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**PRESS RELEASE****Ministerial Meeting of Quartet of International Mediators for Middle East Settlement**

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On May 9 a regular ministerial meeting of the Quartet of international mediators for Middle East Settlement was held in New York, in which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ursula Plassnik, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, High Representative for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner took part. Also taking part in a Quartet meeting for the first time were the representatives of countries of the region - Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdelelah al-Khatib, and Saudi Arabian Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud al-Faisal.

A discussion of the state of affairs in Palestinian-Israeli settlement, brought about by the recent parliamentary elections in the Palestinian territories and Israel, took place.

There was expressed deep concern over the degradation of relations between the PNA and Israel. The Quartet urged both parties not to resort to violence and to adhere to the principles of mutual recognition and to previously concluded agreements and understandings. It underscored the need for both parties to avoid actions which could prejudice final status issues.

The Quartet reiterated its commitment to the Roadmap as the sole internationally recognized plan for Palestinian-Israeli settlement. In this context the meeting participants unanimously spoke in favor of restoring the negotiation process and welcomed the intentions of PNA Head Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to enter into dialogue.

The difficult humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories and the need to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people were discussed. The members of the Quartet supported the steps taken by Russia in this direction and called upon the international community to respond urgently to assistance requests by international organizations for the Palestinians. It was decided to at once start working out a mechanism for delivering to them financial assistance for humanitarian purposes.

The Quartet expressed its appreciation for the service of James Wolfensohn as Quartet Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, and noted his central role in the conclusion of the Agreement on Movement and Access and the promulgation of an agenda for Palestinian economic recovery.

At its meeting in New York, the Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the conflict based upon UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515.

May 11, 2006