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Peace products

By HASAN ABU-LIBDEH

03/05/2010

The Palestinian campaign against settlement products represents a practical commitment to peace, writes the PA minister of national economy.

The issue of settlements and their illegality under international law should dominate debate surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and a return to negotiations. Israel's refusal to adhere to international law or its previous commitments, particularly its obligation to freeze all settlement construction as stipulated under the 2003 road map, has led to a low point in relations with Washington. Israel's policy of building settlements on occupied Palestinian land undermines prospects for peace, and continues at the expense of all Palestinians. That is why the Palestinian government, private sector, civil society groups and organizations are taking practical action to oppose illegal settlements.

Recently, the Palestinian Authority launched a "call to action" campaign focused on raising public awareness of the political and economic implications of settlement businesses and their products, in particular how they help sustain the illegal settlements. The campaign also aims at helping Palestinian consumers know their rights, and distinguish between illegal settlement products and legal Israeli products imported under the existing Paris Economic Protocols. Consumers today are being given the tools to make conscientious decisions to replace settlement products in their homes with other products, while giving priority to Palestinian ones in support of economic nation-building.

The PA is serious about building for a future state living side by side with Israel. By definition, this includes building a viable economy, free from economic dependence on Israel – a dependency Israel has actively cultivated and exploited for the past four decades.

ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS produce a wide range of products that reach a large number of countries. Their first stop is the captive Palestinian market under occupation. Israel literally floods this market with its goods, including settlement products, while maintaining policies that hinder Palestine's productive capacity and economic growth, including severe restrictions on

freedom of movement for people and goods.

The impact of settlement products on the economic viability of a Palestinian state extends further than the share they represent of the Palestinian market. Settlements are built on stolen land – land Palestinians are subsequently prevented from developing for residential, industrial or commercial use. Settlements benefit from the exploitation of our natural resources, particularly water, while Israel continues to deny us access to those resources. How is the PA to build the foundations of a decent economy given the status quo?

Palestinians have the most to lose if a just and lasting peace remains elusive, just as they are paying the real price for Israel's intransigence. That is why we are taking it upon ourselves to assert our rights, especially when others fail to protect them. It is this that fuels the campaign against settlement products.

OURS IS not a campaign against Israel, nor does it target products made in Israel. To portray it as such is not only wrong, it obscures the real issues, namely the illegality of settlement activity, its impact on Palestinians and the enormous threat it poses to the viability of a two-state solution. This initiative should reassure all who are serious about saving the two-state solution. The PA is still committed to all previous agreements, including the Paris Protocol. And Palestinians are committed to the political process proposed by the international community. Peace with settlements and settlement products is an obvious illusion.

The status quo undermines current attempts to restore credibility to the peace process as well as hope among those who believe in peace founded on justice. Time is a luxury we can no longer afford, while today's international consensus on the two-state solution is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

Israel's commitment and seriousness about peace hangs in the balance.

*The writer is the Palestinian Authority Minister of National Economy.*