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**Javier SOLANA,
EU High Representative for the CFSP,
welcomes announcements by Israeli and Palestinian leaders on
Palestinian Authorities elections**

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), welcomed the expected decision by the Israeli cabinet on Sunday to allow voting by Palestinians in East Jerusalem, in accordance with existing precedent. He said that the European Union expects Israel to facilitate electoral operations, including movement of candidates and voting officials, as well as of local and international observers.

He also welcomed the announcement by President Abbas to hold elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) as scheduled on 25 January, as well as the declared intention of the Palestinian Authority to ensure security of the electoral operations and safety of the voters, candidates and local and international observers. He said that absence of intimidation and violence are basic requirements for free and fair elections.

Elections are an essential step in the building of a democratic Palestinian state, in the perspective of the two state solution. They are an important milestone in the implementation of Palestinian Roadmap obligations. The High Representative expressed strong support for and confidence in Palestinian democracy.

The European Union provides technical and financial assistance to Palestinian elections. With an additional 1.4 million Euro recently granted to the Central Elections Commission for the PLC elections, total EC contribution amounts now to 18.5 million.

The European Union remains committed to assist in building the institutions of a democratic and peaceful Palestinian state, in the context of a full implementation of the Roadmap.

The High Representative reiterated EU and Quartet positions that all factions, including Hamas, should renounce violence, recognise Israel's right to exist and disarm. Those who want to be part of the political process should not engage in armed activities, as there is a fundamental contradiction between such activities and building a democratic state.

This statement is attributable to Cristina Gallach, Spokesperson of HR Solana
