

DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

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Press release by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel on establishing task force for foreign observers to Palestinian elections

Jerusalem, 5 January 2005

On 5 January 2005, a press release was issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel, the text of which is reproduced below.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sylvan Shalom established a foreign ministry task force in order to coordinate the arrival, movements and work of the foreign observers arriving to assist in the Palestinian elections to be held on 9 January 2005.

The Palestinian Authority elections are very important in creating a leadership with which Israel hopes to make progress in the road map process. Israel hopes that the elected leadership will implement its commitments, including the elimination of terrorism and the dismantling of terrorist infrastructures as well as the implementation of political reforms.

In helping to ensure democratic elections, Israel will make possible the presence and free movement of international and local election observers. Over 500 observers will be deployed in cooperation with the Palestinian Central Elections Committee throughout Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The observers will be from the European Union (including 30 members of the European Parliament), the Council of Europe, the American National Democratic Institute and various United Nations bodies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is issuing special identification cards to the international observers that will facilitate their movement into and out of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

It should be stressed that Israel is committed to the democratic principle of free elections and has no wish to be involved in any way in the electoral process. These elections are a Palestinian matter and must reflect the will of the Palestinian people.

The elections will be held along the lines agreed upon in the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement of 28 September 1995 and will follow procedures already implemented in the 1996 Palestinian elections.

For this purpose, the presence of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Palestinian towns will be reduced to the minimum necessary in order to maintain Israeli security needs while taking into consideration the fact that terror organizations are still threatening Israeli citizens and may try to violently impede the electoral process. In close proximity to the date of the elections, IDF forces will leave all Palestinian cities. Checkpoints will be removed from specified positions in the area. Opening hours at the Allenby Bridge crossing will be expanded.

On election day, seam zone crossings will be open around the clock in order to enable voters to reach their place of polling. Freedom of movement and transit will be permitted for those involved in the election process, including candidates and campaigners.

Joint Israeli-Palestinian coordination offices will operate in order to provide immediate responses to problems that may arise.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Operations Center will be functioning on a 24 hours a day basis in order to deal with any queries or difficulties that the foreign observers and media may have, at telephone number +972-(0)2-5303155.

Declaration of Presidency of the European Union on Palestinian presidential elections
10 January 2005

On 10 January 2005, the European Union issued a declaration following the election of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas as the President of the Palestinian Authority, the text of which is reproduced below.

The European Union wishes to congratulate Mr. Mahmoud Abbas on his election as President of the Palestinian Authority. It pays tribute to the Palestinian people and Government for the commitment to democracy that they have just demonstrated. The European Union's election observation mission, led by Michel Rocard, confirmed that the Palestinian presidential elections proceeded in a satisfactory manner given the difficult circumstances. The European Union welcomes the considerable turnout of voters at the first presidential elections since 1996. By taking part in the elections the Palestinians seized the opportunity to determine their future and realize their aspirations to peace and democracy.

Statement by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit
Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 8 February 2005

On 8 February 2005, Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon; Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; and King Abdullah II of Jordan. Met at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit to find a solution to the impasse that began with the Al-Aqsa intifada. The text of the statement by Mr. Abbas is reproduced below.

President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, His Majesty King Abdullah II, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and gentlemen.

I should like first to express thanks and appreciation to President Hosni Mubarak and Egypt for hosting this meeting in continuation of the effective Egyptian role in sponsoring the peace process in our region.

I would also like to thank His Majesty King Abdullah for his efforts and the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in this regard. I would like to congratulate his majesty the King and Queen Raniya on their new born, Prince Hashim. I would also like to congratulate the King on his birthday.

We have agreed with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to stop all acts of violence against Israelis and Palestinians, wherever they are.

The calm that our land will experience starting today is the start of a new era, a start for peace and hope. It is the beginning of peace and hope.

What we have announced today not only represents the implementation of the first articles of the road map drafted by the Quartet Committee, but is also an important step representing a new chance for the peace process to regain momentum and to get back on track, so that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples might regain hope in the possibility of achieving peace.

I believe we are all aware of our great and joint responsibilities to enhance and develop this chance.

