In essence the peace process has come to a halt, tension mounts and alienation grows.

Question: Where do you see the principal task of the Quartet at this stage?

Answer: Under today's conditions, the task of the Quartet as the chief international mediator is to help the parties get out of the confrontational impasse, restore the dialogue and revive the prospect of negotiations based on the Roadmap, which will make it possible to create an independent Palestinian state which will live in peace and security with Israel.

In this connection we consider it necessary for the Quartet to convey to both parties an unambiguous signal of the necessity to abide by the principles of the renunciation of violence, mutual respect and the fulfillment of previously concluded agreements and understandings.

The decision to invite to the Quartet meeting the major regional players, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, is seen by us as timely and correct. Their point of view is important, as these countries are traditionally involved in the facilitation of Middle East settlement.

Question: What specific questions are expected to be discussed in New York within the framework of the upcoming meeting?

Answer: Of course, one central theme of the Quartet will be the exacerbating humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis in the Palestinian territories. It is borne in mind to arrive at decisions which would halt the degradation of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories and permit maintaining the Palestinian power institutions that have been created within the framework of the peace process.

We attach great importance to there being reiterated at the New York meeting the principles outlined in the Roadmap and also the commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of UNSC resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515 and the Arab peace initiative of 2002.

The Quartet will examine the results of the work of James Wolfensohn as its special representative for implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan, who, in our opinion, has made a substantial useful contribution at this post.

Question: What significance does Moscow attach to the economic component of aid to the PNA?

Answer: As is known, the Russian government has transferred 10 million dollars as urgent financial aid to the PNA. The money is placed in a special account of the PNA Head's office and will be used to supply the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population. We hope that our experience will turn out to be relevant.

A variety of options and mechanisms for providing financial aid to the Palestinians are now being actively discussed, including those via international organizations and the specialized institutions of the UN. This indicates a striving by the international community to find solutions to this problem which would permit effectively meeting the basic needs of the Palestinian population. Russia adheres to the same positions. The most important thing is that aid to the Palestinians should not cease.

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