

Int'l community should help boost peace process — FM

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh and Petra

BRUSSELS — Jordan has reiterated its call on parties involved in the Middle East conflict to build on the outcome of last month's Annapolis peace meeting to reach a peace settlement before the end of next year.

Foreign Minister Salah Bashir said on Friday in remarks at a meeting of Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) countries and NATO members at the level of foreign ministers that Jordan would remain concerned with the peace process until a Palestinian state is established.

He said Israel should take immediate trust-building steps, while the international community should provide all kinds of assistance to push forward the peace process.

Arab and Western Foreign ministers, who gathered here for NATO's annual meeting, called for serious efforts towards peace and criticised Israel's recent decision to expand a Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem as counterproductive.

"I've made very clear about seeking clarification on precisely what this means. I've made clear that we're at a time when the goal is to

build maximum confidence between the parties and this doesn't help build confidence," US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told a press conference on Friday after her talks with counterparts from MD countries.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit also slammed Israel for launching a tender to build new housing units at a Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, saying such measures contradict Israel's commitments in Annapolis.

Aboul Gheit told The Jordan Times that the Israeli move also violates the trust-building measures it pledged

to take in an attempt to create a suitable atmosphere for launching serious negotiations with the Palestinian side.

The Egyptian top diplomat said the attending MD Arab countries called on the international community, especially the US, to shoulder their responsibilities and press Israel to give up such a step.

"The Arab side urged seriousness over implementing the results of the Annapolis meeting. What we need now are serious measures, credibility and the halt of settlements," he said.

Israel announced last

week plans to invite bids to build more than 300 new housing units in Har Homa, a settlement in East Jerusalem. Palestinian officials blasted the expansion project as a "serious violation" and called on the US and UN Security Council to put pressure on Israel to halt the building of the settlement.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had also said the move was "not helpful", adding that he would discuss the matter with his partners in the Quartet for Middle East peace.

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