

Politicians alone cannot create peace, UN official says at Middle East media forum



Under-Secretary-General Kiyoo Akasaka

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The United Nations communications chief today called on those involved in traditional and social media to explore how they can help foster a climate conducive to peace in the Middle East.

“It is important to remember that peace is not something that politicians alone can create. Journalists and artists have a critical role,” said Kiyoo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

In his closing remarks to the International Media Seminar on Middle East Peace, which ended today in Budapest, Mr. Akasaka said he hoped the participants at the two-day meeting will be inspired to consider further how obstacles to a permanent agreement between Israelis and Palestinians can be overcome through their work.

The annual two-day seminar, organized by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), brought together scholars, activists, journalists, writers, theatre producers, musicians and bloggers for a dialogue aimed at enhancing understanding between peoples and achieving a just and lasting peace based on a two-State solution.

This year's event was on the theme of "Prospects for Peace: Understanding Current Challenges and Overcoming Obstacles," and took account of the dramatic changes in the political landscape in the region, including the increased role of new media such as Twitter and Facebook in fostering political change.

Mr. Akasaka emphasized that this year's gathering was very important because of the ongoing stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"We need a push. We need negotiations to be started. This sort of seminar, I hope, will be helpful in producing the atmosphere conducive for re-opening negotiations," he stated in an interview with UN Radio.

He added that the event was also significant in light of the 'Arab spring' – the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and pro-democracy movements taking place elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa – and its implications for the peace process.

"There was, some pointed out, a very strong view that democracy was only found in the State of Israel. But now that the democratization is in the making in many Arab countries, the perception of the world about the Arab people and the Arab world may significantly change," he noted, adding that this could have positive repercussions for Palestine.

The role of the media, particularly social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, in transforming societies in the region was also highlighted by participants, as was the role of the creative community, including writers, poets, musicians and artists.

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