

**Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland**

Speech in honour of Chairman Yasser Arafat at a banquet held at Akershus Castle, Oslo, 25 November 1993.

Dear Chairman Arafat,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for the Norwegian Government to receive you, Mr. Chairman, and your delegation, as our guests here in Norway. You have achieved something few people have: you have become a legend while you are still very much alive and in active pursuit of your goals. You have contributed courageously and substantially to the historic breakthrough which has changed the outlook of the Middle East. That famous handshake on the White House lawn on 13 September electrified a whole world, - and marked a turning point in history.

Tonight, we share with you the hope and aspiration that the Declaration of Principles on Interim Palestinian Self-government, which was initialed here in Oslo, will introduce a new era of peace, security and prosperity for the Palestinian people and the whole region of the Middle East.

We pledge our support to this process. We will work with you and the other responsible parties to unleash the positive and productive forces of the region, which is so rich in human and natural resources. Whole generations of Palestinians have known nothing but fear and contention all their lives. For an entire century, the Levant has been haunted by the specter of hostility and instability instead of enjoying the peace and stability it so deserves.

This region - the cradle of great civilizations long before the ascent of Athens and Rome - must now enjoy a period of healing and continue on the brave efforts towards reconciliation. Now is the time for peace between Israel and its neighbours. Now is the opportunity.

Few people know better than yourself how most of the secret negotiations took place here in Norway. We are grateful - and I will make no secret about it - also very proud that we gained the trust of both parties and were allowed to play a facilitating role. Rest assured that we are prepared to play a role in the future as well, should the parties so desire. However, the breakthrough is, first and foremost, the achievement and responsibility of the parties themselves.

Peace has not been reached, but it has become possible. It has to be constructed through careful, imaginative implementation of the Declaration of Principles.

Chairman Arafat, you knew that you would elicit not only support, but also opposition when you made your choice. We have heard the voices of rejection even in Norway. They carry little persuasion. They try to compensate by resorting to violence. Some have perhaps confused the struggle itself with the purpose of the struggle.

Over the years, close and friendly relations have developed between the Palestinian and Norwegian peoples in many different fields. Many Norwegians have become acquainted with your people through UN service in Gaza and Lebanon, through solidarity work, or as medical staff and other volunteers in Palestinian hospitals, clinics and schools. A number of Palestinian organizations and individuals have visited Norway through the years. Among us here tonight are numerous people who are long-standing friends of the Palestinian people. Let me also mention some of your finest ambassadors, the F.C. Gaza soccer team which has participated in the "Norway Cup" youth tournament for four consecutive years, and done better every year. They have truly won many hearts in Norway.

The Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions - LO - and its member organizations, should be especially mentioned. They have consistently defended the rights of their Palestinian colleagues and provided substantial material and financial assistance. Since 1981, Palestinian trade union representatives have participated in LO Congresses. The LO is now planning a comprehensive aid package for the trade union movement in the occupied territories.

Moreover, last year the International Solidarity Committee of the Labour Movement launched a fund-raising campaign partly in support of the Palestinians. Within this campaign, the Falcon Movement (Framfylkingen) has been supporting the establishment of a Palestinian sister organization. It has also participated in peace camps for Israeli and Palestinian youths.

The FAFO studies of living conditions on the West Bank and in Gaza constitute the latest involvement of the Labour movement. In the course of this project important contacts were established with Palestinian and Israeli social scientists, as well as with the Israeli Government following the Labour victory in Israel and with the PLO Headquarters in Tunis. As you all know, these contacts formed a network which eventually proved to be essential.

The international community carries a major responsibility, particularly with regard to mobilizing the economic resources needed for stabilizing the agreement, and making the fruits of peace available to your people and to the people of Israel. In chairing the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, Norway will play a central rôle in organizing and co-ordinating international assistance to the Palestinians. It is of the utmost importance that the economic cooperation between donors and recipients be based on transparency, accountability and efficiency. Our Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst has reported on the significant agreement you reached on this matter during your meeting in Tunis last week. I am sure the subject will be followed up in your continued talks tomorrow.

Norway is pleased to have pledged some USD 35 million in assistance to the Palestinian people during the first year. We intend to maintain this level of assistance during the five-year transitional period. We are also committed to continuing our support for Palestinian refugees through NGOs and the UNRWA - an agency to which Norway is already one of the largest contributors.

Mr. Chairman, you have proved to be a man who is capable of facing many challenges. Tremendous responsibilities have been placed on your shoulders. Some issues have had to be postponed, because present political frameworks and attitudes made it

impossible to agree. However, the process of cooperative implementation could so transform the political perspective that solutions may no longer be out of reach.

I know that both the Palestinian and the Israeli negotiators were fascinated with the European experience of economic integration as a means of transforming political relations and attitudes. The DOP contains extensive and detailed provisions for institutionalized economic cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian people as well as important perspectives concerning regional cooperation and integration. Such processes could give substance and resilience to peace in the Middle East.

The Norwegian people will be with you in your endeavours to create a better future for present and coming generations of Palestinians. I propose a toast to you, Chairman Arafat, and to the close and friendly relations between the Palestinian people and the people of Norway.