

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Declaration by the European Council on the situation in the Middle East

The extreme gravity of the situation in the Middle East requires each side to face up to its responsibilities: it is imperative to put an end to the violence.

The only basis for peace is UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and:

- reaffirmation and full recognition of Israel's inalienable right to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders.
- the establishment of a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state and an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Israel needs the Palestinian Authority and its elected President, Yasser Arafat, as a partner to negotiate with, both in order to eradicate terrorism and to work towards peace. Its capacity to fight terrorism must not be weakened. The European Union renews its appeal to the Palestinian Authority to do everything to prevent acts of terrorism.

The European Union would remind the parties of the pledges demanded of them:

- The Palestinian Authority: the dismantling of Hamas' and Islamic Jihad's terrorist networks, including the arrest and prosecution of all suspects; a public appeal in Arabic for an end to the armed intifada.

Internet: <http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom>
E-mail: press.office@consilium.eu.int

15474/01 (Presse 487 - G)

Press Office - Rue de la Loi, 175 - 1048 Brussels
Tel. : 285 62 31 - 285 63 19 - 285 68 08 - 285 81 11 — Telefax : 285 80 26

- **The Israeli Government:** withdrawal of its military forces and a stop to extrajudicial executions; the lifting of closures and of all the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people; a freeze on settlements and an end to operations directed against Palestinian infrastructures.

Implementation of these commitments requires resolute action by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

Immediate and unconditional implementation of the Tenet cease-fire plan and the Mitchell Committee recommendations remains the only way to resume political dialogue.

The European Union remains convinced that setting up a third-party monitoring mechanism would serve the interests of both parties. It is prepared to play an active role in such a mechanism.

Resolute and concerted action by the European Union, the United Nations, the United States, the Russian Federation and the Arab countries most concerned is essential and urgent. The European Council has mandated High Representative Javier Solana to continue appropriate contacts to this end.

The Union attaches great importance to an economic recovery programme focused on Palestine as a way of encouraging peace.

The European Union will continue its efforts to ensure that both States, Israel and Palestine, can live side by side in peace and security.

Peace in the Middle East can be comprehensive only if it includes Syria and Lebanon.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, and the EFTA countries members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.