

PRESS RELEASE

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the Palestinian Elections**

The European Union expresses its deep satisfaction at the successful conclusion of the first ever Palestinian General Election.

It conveys its congratulations to all those candidates elected to the Palestinian Council and to Mr Arafat on his election as President of the Council and sends its sincerest good wishes to these duly elected representatives of the Palestinian people as they assume the responsibilities of their office.

The European Union also congratulates the Palestinian people for the political maturity they have shown in their approach to democracy and the elections for the Palestinian Council and its President. It applauds the way in which the vast majority of candidates and election officials alike have fulfilled their obligations during the election process. It welcomes the fact that the electoral process itself was conducted in a generally peaceful atmosphere in which potentially disruptive and divisive incidents did not cast a shadow over proceedings or give rise to tension or violence which might have undermined the democratic process.

The European Union underlines the importance of the successful conclusion of the Palestinian elections for the Middle East Peace Process as a whole. Not only have they conferred democratic legitimacy on the Palestinian Authority. They have confirmed the commitment of the Palestinian people and their democratically elected leaders to the Palestinian Track of the Peace Process and the peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict. They have confounded opponents of the Middle East Peace Process who seek to undermine it through violence and terror.

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