

**HEADLINE: British Foreign Secretary reiterates her country's commitment to the establishment of a viable and prosperous state**

Margaret Beckett, British Foreign Secretary, said in an exclusive interview with *Alquds* daily that she hopes for positive outcomes from the Mecca meeting. This could help move the peace process forward and end the suffering of the Palestinian people and thereby encourage the international community to help establish a prosperous and viable Palestinian state living in peace side by side with Israel.

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**Q – What is the aim of your visit?**

A – The aim of the visit is to meet officials on both sides and to listen to their views and to look for a window of opportunity for resuming the dialogue and returning to the peace process. We do hope that the meetings held here and in Mecca would enable an agreement that would allow the two parties to return to the negotiating table.

**Q – As you know Hamas was democratically elected. Some members of the House of Commons have criticised the EU and US position of not dealing with Hamas.**

A – there are a number of parties represented at the House of Commons and each party has its own viewpoint. Some parties simplify matters.

**Q. – Do you expect Hamas to change position after participating in the new [national unity] government?**

A. We said from the beginning, and the PM has expressed this during his last visit to the region, that we can deal with a national unity government that complies with the Quartet principles. This is the European position and the American position as well. Such efforts were made in the past and have not succeeded.

**Q.- How do you view the Fatah-Hamas ongoing talks in Mecca and what is your position from these talks?**

A- These talks have not yet concluded and we do not know the outcomes yet. We will only be able to deal with a national unity government that complies with the Quartet principles.

**Q. Would you accept a government in which Hamas is part of?**

A. Hamas was democratically elected. The difficulty is that it has a responsibility to fulfil as a government. It is not clear yet that Hamas recognises and practices its obligations as a government. This has been an obstacle to forming a national unity government in the past. There are well-known principles that any government needs to respect in order for the international community to deal with.

**Q. Do you think the Israeli PM and Foreign Minister are interested in moving forward in the peace talks**

A. I think they share my viewpoint which I just explained and that there are a number of existing opportunities.

**Q. In the last two days, Jerusalem witnessed an Israeli escalation of digging near Al Aqssa mosque. How do you see this escalation?**

A. We expressed our discontent from this and hoped that this should only be carried out in a framework of prior agreement that respects the status quo in the city.

**Q. What about UK Aid – especially direct aid to the Palestinians?**

A. We have not stopped our financial aid to the Palestinians and it has been dependent on the situation on the ground.

**Q. Who did you meet on the Palestinian side, since most officials are out of the country?**

A. I met Rafiq Husseini and Nasser Al Qidwa, as most of them are in Mecca and Washington but I hope to meet Abbas again.

**Q. If the Mecca meeting does not succeed, what is your stand on the Palestinian internal fighting?**

A. This depends on the outcomes of the talks in Mecca. The success of the meeting is in the hands of the parties involved. Internal fighting itself is destructive and it causes further suffering to the Palestinian people and their cause.

**Q. Don't you think the international community and especially the United States is punishing the Palestinian people for its democratic choice?**

A. We recognise the Palestinian right to choose its government and we expressed this through our continued direct support to the Palestinian people and increasing the aid given. But the international community cannot deal with a government that is committed to violence and we need to find a different working relationship. The bombing in Eilat was officially welcomed by the Palestinian government and this could not be tolerated.

**Q. PM Blair said three years ago that the Palestinian case is on top of his agenda. Did priorities change with the stalemate in the peace process?**

A. Blair said this 10 years ago not three years ago.

**Q. But he expressed it more precisely three years ago?**

This is not precise either. Ten years ago he said that and he has repeated his point of view in a number of occasions. There are various opportunities and the current opportunity is unique and therefore he sees an opportunity for pushing the peace process forward and therefore makes an effort to utilise it.

**Q. It is said that President Bush is seeking to hold a summit that would include President Abbas, Olmert, King Abdullah of Jordan and President Mubarak..**

A. The important question is would this summit push the peace process forward. If there is practical outcome of such a meeting, this is what would happen. Everyone realises that there is a need for intensive efforts to deal with specific issues. And a summit that would not have any outcomes would have a destructive impact.

**Q. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed and injured in Iraq and there are thousands of Palestinian refugees there, how could the UK help protecting Palestinian refugees?**

A. This tragedy is not solely Palestinian; they are part of a greater tragedy in Iraq. It is similar to what is happening in Gaza. If possible, put an end to the conduct of individuals determined to kill their fellow Moslems in Iraq, it would be easier to solve a number of issues in the region.

**Q. What is your message to the Palestinian people?**

A. The international community is committed to a two states solution; a viable and prosperous Palestinian state side by side with prosperous Israel and there are many parties working on reaching that objective.

END

Translated: jumana jaouni