



EUROPEAN UNION

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Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the launch of direct talks on the Middle East

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, made the following statement:

"On the occasion of the launch of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, I congratulate Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas for their vision and political courage. I commend the US and the efforts deployed by President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and Senator Mitchell to bring the parties to the negotiation table. Quartet Envoy Tony Blair and the Arab League have also played an important role in this difficult endeavour.

The EU, including as a member of the Quartet, will continue to support the direct negotiations to ensure their success. The negotiations should focus on all final status issues. I look forward to the accomplishment of the negotiations within one year, as stated in the latest Quartet statement.

The outcome will be crucial not just for the parties, but for the whole region and beyond. The terrible terrorist act that killed four Israeli citizens near Hebron, which I have strongly condemned, shows that there are forces in the region which are determined to undermine the peace process. We must not allow them to succeed. Supporters of peace must persevere through difficult times. It is very important that all relevant parties avoid provocative actions which could undermine the success of the talks. This attack underlines, above all, the urgency of a two-state solution with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with each other and their neighbours."

P R E S S

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