



EUROPEAN UNION

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Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians

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

"I welcome the decision by Israel and the Palestinians to resume direct negotiations. This decision by the parties to engage in substantive talks represents a major step on the road towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, something I am hopeful we can now achieve.

I want to firstly commend U.S. President Barack Obama, my U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator George Mitchell for their hard work and determination to bring the Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table. I want to also credit my Quartet partners and Quartet Envoy Tony Blair and I would like to thank all of the EU member states for their support of this process.

I also want to stress the importance of the positive outcome of the Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting of July 29.

As a member of the Quartet, and on behalf of the EU, I will continue to work with the parties to support the negotiations. We all want to see 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.

The parties must work fast and hard on all the final status issues to meet the Quartet's call for a negotiated settlement within one year.

P R E S S

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To give negotiations the best chance of success, an enabling environment on the ground is essential. It is therefore imperative that both parties keep calm and exercise restraint. They should only act on the basis of international law, refraining from all provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric.

Successful negotiations will also need sustained regional, international support and the continuation of the Palestinian state-building process, which the EU fully supports. I call on all concerned to fulfil previous pledges to help the Palestinian Authority.

I also want to reiterate the EU's readiness to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements aimed at ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements."
