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Subject: China says supports Palestinians' UN aspirations (Reuters)

BEIJING, Sept 20 (Reuters) - China's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday it understood and supported Palestinian aspirations to seek full U.N. membership, but stopped short of saying how it would vote on the matter.

China "believes that establishing a state is a legal right the Palestinian people cannot be denied and is the basis and precondition for peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel", ministry spokesman Hong Lei said.

"As for the matter of the Palestinians independently establishing a state and applying to the United Nations, we express understanding, respect and support," he told a regular news briefing.

"At the same time, we believe that the international community should also step up efforts to ensure an early return to talks between the Palestinians and Israel."

China has traditionally had close relations with the Palestinians, but also has good ties with Israel, especially in the field of defence.

The United States and Israel say a Palestinian state should emerge from peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel, which would be impossible if the Palestinians declare a state on their own. Washington has pledged to veto such a Palestinian request at the U.N. Security Council.

Palestinians say U.S.-brokered peace talks have foundered, in part because of continued Jewish settlement-building in the occupied West Bank, leaving them no choice but to request recognition without waiting for Israel to agree.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Monday he would press ahead with plans to ask for a Security Council vote on Friday on Palestinian membership.

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