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Paris, 30 décembre 2008

## **Statement by the European Union on the Situation in the Middle East**

The Foreign Ministers or their representatives of the Member States of the European Union, the High Representative for the CFSP and the European Commission met on 30 December to discuss the situation in the Middle East, following current tragic events in Israel and Gaza. This meeting is part of the international community's efforts, particularly the Quartet and the Arab League, to find a solution to this crisis.

The European Union, conscious of the suffering and anguish of all civilian populations, puts forward the following proposals to resolve the crisis:

- **Immediate and permanent ceasefire:** there must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action.

The cessation of fighting should allow lasting and normal opening of all border crossings, as provided for in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The European Union is ready to re-dispatch the EUBAM to Rafah to enable its re-opening, in cooperation with Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It is also willing to examine the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points, provided that the issues relating to security have found a satisfactory response.

- **Immediate humanitarian action:** food, urgent medical aid and fuel should be delivered to the Gaza Strip, the evacuation of the injured and unhindered access of humanitarian workers should be made possible through the opening of crossing points. The European Union, the leading aid donor to the Palestinians, dispatched a field mission to provide the most appropriate response as quickly as possible in cooperation with the United Nations and NGOs. It has also agreed to coordinate aid donated by each Member State, in collaboration with the European Commission and the outgoing and incoming presidencies.

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- **Stepping up the peace process**, as called for by Security Council Resolution 1850. There is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in Gaza or elsewhere. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on the process set out in Annapolis and on the establishment of a viable Palestinian state existing side by side with Israel in peace and security. Work must be carried out, notably on the basis of the Arab peace initiative, to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a comprehensive and operational manner. Europe encourages the inter-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, as called for by the Ministers of the Arab League on 26 November, and supports the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in this respect.

The European Union is more determined than ever to assist alongside the other members of the Quartet and the region's states in ending violence and re-launching the peace process. In this respect, it has been agreed that a European ministerial delegation will travel to the region shortly.