



Brussels, 18 July 2014
12079/1/14 REV1
(OR. en)
PRESSE 416

Declaration on behalf of the European Union on the escalation in the Gaza Strip

We are very concerned about the escalation in the Gaza Strip including the resumption of rocket fire into Israel and the Israeli ground operation.

We welcome yesterday's humanitarian pause and deeply regret that this did not lead to a lasting ceasefire. We call on all parties to immediately agree to a ceasefire. We underline the obligation to allow full and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance.

We have already witnessed too many civilian deaths, including many children such as those killed on a beach in Gaza. We strongly deplore such incidents and we call for them to be investigated swiftly. We condemn the continued firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and other militant groups and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. We share the UN condemnation of the placement of rockets in a UN school. Israel has the right to protect its population from this kind of attacks. In doing so, it must act proportionately and ensure the protection of civilians at all times.

These events make the efforts to establish a ceasefire even more urgent. We welcome the on-going efforts by regional partners and in particular the initiative launched by Egypt. We reiterate our call on both sides to de-escalate the situation, to end the violence and to end the suffering of the civilian populations. A lasting solution must be found which ensures peace and security for all Israelis and Palestinians. The EU reiterates its readiness to provide the necessary support to this end.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia^{*}, Montenegro^{*}, Iceland[†], Serbia^{*} and Albania^{*}, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this Declaration.

^{*} The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

[†] Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

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