



european community

NEWS

September 15, 1993
No. 41/93

EC INCREASES AID TO MIDDLE EAST TO BOOST PEACE PROCESS

The European Community has decided to increase this year's aid allocation for the Occupied Territories from 70 million ECU* to 90 million ECU in support of the Middle East Peace Process.

The additional funds, which were decided by a September 13 Council of EC Finance Ministers, will be used to help establish administrative structures, particularly in Jericho and the Gaza Strip, for education, health, setting up of small businesses, and food aid.

The Council also agreed to act quickly on the EC Commission's proposal to assist the Middle East region, which was put forward following the September 2 meeting in Brussels between EC Commission President Jacques Delors and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

The Commission's three-part plan includes a five-year, 500 million ECU aid package for the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; an acceleration of trade benefits in the existing EC-Israel trade and cooperation agreement; and a revision of bilateral aid protocols between the EC and Jordan, Egypt, and Syria aimed at promoting more regional cooperation.

Over the years, the EC has been the principal financial supporter of the Occupied Territories. Its total aid contributions to the Palestinian people stand at almost 1 billion ECU.

*1 ECU = \$1.19 at today's exchange rates

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