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Egyptian envoy: Peace process not dead, but seriously ill

• By YONAH JEREMY BOB

"The peace process is not dead, but may be seriously ill, unless we maintain" the legacy of peace of Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin, Egyptian Ambassador Hazem Khairat said on Tuesday.

Khairat, speaking at the annual IDC Herzliya Conference, said that he "genuinely believes peace between Palestinians and Israel is still possible," but that it requires both sides to exhibit a stronger will in that direction.

He called on all the involved "societies not to be dragged by extreme and dramatic voices" away from peace, and emphasized that the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative was still the best basis for reaching regional peace.

The 10-sentence proposal offers regional peace to Israel from the Arab League in exchange for a withdrawal to something approximating the pre-1967 war borders, and a "just settlement" of the Palestinian refugee problem based on UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

Rhetorically asking, "Does Israel really consider itself a part of the Middle East? Is Israel really ready to integrate with its neighbors based on mutual cooperation and coexistence?" Khairat said he viewed trends in Israel toward endorsing annexation of portions of the West Bank as dangerous.



AMBASSADOR OF Egypt Hazem Khairat: Does Israel really consider itself a part of the Middle East? (Gilad Kavalchik)

Without explicitly criticizing the US, the ambassador implied that the ceremony next week surrounding opening the American Embassy in Jerusalem could destabilize peace efforts.

Without peace, Israel and its neighbors will all continue to face the danger of nation-states destabilizing throughout the region, Khairat said.