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Middle East politicians to learn lessons of peace

Politicians from Israel and Palestine are in Ireland this week to learn lessons from the Northern Ireland peace process. Fourteen members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Israeli Knesset parliament are on a five-day visit to Dublin and Belfast.

The Irish Foreign Affairs Department and the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation helped organise and fund the trip which aims to promote dialogue on issues of mutual interest. The Middle East delegation will hold talks with politicians, Government officials and prisoners who have played a role in the Northern Ireland peace process. The group is to meet Foreign Affairs Minister Dermot Ahern for discussions in Dundalk tomorrow.

The Co Louth TD remarked that the peace process in the Middle East was a very protracted and complex issue but there were areas where Northern Ireland can offer lessons.

Mr Ahern, who has visited the Middle East on several occasions, said: "I know from my contacts and visits to the Middle East in the last couple of years that there is major interest in the peace process in Ireland. "The process and steps towards the establishment of the Northern Executive has been raised with me on a number of occasions by Middle East Parliamentarians and observers." He added: "A lasting and just peace for Palestine will have major benefits for Israel also, not just from a security perspective but also economically. "There is a peace dividend at the end of the process which can only benefit Israelis and Palestinians."

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