This will be done by rapidly seeking to regain the spirit of partnership in peace and in the future, by entrenching reciprocity and by refraining from unilateral steps.

From now on, we must work to protect our announcement by facilitating the appropriate mechanisms that will ensure implementation.

What we have agreed upon today is but a start on bridging the gap and differences between us.

We have differences on several issues, which may include the settlements, prisoner releases, the wall, the closure of Jerusalem institutions and other issues.

We shall not be able to settle all these issues today, but our stand on them remains clear and firm.

Intensifying efforts to fulfil our obligations will lead us to another commitment from the road map: resuming the final status negotiations with the aim of ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, which started in 1967, and settling all the final status issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, water and other issues postponed until the final status negotiations, in accordance with the aforesaid points of reference outlined in the road map.

Mr. President, your majesty, Mr. Prime Minister, less than a month ago, the Palestinian people headed for the ballot boxes to take part in presidential elections held following the death of President Yasser Arafat.

In their memorable, democratic practice, the Palestinian people reiterated through these elections their adherence to the choice of a just peace; a peace that will finally end decades of war, violence and occupation; a peace that will mean the establishment of a Palestinian State or an independent, democratic State of Palestine side-by-side with the State of Israel in accordance with the provisions of the road map.

From the city of Sharm el-Sheikh, the city of peace, I reiterate, in the name of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian National Authority, our adherence to the peace process points of reference, the resolutions of international legitimacy, agreements signed between the PLO and the Government of Israel and the road map.

I stress our eagerness to honour and implement all our obligations. We will not spare any possible effort to protect this new chance for peace, which has been made possible by what we announced here today.

We hope that our brothers in Egypt and Jordan will continue their good efforts. We are also expecting the Quartet Committee to perform its tasks to ensure speedy progress along the Palestinian-Israeli track, together with efforts to reinvigorate the peace process on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

It is time for the Palestinian people to regain their freedom and independence. It is time for an end to long decades of suffering and hardship. It is time for our people to enjoy peace and the right to lead a normal life like the rest of the world under the rule of law, under one authority that is the only party allowed to carry weapons, and through political pluralism.

We look forward to seeing this day as soon as possible, for the language of dialogue to replace that of bullets and cannons and for coexistence and good neighbourliness to replace the [Israeli separation] wall. This is in order to offer our children and grandchildren, Palestinians and Israelis, a different, promising tomorrow.

Here is a new chance for peace to be born in the city of peace today. So let us all pledge to protect it until the hope of peace becomes reality, becomes a daily reality in this region.

Statement by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit
Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 8 February 2005

On 8 February 2005, Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah II of Jordan met at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit to find a solution to the impasse that began with the Al-Aqsa intifada. The text of the statement by Mr. Sharon is reproduced below.

I would like to thank you, the President of Egypt, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, on your welcome initiative and the kind hospitality for this important summit. We all hope and pray that this day will be remembered as the day on which the process began to move forward towards completion, towards the goal of a tranquil, dignified and peaceful life for all the peoples of the Middle East.

I also wish to convey special congratulations to Your Majesty, King Abdullah, on the birth of your son Hashem and on the occasion of your birthday. May you live a long life filled with joy and be able to lead your people to tranquillity and prosperity, and hopefully we can, together, strengthen the relations between us.

Congratulations are also due to you, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, on your impressive victory in the Palestinian Authority elections. Your victory and the path on which you wish to lead your people can mark a direction of real change to your people, which will affect the entire region. I hope that you will be able to lead your people on the path of democracy and maintenance of law and order, until the establishment of an independent and democratic Palestinian State.

The year 2005 began as one of great opportunity for all the peoples of the region, first and foremost for Israelis and Palestinians. We must all ensure that this opportunity is not missed.

We have an opportunity to break off from the path of blood which has been forced on us over the past four years. We have an opportunity to start on a new path. For the first time in a long time, there exists in our region hope for a better future for our children and grandchildren. We must move forward cautiously. This is a very fragile opportunity that the extremists will want to exploit. They want to close the window of opportunity for us and allow our two peoples to drown in their blood.

If we do not act now, they may be successful in their scheme.

