

Middle East road map offers 'window of opportunity' says WCC's Raiser

By Stephen Brown

Geneva, 4 June (ENI)--The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Konrad Raiser, said on Wednesday that a US-backed "road map" for Middle East peace was not ideal but provided a "new - albeit very small - window of opportunity".

Raiser's comments came in a WCC news release from Geneva as US President George Bush was discussing the peace plan at a meeting in Jordan with the Israeli and Palestinian prime ministers.

"The 'road map' is seriously lacking in detail and is far from being ideal. There are many vague and disturbing elements in it," said Raiser. "However, it provides a new - albeit very small - window of opportunity for a two-state solution."

The peace plan was drawn up by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia, with Israeli and Palestinian consultation. It aims to create two states, setting up an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Raiser noted that the plan stressed the need for a solution to the conflict based on two key UN resolutions.

"The implementation of these resolutions would mean an end of 'the occupation that began in 1967' and lead to the emergence of an 'independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours'."

However, Raiser deplored the fact that the road map hardly dealt with the issues of borders, the status of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements or Palestinian refugees until the end of the process.

He said: "Whether it will lead the two sides to move from mutual destruction to a path of mutual benefit remains to be seen."

In the news release, Raiser also defended the WCC's stance of opposition to the US-led military action against Iraq, saying he continued to believe the war had been "immoral" and "illegal".

"The war on Iraq did not produce regime change, but a regime demolition without a constructive and sustainable change," said Raiser.

The WCC said that Raiser's comments were in response to "critical questions" posed to organizations like the council, which had a high profile in opposition to the war in Iraq.

On Thursday, in Paris, WCC representatives are to discuss ways of strengthening the United Nations and international law in the aftermath of the war.

Raiser rejected the idea that churches were irrelevant because they had been unable to stop the war.

Said Raiser: "The unanimity of the protest of the churches has, however, strengthened their voice and increased their moral standing in society. This is more important than their institutional power."

The WCC has 342 member churches throughout the world from virtually every Christian tradition except the Roman Catholic Church with which it however co-operates.