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The historic and courageous breakthrough in the Middle East peace process should indeed bring an end to a conflict which has tormented that entire region for most of this century. It brought superpowers to the brink of war. It has placed enormous burdens on the international community. It has deprived families of their dear ones and held people under the ominous spell of fear. Now, brave Israeli and Palestinian leaders have made reality of the seemingly impossible.

The role of the Socialist International in the process towards peace has so far not been fully recognized. But it was here, in the SI, that successive social democratic leaders in various countries met with the Israeli Labour Party and developed their relationship of friendship and understanding. It was here that, early, leaders were able to sow the seeds of the dialogue with the representatives of the Palestinian people.

The Middle East Committee was able to talk to all parties also in times of crisis and consternation. My personal relations to leaders in the region date back to the 1970s. Foreign Ministers Knut Frydenlund and Thorvald Stoltenberg had met with Chairman Yassir Arafat since the early 1980s. They passed the torch to Johan Jørgen Holst who facilitated the later stages of the negotiations, building on the Norwegian Labour Party's tradition for balanced relations with the parties to the Middle East conflict.

Enjoying the confidence of both sides, we were gradually able to establish the back-channel which led to the initialling, in Oslo on 20 August, of the Declaration of Principles and finally to the defining moment on the South Lawn of the White House when dream became reality, when it was proven that even the deepest trenches can be bridged and when our vision of peace and hope rose above the horizon.

It has been our experience that a network of personal contacts and relations also at the political level are particularly valuable when supported by meticulous studies of the needs and aspirations of the parties. Subsequently, a broadly based study of the quality of living in Gaza and the West Bank was undertaken by FAFO, the Institute for Applied Social Science which was established by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade

Unions.

This study provided an important data base for the multilateral working group on refugees in the framework of the Madrid process. But equally important, the study process itself brought our people into close contact with people on both sides of the conflict, and established confidence, since they all knew that our people were truly impartial with no political ambitions other than contributing to peace.

Thus, a small group of dedicated and qualified people were able to work under real secrecy. The Norwegian Labour movement constituted in many ways an unlikely and unexpected partner in a project to seek peace in the Middle East, and the prospect of maintaining secrecy may have appeared brighter than in many alternative cases.

FAFO was able to build on the experience of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions which had maintained lasting relationships with the Israeli labour union Histadrut and with the Palestine Trade Union Federation and with trade unions in Gaza and the West Bank, a work based on the belief that without responsible trade unions, social cohesion will suffer.

The Declaration of Principles is now public knowledge, and I shall just reiterate the main provisions of the document. The Declaration will come into force on October 13th, 1993 resulting in an immediate transfer of authority to the Palestinians in the spheres of education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism.

It projects the establishment of a Palestinian interim self government authority, an elected council for the Palestinian people on the West Bank and the Gaza strip for a transitional period not exceeding five years leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

Elections for the Council are to be held not later than nine months after the entry into force of the peace accord. Not later than the eve of the elections for the Council Israel will carry out a redeployment of military forces. By December 13th, 1993 Israel and the PLO are to sign an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the Jerico area. An accelerated and scheduled withdrawal from those areas will be completed no later than January 13th, 1994. Israel will remain responsible for external security, settlements, Israelis, foreign relations and other mutually agreed matters.

The agreement on withdrawal of Israeli forces will include inter alia a temporary agreed international or foreign presence, a joint Palestinian-Israeli coordination and cooperation committee for mutual security purposes, arrangements for safe passage between the Gaza strip and the Jerico area, and an economic development and stabilization programme. The two sides are also to negotiate an Interim

Agreement which specifies the structure and authority of the Council. Permanent status negotiations are to commence no later than the third year of the interim period.

The peace accord was developed and shaped within the continuity of the Middle East peace process, drawing on the structure and content of the Camp David accords and the draft declaration of principles under negotiation in the front channel in Washington. Some key issues have been deferred to the final status negotiations, most notably Jerusalem, settlements, borders, refugees, security agreements and relations with other neighbours. Those issues were not ripe for resolution in 1993. However, it would not do just to defer the issues. We need to institute a process which can transform perceptions and outlooks and make possible later constructions and solutions which seem unattainable or unacceptable today.

Peace has not arrived yet in the Middle East, but it is now in the making. A new road has been opened. It is not a paved highway. Nor is it a road safe from robbers and spoilers. Complex negotiations are ahead of us concerning the interim agreement, military withdrawal and economic development. The prospects of success now seem brighter than before the historical breakthrough.

The international community at large carries major responsibilities, particularly in regard to mobilizing the economic resources which are needed for purposes of stabilizing the agreement and making the fruits of peace available to the ordinary child, woman and man. And that effort cannot be confined to the present inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian camps and refugees in Lebanon and Jordan must receive support as well if we are to prevent the most deprived from turning against the agreement, from becoming the victims of despair and rejectionist agitation. Furthermore, it is important to channel assistance both for immediate emergency purposes and for medium and long term economic development. It is particularly important to provide immediate support to Palestinian educational and health institutions, to work with Palestinian institutions in general, in order to enable them to develop capacities for self reliance and dignity.

Now we must mobilize our collective political and financial resources to help move the peace process forward. For the peace process to succeed, it must be consolidated and stabilized by the economic development the two parties have agreed to undertake together. The process of implementation could change the perspectives and expectations of the parties, convert interdependence into a sense of community and make possible solutions and visions which today seem beyond reach.

Projecting an ethos of economic and regional cooperation, through commitments to institutionalized and programmed activities could help to overcome enmities and antagonisms in the Middle East as they had in Europe. In many ways the commitment spelled out in the appendices on economic and

regional cooperation of the peace accord are the most important from the point of view of future resolution.

The economic situation in Gaza and on the West Bank is dramatic and calls for immediate and extensive economic aid. We must respond to the just but unfulfilled aspirations of the Palestinians - for job opportunities, for schools, hospitals and universities. Now we must assist in building houses, roads and water supplies, and make reconciliation pay so that new generations of Israelis and Palestinians may grow up without fear, as good neighbours in a life of dignity.

A period of healing is needed in which all peace-loving countries, the UN itself, the Bretton Woods institutions, other financial institutions, and the EC join financially and substantially in a coordinated, immediate investment-for-peace programme. During last week's pledging conference in Washington, the international community committed considerable resources, close to USD 2 billion. Norway's assistance will be substantial and we shall be honored to play a continued political role should the parties so desire.

Let me emphasize, the breakthrough in the Middle East peace process would not have been possible without the election of a Labour government in Israel. Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Perez came into office unencumbered by the stalemate which had developed through Likhud policies and Arab reactions thereto.

The Socialist International should now engage itself decisively in the process of conciliation between Israel and the Palestinians. This should be done not just by encouraging its member parties to influence national policies in a favorable manner, but also by providing a good example in terms of fraternal cooperation among social democratic parties and social democrats in the region. In this respect, it would seem appropriate for the Socialist International to establish closer contacts with those political leaders in the region that are most sympathetic to our social democratic ideals and values. Social democratic involvement will be crucial to the outcome of the peace process for all parties and peoples concerned.

The day will come when all the people of the Middle East will share a common future of democracy, social and economic development and opportunity, as well as peace and security, and when the Middle East will fully liberate the human creativity which is so vital to any social and economic development. We on our part would fail abysmally in our duties should we falter now in our efforts to support the process of prying peace out of the knot of conflict which men and women of vision have dared to think, dared to do. But fail we shall not. By the full strength of our powers and visions, let us listen to the voice of unborn generations and help make the Middle East the land of great promise its people rightly deserve.