

**INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SEMINAR ON PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST
PROSPECTS FOR PEACE: UNDERSTANDING CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OVERCOMING
OBSTACLES**

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

12-13 JULY 2011

OPENING STATEMENT

H.E. MR ZSOLT NÉMETH

MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HUNGARY

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Participants,

It is a great pleasure for me to greet you here, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, János Martonyi, who – due to another urgent obligation – is not able to participate at this event.

While the North-African and Middle East region is in upheaval, some would say *now* is not the right time to focus on the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. I believe the opposite is true. At this crucial moment, it is more important than ever to reinvigorate all efforts aimed at seeking a solution to this conflict with a view of ensuring sustainable stability and peace in the region.

I am aware of the difficulty of taking bold initiatives for promoting the Middle East peace process in general, and especially now, amid the on-going turbulences in the Middle East and North Africa. However, I also see an unprecedented opportunity and, at the same time, a growing pressure created by the changes in the surrounding neighbourhood, the speech of President Obama in May, the recent moves towards Palestinian reconciliation and the approaching UN General Assembly: all these bring a renewed focus on the urgent need of resuming talks and finding a solution.

Hungary firmly believes that the transformational moment we are witnessing is indeed an opportunity not to be missed. The parties, the region and the world have waited long enough. Their hopes and aspirations have been dashed too many times. The international community and the UN have invested a great deal of effort in recent times, and will continue to do so, because it is our conviction that by complementing and supporting international efforts direct negotiations between the parties will eventually be resumed. Together with the EU, we are strongly convinced that negotiations are the best way forward if there is to be a lasting resolution of the conflict. The parties and the international community must contribute to the resumption of substantive talks as a matter of urgency.

Hungary believes that setting clear parameters which define the basis for negotiations is crucial for reaching a successful outcome, while at the same time all unilateral measures which could undermine confidence should be avoided. Trust between the parties should be restored. This is why international efforts have been aimed at promoting a credible framework for the resumption of negotiations between the parties.

At this point, let me express my sincere hope that the Quartet meeting which convened yesterday night in Washington and has so far failed to reach an agreement will eventually yield the adoption of a statement that could bridge the gap between the parties and allow for a return to the negotiating table. We strongly believe that the road to two states living side by side in peace and security leads through direct negotiations.

Wherever conflicts occur in the world, dialogue should be preferred to confrontation in seeking a solution. An event like this media seminar has the potential of promoting a spirit of understanding and tolerance. It gathers participants with different backgrounds – policy-makers, Government officials, diplomats, civil society organizations, academia and journalists – who have the ability of sending constructive messages, which could, in turn, have a positive impact on the public opinion of their respective countries and communities. Along with political processes aimed at reaching a solution, the role of the media – in particular the new forms of visual and social media –, as well as that of the creative community should be further explored: How can the media promote the peace agenda by sensitizing public opinion on the issue of the Middle East peace process and by allowing for increased people-to-people contacts within and between the communities concerned? Or, putting it in a slightly different way: How can the media contribute to reducing tensions, ensuring objectivity, providing a credible reflection of events on the ground and thereby, creating an environment conducive to peace?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you a very successful exchange of ideas. May this event be yet another step towards promoting mutual understanding and dialogue in the Middle East – that would be in the genuine interest of us all.

Thank you for your attention.