COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Council Conclusions on Middle East peace process

(2744th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting - Brussels, 17 July 2006)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council is acutely concerned at the situation in the Middle East, in particular at the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and deplores the loss of civilian lives on all sides. These developments pose a serious threat to peace and security in the region. It calls for the release of abducted soldiers and an immediate cessation of hostilities. The EU recognises Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, but it urges Israel to exercise utmost restraint and not to resort to disproportionate action. All parties must do everything possible to protect civilian populations and to refrain from actions in violation of international humanitarian law. It is urgent to stop violence and return to diplomacy. Only a political process of negotiation can bring lasting peace to the region. It is urgent that the international community engage actively in this. We express our full support for the High Representative's active engagement, for the efforts of the UN Secretary General and for the efforts of actors in the region. The Council welcomes an active role of the UN Security Council including through examining the possibility for an international monitoring presence. We support the agenda set out in the G8 statement.

Developments in Lebanon and Israel

1. The European Union condemns the attacks by Hezbollah on Israel and the abduction of two Israeli soldiers. It calls for their immediate and unconditional release and for the cessation of all attacks on Israeli towns and cities.

2. The EU recalls the need for the Lebanese state to restore its sovereignty over the whole of its national territory and to do its utmost to prevent such attacks. The EU expresses its support for Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora. The EU urges the full implementation of the UNSCR 1559 and UNSCR 1680, including disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, and strict respect of the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon.

3. Continued escalation will only aggravate the vicious circle of violence and retribution.

4. The EU appeals to all parties to ensure the safe and speedy passage from Lebanon of all those citizens of EU Member States, as well as other expatriates, who wish to leave Lebanon in the current situation. The EU calls on Israel not to hinder shipping in international waters.

Situation in Gaza

5. The Council remains deeply concerned at the deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinians and deplores the loss of civilian life it has brought. The EU reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldier. It calls on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets on Israeli territory.

6. The Council calls on both parties to alleviate the desperate humanitarian situation of the civilian population. The Council urges Israel to engage in the restoration of the destroyed civilian infrastructure. The Israeli air strikes on Gaza's only power plant have had a far-reaching impact on Gaza's hospitals, food production facilities, water and sanitation systems. The Council urges that the border crossings such as Rafah and Karni be opened and remain open to allow at least the passage of humanitarian aid and basic products to Gaza and the safe return of Palestinians currently on the Egyptian side of the border.

7. The European Union remains particularly concerned about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature and calls for their immediate release.

8. The Council commends the efforts of President Abbas to create the widest possible consensus in support of the objectives of the Roadmap. The Council reiterates that the EU stands ready to work with a Palestinian government that meets and implements the three principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap. The Council encourages progress in the Palestinian National Dialogue to that end.

9. The European Union is committed to pressing ahead with the further expansion of the proposed Temporary International Mechanism to which the EU and its Member States have contributed significantly. The EU encourages donors and others in the region to make full use of the mechanism. The Council urges Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues.

10. This crisis underlines the need for the negotiation of a just and lasting settlement. The European Union calls on both parties to demonstrate urgently an active commitment to the search for a negotiated two-state solution. The European Union supports the central role of the Quartet in this process. "
