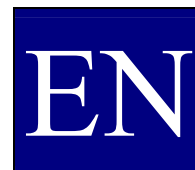




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process

*2846th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 28 January 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The EU welcomes the start of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials on all outstanding issues, including all final status issues, with a view to concluding a peace agreement before the end of 2008 as agreed in Annapolis last November. The Council reaffirms that this is a crucial opportunity for regional and international partners to support effectively a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In this context, the Council calls for a continued broad and constructive involvement by Arab partners, building on the Arab Peace Initiative. The Council urges the parties to implement their Road Map obligations in parallel with their negotiations. The goal remains the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza that will unite all Palestinians, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The EU considers that settlement building anywhere in the occupied Palestinian Territories is illegal under international law. This includes Israeli settlements in both East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Settlement construction is an obstacle to peace. The EU is therefore deeply concerned by recent settlement activity, particularly the recent tenders issued for new construction in Har Homa. The Road Map is clear that Israel should freeze all settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements, and dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001.

The Council is deeply concerned about recent events in Gaza and the grave disturbances at the border between Gaza and Egypt. It expresses its sympathy for the civilian populations affected by the violence in Gaza and in Southern Israel. It condemns the continued firing of rockets into Israeli territory and all other activities which are contrary to international law and endanger civilians. While recognising Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the Council calls for an immediate end to all acts of violence. It reiterates its grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for

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the continuous provision of essential goods and services, including fuel and power supplies. The Council calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations to Gaza. The Council reiterates its call on all parties to work urgently for the controlled re-opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian reasons and commercial flows. In that context, the Council underlines its support for the proposal by the Palestinian Authority to take control of the crossings and supports the Arab League resolution in that respect. The EU will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the population of Gaza and stands ready to assist in the economic rehabilitation of Gaza. The EU reiterates its call for the immediate release of the Israeli soldier abducted 19 months ago and commends efforts including by partners in the region, to that effect.

The Council commends and supports efforts by the government of Egypt to find a peaceful and orderly solution to the current situation, and expresses the EU readiness to contribute to its implementation in the framework of an agreement involving the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Israel. The EU is ready to consider resuming its monitoring mission at Rafah under the provisions of the relevant international agreements related to Access and Movement concluded in November 2005.

The EU reaffirms its commitment to remain actively involved in order to support the parties' efforts to keep the negotiation on track, working closely with other members of the Quartet and partners in the region. The EU remains determined to contribute significantly to this effort, as laid down in its Action Strategy: "State building for Peace in the Middle East", which covers the broad range of its assistance activities. The EU welcomes the agreement reached on the accreditation procedure of EUPOL COPPS, which will allow the EU to support Palestinian Civilian Police in order to further strengthen security and law and order.

The EU welcomes the results of the International Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State last December, namely over 7,4 billion US-\$ in pledges, and calls on all donors to deliver on their pledges in support of efforts to build the future Palestinian State in accordance with the Reform and Development Plan presented by Prime Minister Fayyad. In this context, the EU recalls the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access. The EU is committed to providing substantial financial support for the Palestinian people, and welcomes the work of the Commission to launch a new funding mechanism PEGASE, which will constitute a key channel for EU and other international assistance. The EU continues to support the work of the Quartet Representative, Tony Blair. "

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