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STATEMENT BY MIDDLE EAST QUARTET

Following is the text of a statement issued by the Quartet (United Nations, Russian Federation, United States and European Union):

The Quartet Principals - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner - met today in Washington to discuss the situation in the Middle East.

The Quartet welcomed UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the representative of the EU Presidency, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Recognizing the critical need to end the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, which would contribute to security and stability in the region, the Quartet pledged to support efforts to put in place a process with the goal of ending the occupation that began in 1967 and creating an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel, and reaffirmed its commitment to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace based on UNSCRs 242 and 338.

The Quartet expressed the hope that the result-oriented dialogue initiated between Israeli and Palestinian leaders will continue in the framework of a renewed political process with the aim of launching meaningful negotiations.

The Quartet undertook to give active follow-up to these meetings and to remain closely engaged at this moment of increased activity and dialogue. The Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to meet regularly at both the principals and envoys level according to an agreed calendar, including with the parties and other regional partners, to monitor developments and actions taken by the parties and to discuss the way ahead.

The Quartet noted its support for renewed dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and welcomed the December 23 meeting between Israeli PM Olmert and PA President Abbas, and the subsequent implementation of some steps discussed at that meeting. The Quartet urged the parties to implement fully steps discussed at the December 23 meeting, to refrain from taking any measures that could predetermine the number of issues that will be resolved in negotiations, to meet their respective obligations under phase one of the Roadmap and under the Agreement on Movement and Access, and to seek to fulfill their obligations under the Sharm el-Sheikh Understandings of 2005.

The Quartet discussed U.S. efforts to facilitate discussions between the parties. The Quartet welcomed the upcoming meeting between Prime Minister Olmert, President Abbas, and Secretary of State Rice, that could begin to define more clearly the political horizon for the Palestinian people, and help engender a sense of partnership. The Quartet affirmed the primacy of the Roadmap, and welcomed U.S. efforts to accelerate progress on the Roadmap.

The Quartet noted the continuing importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, particularly its reflection of a shared commitment to a two-state solution.

The Quartet reiterated its call for an immediate and unconditional end to all acts of violence and terror. It condemned the suicide bombing in Eilat on 29 January and called once again for an immediate end to all rocket attacks against Israel.

The Quartet expressed its deep concern at the violence among Palestinians and called for respect for law and order.

The Quartet called for continued international assistance to the Palestinian people, and encouraged donors to focus on preserving and building the capacity of institutions of Palestinian governance as well as the development of the Palestinian economy. The Quartet welcomed international efforts to reform the Palestinian security sector and thus to help improve law and order for the Palestinian people. It called for the Temporary International Mechanism to be further developed to support the political process, to identify suitable projects for international support in the areas of governance, institution building and economic development, and urged other members of the international community to consider practical support to the parties.

The Quartet called for Palestinian unity in support of a government committed to nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap. The Quartet reaffirmed that these principles endure. The Quartet reiterated its call for the PA government to commit to these principles.