



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on Middle East Peace Process

*2921st EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 26-27 January 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"1. The Council welcomes the cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and calls on all parties to make the current ceasefire permanent through the full implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1860. Noting the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the issues which should be addressed without any delay include a sustained halt of rocket launches towards Israel, the urgent opening of the Gaza crossings on a regular and predictable basis and an effective mechanism to prevent arms and ammunition smuggling to the Gaza Strip.

2. The Council fully supports the Egyptian initiative and efforts to achieve a lasting ceasefire. The European Union, in close coordination with Egypt and other partners, is examining options and intends to support the sustainability of the ceasefire including through assistance on border management. At the same time the Council expresses the European Union's readiness to reactivate the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM Rafah), as soon as conditions allow, and to examine the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points as part of the overall EU engagement in the region. The EU welcomes the commitment of the United States to contribute to stopping arms smuggling to Gaza and is prepared to identify ways to cooperate in such efforts.

3. The European Union deeply deplores the loss of life during this conflict, particularly the civilian casualties. The Council reminds all parties to the conflict to fully respect human rights and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and will follow closely investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law. In this regard it takes careful note of the statement by UNSG Ban Ki-moon to the Security Council on 21 January.

P R E S S

4. Gravely concerned by the critical humanitarian situation on the ground, the EU calls for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance to the suffering people of Gaza. The European Union is ready to step up its already substantial emergency aid contribution and it will continue to strongly support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and other international agencies in their efforts. The Council condemns the shelling of UNRWA infrastructure in Gaza. The EU is also prepared to work towards rehabilitation, reconstruction, the sustainable economic recovery and future economic development of the Gaza Strip. This will only be possible if the Gaza crossings are open for humanitarian assistance, commercial goods and persons. The EU supports the idea of convening an international donors' conference in Egypt. Donor efforts need to be closely coordinated with the AHLC. All future assistance will be carried out on the basis of a specific needs assessment.

5. In response to the current crisis the European Union will focus its support and assistance on the following : immediate humanitarian relief for the population of Gaza, prevention of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, sustained re-opening of crossing points on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, rehabilitation and reconstruction and the resumption of the peace process. The EU will take forward this agenda in close cooperation with its Quartet partners and regional actors and in line with its wider approach to the region including its state building efforts. To this end the EU is developing a Work Plan.

6. The Council strongly encourages inter-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas which is key for peace, stability, and development and supports the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in this respect.

7. Reaffirming its conclusions of 8 December 2008, the European Union is convinced that an end to the current crisis must be followed by renewed and urgent efforts by the Israeli and Palestinian parties as well as the international community to establish an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. This can only be brought about by the urgent and successful conclusion of the peace process. The European Union reiterates its commitment to work vigorously with the other Quartet members and Arab partners and looks forward to a strong and committed participation and cooperation of the new US Administration. The EU reiterates its commitment to a comprehensive and regional approach to the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. It supports all efforts deployed to achieve stability, peace and security in the region. The Council reiterates that the Arab Peace Initiative offers a solid and appropriate basis for progress in this direction."
