

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the situation in the Palestinian Territories**

Recalling the undertaking by the Palestinians and the Israelis to abide by the Declaration of Principles and to continue the negotiations, the European Union reaffirms the need to continue the Peace Process in the Middle East.

The Union wishes to express its concern at the difficulties in implementing the Declaration of Principles which have arisen in the last few days, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. It particularly deplores the acts of violence which have occurred and reaffirms in this connection its condemnation of all violence, whatever its origin.

The European Union is also concerned at the incidents connected with continued Israeli settlement in the Occupied Territories. While welcoming the decision to stop work on disputed land in Efrat, further to the meeting of the Israeli Cabinet on 1 January, it would point out that the total cessation of work on settlements is vital to the smooth operation of the Peace Process.

The European Union welcomes the fact that, in spite of these difficulties, the Israeli-Palestinian talks on the process of autonomy started again in Cairo on 3 January. It hopes that these talks will open the way to progress on the principal questions outstanding.