

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Declaration by the European Union on the Middle East**

For weeks now lives have been lost on a daily basis, both Palestinian and Israeli. This is an intolerable situation. The European Union appeals to both sides' sense of responsibility not to respond to provocation.

The lack of progress in the Peace Process, including on the settlements issue, is the source of the Palestinian community's frustration and the violence.

The European Union urges Israeli and Palestinian leaders to comply fully, and without delay, with the undertakings entered into at Sharm el Sheikh five weeks ago and in Gaza on 2 November.

It calls on the Israeli authorities:

- to pull back their armed forces to the positions they occupied before 28 September and to end restrictions on the movement of goods and persons in the Palestinian territories;
- to lift the financial sanctions imposed on the Palestinian Authority;
- if action by the security forces appears unavoidable, to use non-lethal means only, as called for by the United Nations Secretary-General.

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It calls on the Palestinian Authority:

- to make every endeavour to bring the violence to an end;
- to issue strict instructions to the security forces to stop shooting at Israelis, in accordance with the statement made by President Arafat.

The European Union calls on the Fact-Finding Commission, set up following the Sharm el Sheikh Summit and in which the European Union is represented by Mr Javier Solana, Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP, to commence its work on the ground without delay.

It supports the moves by the United Nations Secretary-General to examine with the parties arrangements for an observer mission in accordance with the Security Council's mandate. It continues to support the endeavours and personal commitment of President Clinton in the search for peace.

The goal naturally remains a resumption of the dialogue and the peace talks, as this is the only way out of the current crisis. The protagonists are well aware of this. Putting a stop to the violence is a matter of vital urgency.

The European Union is willing to make a contribution. It is ready to assume its responsibilities.

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