
EXPERT MEETING IN COPENHAGEN, FEBRUARY 4-5, 2009 ON PREVENTING THE FLOW OF WEAPONS TO GAZA

At the request of the USA, Denmark is hosting an expert meeting for a small number of countries with maritime expertise to discuss the challenges related to illicit arms trafficking into Gaza, including the possibilities for an international contribution to prevent the flow of weapons. The expert meeting takes place in Copenhagen on 4-5 February, 2009.

The expert meeting is organized in close cooperation with the American administration and will seek to map the challenges related to illicit arms trafficking to Gaza, including the political, juridical, diplomatic and technical aspects of potential international contributions to handle this challenge. Focus will be on the transit routes that the arms are following from their point of origin towards Gaza. The participants in the meeting will be USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway. In addition it is expected that a number of observers will be participating.

In relation to the expert meeting, the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Per Stig Møller, states:

“The expert meeting is a significant contribution to further the international community’s collective efforts to ensure a lasting ceasefire and to improve the situation for the populations in the area, including the suffering Palestinian population in Gaza. I am pleased that Denmark can contribute to this work by hosting this expert meeting regarding arms smuggling.

Opening of the borders to Gaza is crucial. There is a need for immediate full access for humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of Gaza needs to be started. This has been clearly communicated to Israel by Denmark and the rest of the international community, and we will keep up the pressure on this issue. At the same time it is important to ensure that an opening of the borders does not entail that the population of Gaza once again risk to be taken hostage by fighting initiated by Hamas. A sustained opening of the borders to Gaza is therefore related to the efforts to prevent the smuggling of weapons.

It is also obvious, however, that in the end, the international efforts to support the ceasefire and the reactivation of the peace process relies on the parties to live up to their obligations under the Roadmap for Peace. The Palestinians need to be reconciled and the terror must end. Israel must freeze the settlement activities and remove roadblocks. Everybody must do their part to sustain the populations’ faith in the peace track”.