

**Palestinians, Israelis To Start New Talks On Jan 9: U.S.
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WASHINGTON, Jan 6 (Bernama) -- The Palestinians and the Israelis will start a fresh round of direct talks on the Middle East peace process in Amman, capital of Jordan next Monday (Jan 9), State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said.

"They're going to meet directly and they're going to make under the sponsorship of the Jordanians, and particularly Foreign Minister Judeh," China's Xinhua news agency reported, citing her as saying said at a regular briefing.

She added that the United States welcomed "the Jordanian leadership on this issue."

Jordan hosted a face-to-face meeting between the two parties on Tuesday in Amman, which is considered to be the first such kind of talks between them in more than one year and a half.

However, the Jordan talks, although being described as face-to-face, are not seen as the revival of direct negotiations aimed at reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

When asked to comment on Palestinian demand that Israel must stop its settlements before direct negotiations resume, Nuland said: "We believe that the parties talking directly together is the best way forward. We've had one round of that."

She said that the United States has called on both sides "not to set preconditions, not to negotiate in public."

Under U.S. brokering, the Israelis and Palestinians resumed direct negotiations in Sept 2010 in Washington.

But the talks quickly collapsed because Israel refused to renew its moratorium on the West Bank settlement construction.

The Quartet, which groups the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, has been pressing the Israelis and the Palestinians to resume direct negotiations over a two-state solution.

The group wants the two parties to present comprehensive proposals before Jan. 26 and reach an overall agreement by the end of 2012.

Nuland said that Washington was encouraged that the two parties are "both coming to the table" and "talking directly," noting "that's the best path forward."

"What the quartet has tried to do, what the United States has tried to do, what the Jordanian government is trying to do is provide a positive environment for them to work in, to give them some ideas, to be supportive, et cetera," she said.

"From our perspective, the fact that they are now meeting face-to-face is a very good

thing," Nuland added.

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