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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Quartet must take 'decisive action': Palestinians (AFP)

(AFP) - The Middle East peacemaking Quartet, which meets on Monday in Washington, must take "decisive action" to restart peace talks, a senior Palestinian official said.

In a statement issued ahead of the meeting of representatives from the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia, Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi urged the Quartet to "undertake its responsibilities seriously."

The group is expected to discuss ways to restart stalled peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, in a bid to head off Palestinian attempts to seek membership at the United Nations in September.

The Palestinians have said they will not be deterred from seeking UN membership, but that they remain open to new talks if they are based on clear guidelines and Israel stops Jewish settlement construction during negotiations.

"It is clear that if there is to be any genuine political momentum and progress, then the Quartet has to undertake its responsibilities seriously," said Ashrawi, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

She called on the group to commit to clear guidelines and a timeframe for any new talks, and to "effectively bring Israel to compliance, including a cessation of all settlement activities."

Talks between Israel and the Palestinians broke down shortly after they restarted in September 2010 when Israel declined to renew a partial freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank.

The Palestinians have accused Washington of failing to insist on a new moratorium and weakening the Quartet's position on settlement construction, which much of the international community regards as illegal.

"The United States must not again undermine its own standing and prospects for peace by diluting the Quartet's political position or preventing positive engagement on the part of the international community," Ashrawi said.

"The Quartet must exhibit the political will to translate words into action. Until this happens there will be no change to the current status quo."

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