

PRESS RELEASE

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Former European leaders call on EU to take action to salvage Middle East Peace Process

26 former European leaders sent a letter to EU President Van Rompuy and High Representative Ashton, in which they call on Europe to live up to its commitments and adopt concrete and determined measures next week, in line with EU positions agreed upon in December 2009, that promote justice and peace in the Middle East. Copies of the letter have been sent to all EU Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers who take part in next week's EU Council meetings, held in Brussels.

The group of former European leaders from 12 EU member states plus Norway consists of former Presidents, Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and European Commissioners, as well as other former dignitaries. All of the signatories (full list enclosed) have in the past played a role in the development of European policy on Israel and Palestine.

In their letter, the former leaders offer recommendations consisting of specific actions the EU should adopt to promote a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the critical year of 2011. These recommendations are formulated in reference to the remarkable Council conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process, which the EU adopted in December 2009. If operationalised, these conclusions would provide the EU with effective tools to strengthen the Union's role and offer a real opportunity for salvaging the Middle East peace process.

Regrettably, one year after the Council conclusions were adopted, the parties and the international community appear to be no closer to a resolution of the conflict. To the contrary, developments on the ground pose an existential threat to the prospects of establishing a sovereign, contiguous and viable Palestinian state and therefore to a two-state solution, which forms the one and only available option for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to the signatories, it is eminently clear that without a rapid and dramatic move to halt the ongoing deterioration of the situation on the ground, a two-state solution will be increasingly difficult to attain.

Determined action is particularly urgent with regard to Israel's continued settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including in East Jerusalem. The EU has always maintained that settlements are illegal, but has not attached any consequences to continued Israeli settlement expansion.

The signatories strongly believe that the EU must now make absolutely clear that enhancement or upgrading of the EU-Israel Association Agreement and other bilateral agreements and programs will not occur unless settlement activity is fully frozen. Moreover, it is necessary that the EU brings an end to the mislabeling of settlement products exported to the EU, which are, in contradiction with EU regulations, marketed as originating in Israel.

To break the impasse in the peace process, the EU should adopt a more pro-active stance and put forward, in cooperation with the United States, the United Nations, the Russian Federation, the League of Arab States and other stakeholders, a concrete and comprehensive proposal for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that includes a clear time frame and terms of reference for the conclusion of the peace process on the basis of longstanding principles agreed upon by the parties and the international community.

With its conclusions of December 2009, the EU attracted considerable interest and raised expectations about its ability to advance the peace process. The 26 former European leaders consider it a matter of fundamental credibility that the Council now takes determined action on the basis of positions and principles agreed to in December 2009.

Full list of signatories of the letters of former European leaders to EU leaders:

Former Vice-President of the European Commission **Chris Patten** (co-chair), Former Foreign Minister **Hubert Védrine** (co-chair), Former Prime Minister **Andreas van Agt**, Former Finance Minister and former Vice-President of the European Commission **Frans Andriessen**, Former Prime Minister **Giuliano Amato**, Former Minister and Former Vice-Prime Minister **Laurens Jan Brinkhorst**, Former Foreign Minister and former EU Commissioner **Hans van den Broek**, Former Foreign Minister **Hervé De Charrette**, Former Foreign Minister **Roland Dumas**, Former European Commissioner **Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, Former Prime Minister **Felipe Gonzales**, Former Foreign Minister **Teresa Patricio Gouveia**, Former Deputy Prime Minister **Lena Hjelm-Wallén**, Former Prime Minister **Lionel Jospin**, Former Minister and Senator **Jean Francois-Poncet**, Former President of the EU Commission and former Prime Minister **Romano Prodi**, Former President **Mary Robinson**, Chairman Swedish Social Democratic Party **Mona Sahlin**, Former Chancellor **Helmut Schmidt**, Former Minister and Member of Parliament **Clare Short**, Former High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy **Javier Solana**, Former Prime Minister **Thorvald Stoltenberg**, Former Director-General of the WTO **Peter D. Sutherland**, Former Foreign Minister **Erkki Tuomioja**, Former President **Vaira Vike-Freiberga**, Former President **Richard von Weizsäcker**.

Note for editor, not for publication:

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