

Palestinian Leader Wants Peace Talks With Israel

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Thursday he hoped peace talks with Israel would restart this year, although the chances of a resumption seemed slim.

Abbas made his comments during a meeting in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said Russia would do all it could to promote peace in the region.

"We ... hope that substantive peace talks will start this year, although the hopes are probably not very high," Abbas said through an interpreter at the start of talks at Putin's state residence outside Moscow.

"We hope that in the end we will reach a political solution based on the two-state principle," he said.

Peace talks broke down in 2010 over Palestinian objections to Israel expanding settlements on occupied land the Palestinians want for a state. Israel has called for a resumption of the talks without preconditions.

After meeting Putin, Abbas said: "We will need major efforts to resume serious and substantive process on the basis of the decisions approved by the international law and the Arab peace initiative."

Russia, a member of the Quartet of Middle East peace mediators along with the United States, the United Nations and the European Union, has criticised the Israeli settlement expansion.

Unlike the United States, it supported the de facto recognition of the sovereign state of Palestine in a U.N. General Assembly vote in November.

Putin pinned a state friendship medal on Abbas's jacket on Thursday and said "Russia's relations with Palestine lie on a strong historical foundation."

Putin has tried to balance relations with Arabs, including the Palestinians, that date back to the Soviet era with improved ties to Israel during his 13 years in power. He visited Israel and the West Bank last year.