

Pakistan Foreign Minister Meets Israeli Foreign Minister

Islamabad, September 1: This morning in Istanbul a meeting was held between the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and Israel. This contact the first at this level, is essentially a gesture to Israel to underscore the importance that we attach to the end of Israeli occupation of Gaza and to the Middle East peace process. We expect Israel to continue the process in the West Bank so that all occupied Palestinian territories are vacated leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace and security. This is vital for just and durable peace in the Middle East.

During his visit last May, President Mahmud Abbas had discussed with President Pervez Musharraf how Pakistan could help the peace process in view of the important position it enjoys internationally and within the Islamic world and how Pakistan could impress upon Israel the need to move forward and respect the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. President Mahmoud Abbas also invited a delegation from Pakistan to visit the Palestinian territories. These sentiments were also publicly expressed by President Mahmoud Abbas. Day before yesterday, when President Musharraf informed President Mahmoud Abbas and then King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia about the prospective meeting, the two leaders welcomed the steps as a helpful initiative.

The meeting, however, does not imply recognition of Israel by Pakistan. We believe that this meeting will provide an impetus to the peace process by encouraging Israel to appreciate that reasonableness on its part in respecting the aspirations of the Palestinian people will draw positive responses from the Islamic world. The initiative is also consistent with the important role that Pakistan continues to play in the Islamic world for peace and security and in the interest of promoting the settlement of long standing issues that continue to torment Islamic societies.

Pakistan's position on the Palestinian issue remains unchanged. We stand by our Palestinian brothers and sisters in their cause for the establishment of an independent state of Palestine with Al-Quds as its capital. We will continue to support all efforts towards that objective including the Quartet Roadmap and the solemn Declaration of the Arab League Summit of March 2002.

Pakistan deeply appreciates the arrangement made by the Government of the brotherly country of Turkey in facilitating the meeting. We informed in advance a number of brotherly countries who are situated in close proximity to Israel or are directly concerned with the Palestinian issue.