



Statement on behalf of the European Union

by

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Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations

United Nations General Assembly

Seventieth session, 62nd plenary meeting

Agenda item 38:

Question of Palestine

United Nations

New York, 23 November 2015

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Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Serbia*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

Mr. President,

The EU reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian question, based on the two-state solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign, and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

There is no alternative to a two-state solution. A one state reality would not be compatible with the legitimate national aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. And yet, the viability of the two-state solution is constantly being eroded by new facts on the ground.

We have repeated time and again that the status quo is unsustainable. Recent events show that this is true.

Last year, during the summer, for the third time in less than seven years we witnessed hostilities in Gaza and in Southern Israel, which caused the death or injury of thousands of people, and among them a majority civilians, and produced the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza we still witness today.

These past weeks, we have witnessed an increase of tensions, clashes and terror attacks in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory, which, once again, left many innocent civilians dead and thousands injured.

In the region, the spread of radicalism, extremism and terrorism have created a context that makes solving the Israeli-Palestinian question more urgent than ever.

The message is clear: we must make progress towards a just and lasting peace. A credible political horizon for both the Israelis and the Palestinians is needed. A political horizon that must point clearly at the possibility of putting an end to this conflict, thus ensuring that the legitimate aspirations of both parties, including those of Israelis for security and those of Palestinians for statehood, are fulfilled.

Mr. President,

The European Union believes that the only way to resolve the conflict is through an agreement that ends the occupation which began in 1967, that ends all claims and that fulfils the aspirations

* *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

of both parties. The basis for this lasting solution can be found in the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the Roadmap, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We believe that clear parameters defining the basis for negotiations are key elements for a successful outcome and we remain convinced that the EU's position on parameters, as set out in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of July 2014 on four final status issues such as borders, security, refugees and Jerusalem, provides a basis for achieving consensus on the way forward.

Mr. President,

I will make three points regarding the situation on the ground: on the present escalation of violence; on the need to preserve the two-state solution; and on the still dire situation in Gaza.

The European Union remains extremely concerned by the recent escalation in violence and tensions in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian Territory.

We condemn in the strongest terms all acts of terror - they are simply unacceptable and they can never be justified. We insist that all perpetrators of crimes or of acts of terror, against the Israelis as well as against the Palestinians, must be brought to justice. Both Israeli and Palestinian people have the right to live in peace and security.

We are also concerned at recurring tensions and clashes at the Haram al Sharif / Temple Mount. We renew our appeal for full respect of the Holy sites and underline that any change of the status quo would have deeply destabilizing effects. We also fully acknowledge the special role of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem. We welcome the understandings that have been reached between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority in this regard last month; we recall the agreements previously reached in October 2014; and we call for their full implementation. Jerusalem is a city sacred to three religions and all should be working for dignity and justice for people of all faiths.

The preservation of the viability of the two-state solution is at the core of EU policy and will remain a priority. Settlements are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. We reiterate our strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in this context, such as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation - including of EU funded projects - evictions, forced transfers including of Bedouins, illegal outposts, settler violence and restrictions of movement and access. These actions seriously threaten the two-state solution. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both states. The EU will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground and their broader implications and remains ready to take further action in order to protect the viability of the two-state solution. The EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to ensure continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. We are also committed to ensure that - in line with international law - all agreements between the State of Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

The EU is also extremely concerned that, more than one year after the tragic hostilities of summer 2014, the humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Gaza remains dire and the root causes of the conflict unaddressed. Addressing this situation must be an immediate priority for the parties and for the international community.

We welcome steps taken by Israel to ease restrictions in Gaza, including the resumption of limited trade from Gaza to the West Bank for the first time since 2007. However, further positive measures are now needed that enable the full delivery of humanitarian aid, reconstruction and economic recovery on a permanent basis. We continue to call for a fundamental change of the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Rocket fire by militant groups is unacceptable and underlines again the danger of escalation. All stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace.

The EU has always supported intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas. Palestinian unity is a fundamental element not only for reaching the two-state solution, but also to ensure security for Palestinians and Israelis and to improve the situation in Gaza. Palestinian factions must make reconciliation and the return of the PA to Gaza a top priority. The PA must take greater responsibility in this regard and assume its government function in the Gaza Strip, including in the field of security, civil administration and through its presence at the Gaza crossing points. The European Union is ready to provide full support to these efforts, including through the rapid reactivation and possible extension in scope and mandate of its EUBAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS Missions.

Mr. President,

In this framework that I have described, the challenge now is to build the conditions that could open the way to a resumption of meaningful negotiations and lead to a comprehensive agreement on all final status issues.

An immediate end to all violence is clearly of paramount importance. Security measures alone, though, cannot stop the cycle of violence. We also need to work on finding a new entry point for the start of a political process that builds the conditions for credible negotiations, thus providing a meaningful political horizon and maintaining a real perspective of final and comprehensive settlement of this conflict.

The EU welcomes and will actively contribute to initiatives by the Quartet aimed at engaging with the parties in order to explore concrete actions both sides can take to demonstrate their genuine commitment to pursuing a two-state solution. Together with our Quartet partners, we will encourage efforts to agree on significant steps, including concrete steps to implement agreements that have already been signed, that benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. We need to look at transformative measures, at steps on the ground that would help Palestinians to increase control over their own lives, while upholding security of both Palestinians and Israelis. We remain convinced that concrete and significant steps must be taken to stabilize the situation and reverse current trends by showing meaningful progress towards creating a two-state reality on the ground and restoring hope among Palestinians and Israelis that a negotiated peace is possible.

Securing a just and lasting peace will also require an increased common international effort. The EU will continue to work actively on a renewed multilateral approach to the peace process in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including partners in the Quartet, notably the US, in the region and in the UN Security Council. We also underline the importance of engaging in joint work with regional partners on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides a significant and important vision for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and an opportunity for building a regional security framework. We welcome efforts by Quartet Envoys in this regard.

International and regional support is crucial for a comprehensive peace. But, ultimately the most important element is leadership and determination by the parties themselves. Israeli and Palestinian leaders need to prove their commitment to a two-state solution in deeds, not just words. They must avoid all actions that might call into question their stated commitment to a negotiated solution and refrain from incitement, provocation or retaliation. No one should ever condone violence: there can be no ambiguity in this. Security forces must always strive to avoid loss of life.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders will have to take courageous choices. First of all they have to do all in their power to ease present tensions and contain violence. But they will also have to show that they are willing and ready to make the historic and difficult decisions that are needed if peace is to be reached. They must realize that waiting is not an option. Waiting is a risk that the international community cannot afford; even more so, it is a risk the parties cannot afford.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by saying that the European Union will do all it can to support the achievement of a lasting and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the parties make the strategic choice of peace, the EU and the international community will support them every step of the way. We reaffirm here that, in the event of a final peace agreement, the EU remains ready to offer to both parties an unprecedented package of political, economic and security support and a Special Privileged Partnership with the EU. At the same time, we recall that the future development of our relations with both the Israeli and Palestinian partners will also depend on their engagement towards a lasting peace based on the two-state solution.
