**ElBaradei: Israeli occupation only understands force**

Former IAEA chief expresses support for Palestinian resistance, calls Gaza 'world's biggest jail'

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Former IAEA Chief Mohamed ElBaradei, who is considering contending in Egypt's presidentialelections next year, expressed his support for the "Palestinian resistance" while slamming Israel.

In a report published Tuesday, the experienced diplomat said that Palestinian violence was the only path open to the Palestinian people, because "the Israeli occupation only understands the language of violence."

ElBaradei (67), who returned to Cairo last February, has not officially announced that he will run in the elections, but behind the scenes a campaign is already underway, including visits to mosques and churches, and photo ops with public figures. A month ago he even established a national "foundation" for democratic reform in Egypt.

According to the report from the UPI news agency, ElBaradei started the ball rolling with a meeting Monday with members of his movement, thus making it clear to Israel how relations between the states will be after the elections – if he wins. According to Ibrahim Nawar, a senior figure in the movement, ElBaradei also said, "The peace process has become a stupid joke which we talk about without achieving any progress."

The former International Atomic Energy Agency leader criticized the fence which Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak set up along the Gaza Strip border. The fence "hurts Egypt's reputation," he said. "It appears to be participation in the siege of Gaza, which has become the world's largest prison."

"The logical solution to the problem," he continued, "would be to close the tunnels and open border crossings while creating a free trade zone in Rafah where Palestinians can trade and then return to Gaza."

ElBaradei also sent a message to his supporters, who have invested great hope in him for the presidential elections in 2011, to put pressure on Mubarak for democratic reforms. He called on all the opposition parties to boycott the parliamentary elections, due this year, if amendments are not made to the constitution to ensure transparency.

The participation of the opposition in the elections under current conditions, he said, will end in a landslide victory which will only grant further legitimacy to Mubarak's regime.