
Mahmoud Abbas at the European Parliament



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The destruction wrought by the Israeli attacks on the people and infrastructure of Gaza was described by the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, in an impassioned speech to MEPs on Wednesday. He called on the international community to press Israel to take a new approach, saying the potential rewards were great for all sides.

Mr Abbas, who was addressing a formal sitting of the House, began his speech by saying "I have come to you from Palestine, whose people are suffering from one of the longest military occupations in modern history".

He described the recent Israeli attacks on the infrastructure of Gaza, saying "the Israeli war has targeted first and foremost the livelihoods of my people, its infrastructure and its future, as well as the future of its Palestinian state for which we have long worked together and for the establishment of which we are still working".

He went on "You have heard the calls of men, the appeals of children and women who lost most of their family members" and added "along with those innocent victims fell the values of the human conscience".

In addition to the destruction of infrastructure, "this Israeli war has claimed the fruit of the blood and sweat of our Palestinian people, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people who worked all their lives and lost the fruit of this work. It has also destroyed what the Palestinian National Authority has established over 15 years".

Settlements continue

The Palestinian president also complained that "The Israeli settlement has not stopped at all. The policies of settlement led to the continuation in building the wall of separation, as well as to an increase in roadblocks, checkpoints and barriers".

Above all, these Israeli incursions showed that there was "an aggression against the entire Palestinian people". The latest attacks were aimed at "separating Gaza from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian lands, and also at marginalising Gaza" and "preventing our people from attaining their ultimate goal: an end to occupation, gaining freedom and the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the lands that were occupied in 1967, with Eastern Jerusalem as its capital".

It was essential to show that Israel is not "a state above accountability, above international and law", argued Mr Abbas. He called for all border crossings, not just Rafah, to be re-opened to allow the free flow of aid, goods and people.

Reconciliation among Palestinians, peace proposals

Turning to the subjects of national reconciliation among Palestinians and proposals for peace, the president said the Palestinian side had accepted the Egyptian working paper, but warned of the "regional forces and tendencies which support separation" and obstruct the Egyptian solution".

A key goal was to hold legislative elections and he hoped "you will help us in organising such elections", as well as supporting efforts to obtain the release of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council arrested by Israel.

However, while commending international efforts to reconstruct Gaza, Mr Abbas asked "how long Israel will be given a free hand to destroy the assets and infrastructure of Arab people?" The international community, he said, must prevail upon Israel to desist.

57 Islamic countries ready to normalise ties with Israel

He also pointed out that the Arab peace initiative, to which the Palestinians were committed, had become "an Islamic peace initiative", meaning that, in exchange for land for peace, 57 Islamic countries were "willing to normalise their relationships with Israel".

"This land is worth living for"

Concluding, Mr Abbas told MEPs that the Palestinian people "look forward to your support in their struggle to achieve their right to freedom and independence, to be able to build their future and to be able to give to their children their right to a safe life, a developed school and a bright future in their homeland – this homeland that deserves life and security."

Lastly, he quoted the words of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who died on 9 August 2008 and will be commemorated this evening at the European Parliament. The poet had said time and again "This land is worth living for".

EU can work with Palestinian government committed to peace, says President Pötering

In his introductory remarks, EP President Hans-Gert Pötering had emphasised to the Palestinian president that, regarding "the tragedy in the Gaza strip", "the European Parliament did not remain silent. We demanded an immediate ceasefire. We condemned the disproportionate reaction" which had hit not only the armed forces of Hamas but also the civilian population. At the same time "we firmly condemned the provocations and firing of rockets by Hamas".

Mr Pötering said the EP wanted "a swift resumption of the peace negotiations" and he stressed that "internal Palestinian reconciliation is a pre-condition for

peace Israel and Palestine". Only a "government of national consensus" could ensure the unity of the Palestinian people. The European Union would be willing to work with such a government, prepared "to respect the basic principles of the peace process, to renounce violence and commit itself to peace negotiations with Israel".

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