

# TODAY'S ZAMAN

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## **EU's Solana hails Turkey's efforts for truce in Gaza**

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, yesterday praised Turkey's efforts to forge a truce in the Gaza Strip, calling these efforts "very constructive," while noting that Ankara has also been using its influence to persuade Hamas, the Palestinian group that controls the Gaza Strip, to agree to a cease-fire.

Solana arrived in the Turkish capital late Wednesday for talks on the Gaza conflict and the situation in the region amid deepening concerns over further expansion of the conflict.



According to Gaza medics, the Israeli offensive in Gaza, which began on Dec. 27, has so far killed more than 700 Palestinians and wounded over 3,000. Solana, who earlier this week visited Egypt and Israel in a bid to broker a truce, had talks with both President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Solana was the one who initiated talks with the Turkish leaders, diplomatic sources told Today's Zaman.

All efforts have been focused on reaching a cease-fire and opening crossings for transportation of humanitarian assistance to the Gazan people, Solana said, noting that the EU and Turkey were of the same opinion on the issue.

He spoke at a press conference held at the embassy of EU term president the Czech Republic following his talks with Gül and Erdoğan. While thanking Turkish leaders for their efforts, Solana also said the EU is willing to send monitors, who were once on Gaza's border with Egypt, to work at the crossing after a cease-fire in Gaza is achieved. Although Israel pressed on with the offensive, it has said it accepts the "principles" of a European-Egyptian cease-fire proposal. The United States urged Israel to study the plan.

When asked if he had asked Turkey to use its influence with Hamas to accept the cease-fire proposal, Solana said: "There is no need for me to do so. The [Turkish] government's feeling of responsibility is very high, and they are already doing this."

Turkey has been pressing the international community for stronger efforts for an urgent cease-fire in Gaza. On Wednesday night, French President Nicolas Sarkozy phoned Prime Minister Erdoğan and briefed him on his efforts to put an end to the attacks in Gaza. The two leaders agreed to further joint efforts by UN Security Council term president France and newcomer non-permanent member Turkey.

Erdoğan and Sarkozy also agreed to assign two special envoys who will start working out details of joint efforts, the Anatolia news agency reported, citing anonymous sources.

On Wednesday, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan continued bilateral talks with world leaders in New York on the sidelines of the UN Security Council session. Babacan had separate talks with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. He met with his French counterpart, Bernard Kouchner, for the second time since their bilateral meeting on Tuesday, Anatolia reported.

Meanwhile, members of Parliament's Human Rights Commission discussed yesterday plans to send a fact-finding mission to Gaza. "The widespread belief among commission members is [that we need] to send a delegation to Gaza to see developments on the ground. But we need to discuss practical arrangements for such a trip," Mehmet Ocaktan of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) told Today's Zaman.

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