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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Fw. (Sydney Morning Herald) Abbas ready for direct talks with Israel

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Subject: (Sydney Morning Herald) Abbas ready for direct talks with Israel

Palestinian President Abbas said he was ready for direct negotiations with Israel, following Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's accusations that the Palestinians are avoiding the talks. "We are ready to hold direct peace negotiations with Israel," Abbas told reporters after talks with Jordan's King Abdullah II in Amman. "We have negotiated with Israeli governments before, more than once. Why would we avoid such talks? We are not."

Netanyahu told the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs and defense earlier July 26 the Palestinians were trying to sneak out of direct negotiations while Israel was ready to start them "immediately." "We have an understanding with the Americans that we need to move now, without any delay, to direct negotiations, but in response, we have a clear Palestinian attempt to avoid this process," Netanyahu said. "They are trying to stall and to sneak away from direct negotiations and to cause the Arab League to shackle the talks."

Netanyahu's remarks come just days ahead of a meeting in Cairo between Abbas and the Arab League at which the Palestinian leader will discuss the indirect talks with Israel, which began in May, and will also address the pressing question of a shift to direct negotiations.

Abbas has repeatedly said he would not move to direct talks without tangible progress on the key issues of borders and security, and without a complete freeze on Jewish settlement building on occupied Palestinian land.

Abbas is due to meet Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos July 27 in Amman before flying to Cairo.