



**COUNCIL OF
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**Comments by
Javier SOLANA,
EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy,
on the occasion of the International Conference
for the Reconstruction of Gaza**

Mr SOLANA attended the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm El-Sheikh on Monday, 2 march 2009. The following is an edited summary of his comments.

"I should like to thank President Mubarak and Foreign Minister Abul Gheit for hosting this conference and I commend Egypt on its leadership in solving the current crisis as well as in promoting peace in the region.

I welcome the presence of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on her first trip to the region in her new office. All those present are looking forward to renewed US engagement and to working together at solving the urgent problems affecting the Middle East.

I spent a full day in Gaza last week. I could see for myself the devastation brought about by the conflict. This devastation is not only about the sorrow of the people who have lost their loved ones, the pain of those who have suffered injuries or the destruction of the physical infrastructure, including UN facilities and businesses that were providing employment to thousands of people. The devastation is also in the heart and minds of Gazans who feel they have been abandoned by the world. Indifference also kills. It kills hope and support for moderation and dialogue. It breeds radicalism.

In this somber context, I would like to commend the UN agencies on the ground and their personnel, UNWRA in particular, for their outstanding and courageous action in extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances, before, during and after the recent violent events.

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Today we are confronted with the task of rebuilding. Rebuilding houses, factories and infrastructures, but also rebuilding the human dignity of the people of Gaza as well as hope and trust in a better future, for all Palestinians and Israelis because they deserve to live in peace and security. It is our collective responsibility. It is our collective interest.

I wholeheartedly support the plan presented to us by President ABBAS and Prime Minister FAYYAD. We should all rally behind it and empower the Palestinian Authority to lead the reconstruction efforts. The EU supports an efficient and transparent approach, using the existing mechanisms for delivery of financial and economic assistance. Let us not waste time and resources by creating new ones. In addition, no amount of financial assistance will solve the problem if better access to Gaza is not allowed for humanitarian and commercial purposes, both in volume and in quality. Essential supplies for reconstruction such as cement, glass, fuel, medical equipment, paper for school books, etc. have to be available to the Gazans and the international agencies. Families do not have cement to make headstones for the graves of the dead. Heavy rains have prevented children from going to school because they had no dry clothes. This is simply not acceptable.

Looking ahead, it is not sufficient to bring about a permanent halt to military operations in Gaza and to the launching of rockets against Israel. Returning to the status quo ante will not be enough. Gaza is an integral part of the future Palestinian state. While taking care of the immediate needs for reconstruction, we must place our efforts in the broader perspective of a comprehensive resolution of the conflict that is the root cause of the tragedy of Gaza. First we should not relax our efforts to improve the situation on the ground in the West Bank too. Secondly, in order to remove the risk of a return of violence and of more death and destruction, urgent work is needed to restore a credible and sustained political process that will lead to a just and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis alike, and ultimately all the peoples in the region. We cannot rest until this goal is achieved."
