



PRIME MINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

Introduction of President Yasser Arafat

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When, in 1969, Yasser Arafat was elected Chairman of the PLO, a colleague of his asked how he felt. Mr. Arafat answered in one word: "Responsibility".

Today we are welcoming him here - a man who has lived with great strain and challenge throughout the whole of his mature life, and who now will address us as the fully democratically elected leader of his people.

The path to the present was crooked. There has been divisiveness, not only among the parties to the Middle-East conflict, but also between factions, groups and parties on both sides. Yasser Arafat has had to assert his leadership in a turbulent internal and external environment. Sometimes playing the non-compromizing role himself. Sometimes persuading his own more hawkish nationals to stay cool, - knowing that at the end of the day, he was the one responsible for the future of his people.

When the time and the circumstances were right, he had the courage, he had the determination and the flexibility of mind to go for a peaceful solution.

While the whole world remembers the handshakes on the White House lawn between former enemies, I have equally clear in my mind your visit to Oslo one year later when you were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Later in the day you came to my office to lay out, not your needs to prevail in a struggle, but your needs to create a civil society in the areas covered by the Oslo Agreement.

Throughout the process and the progress, you have maintained a high and equal level of compassion - and of responsibility. Today you are struggling to build school-houses, water and electricity -infrastructure, roads. You are establishing a national economy from scratch. And we have a moral obligation to assist you. I am personally grateful for the trust you have shown my country, now chairing the group of donor countries. We will support you, to the best of our ability - We know we will see the day when the Palestinian people are living in greater prosperity, at lasting peace with Israel. Let us all welcome a man of responsibility - President Yasser Arafat.