

Sunday, May 02, 2010 Israel Today Staff

## Obama tells Palestinians that Israel is to blame

US President Barack Obama made clear in a recent letter to the Palestinians that he views Israel as the obstacle to peace and will approach further peace efforts from that point of view, according to senior Palestinian Authority officials.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat confirmed for the Bethlehem-based Ma'an news agency that such a letter was sent, and that in it Obama "clarified the US stance on the peace process and Israel's intransigence on the issue of settlements."

Erekat said that the letter contained several assurances to the Palestinians, but refused to go into detail.

A day earlier, London newspaper *The Guardian* reported on what one of those assurances may be - a proposal to start backing official UN condemnation of any and all Israeli "settlement activity."

Washington has traditionally used its veto power to block any UN resolutions that would put Israel in a difficult position vis-à-vis allowing Jews to build on their ancestral and biblical lands. If the US were to stop vetoing such resolutions, which would likely result in an increase in condemnation, Israel could be forced to implement an unofficial Jewish building freeze across the board and for an unlimited amount of time.

That report would seem to fit with the more vague account of assurances another Palestinian official said the letter contained.

PA secretary general Tayeb Abdel Rahim on Sunday told reporters that the letter made the usual commitments to an independent Palestinian state with territorial continuity. Rahim also said that Obama promised to start publicly assigning blame to those he sees holding up peace and to force Israel into indefinitely extending its temporary settlement freeze.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu implemented the 10-month freeze at the behest of Washington in order to test the Palestinians' readiness to return to the negotiating table. When it was first announced last November, US officials praised Netanyahu for taking "unprecedented" steps for peace. Now that it is clear the Palestinians are not going to respond in kind, the Obama administration appears to be blaming Netanyahu for not having done enough.