There is only one answer to them: we must all announce here today that violence will not win, that violence will not be allowed to murder hope. We must all make a commitment not to agree for a temporary solution, not to allow violence to raise its head, but to act together, determinedly, to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, to disarm and subdue it once and for all. Only by crushing terror and violence will we build peace.

I have no intention of missing this opportunity, because we must not let the new spirit, which grants our peoples hope, pass us by and leave us empty-handed.

That is why we have acted quickly and with determination, with an understanding of the needs of the Palestinian side. Over the past few days, we reached a number of understandings with our Palestinian colleagues that will enable us to grant both peoples tranquillity and security for the near future. Today, in my meeting with Chairman Abbas, we agreed that all Palestinians will stop all acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere, and, in parallel, Israel will cease all its military activity against all Palestinians anywhere. We hope that today we are starting a new period of tranquillity and hope. Furthermore, we agreed on a process of transferring security

responsibility for Palestinian areas. I informed Chairman Abbas of our intention to take a series of confidence-building measures. Soon we will release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and establish a joint committee to explore future release of prisoners.

We wish to conduct genuine and honest dialogue in order to transform these first steps into a sound basis for the foundation of our relations.

I am determined to carry out the disengagement plan that I initiated. The disengagement plan was initiated by a unilateral decision. Now, if new change does emerge on the Palestinian side, the disengagement can bring hope and become the new starting point for a coordinated, successful process.

The disengagement plan can pave the way to implementation of the road map, to which we are committed and which we want to implement. We are prepared to actively fulfill all our obligations and expect the other side to carry out all its obligations.

Only actions and not words – this is the only way to attain the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and tranquillity.

With your permission, I wish to address the citizens of both peoples: To our Palestinian neighbours, I assure you that we have a genuine intention to respect your right to live independently and in dignity. I have already said that Israel has no desire to continue to govern over you and control your fate. We in Israel have had to painfully wake up from our dreams and we are determined to overcome all the obstacles that might stand in our path in order to realize the new chance that has been created.

You too must prove that you have the strength and the courage to compromise, abandon unrealistic dreams, subdue the forces that oppose peace and live in peace and mutual respect side-by-side with us.

To the citizens of Israel, I say: we have passed difficult years, faced the most painful experiences and overcame them. The future lies before us. We are required to take difficult and controversial steps, but we must not miss the opportunity to try to achieve what we have wished for, for so many years: security, tranquillity and peace.

And one final call to our hosts and to the Arab leaders of the region: come let us join hands and create a new atmosphere of openness and tolerance in our region. Together we can build a dam against the radical forces of yesterday, which threaten to carry us all into a whirlpool of blood and hatred. Together, we can promote relations between us and ignite a first ray of hope for all the people of the Middle East. Together, we can ensure our peoples lives of freedom and stability, prosperity and peace.

May we all be found deserving of this great opportunity that we have been granted.

**Statement by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the outcome
of the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting**
Moscow, 8 February 2005

On 8 February 2005, a statement was issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the text of which is reproduced below.

A meeting took place on 8 February in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, at Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's initiative, between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee and PNA Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, in which, along with the Egyptian leader, King Abdullah II of Jordan took part.

The main outcome of the summit is the announcement of a mutual cessation of all acts of violence on the Israeli and Palestinian side. Abbas and Sharon also discussed a number of other important issues related to overcoming the confrontation and resuming a dialogue based on fulfilment by the parties of their obligations under the road map. It was agreed that negotiating contacts between the Israelis and Palestinians would continue.

Russia welcomes the results of the summit held in Egypt. They establish the conditions for a fully fledged restoration of the peace process and advance towards a just Palestinian-Israeli settlement, as provided by the road map, drawn up by the Quartet of international mediators and approved by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003).

We highly assess the effective and useful role of Egypt and Jordan in the preparation and holding of the meeting. We also proceed from the necessity of consolidating the positive tendencies in the region, including by way of the restoration of talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in the interest of achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Moscow expects that the accords worked out in Sharm el-Sheikh will be scrupulously observed by the parties. Russia together with the other Quartet members is ready to render them necessary help and assistance in this.

Statement by the International Committee of the Red Cross on monitoring the release of Palestinian prisoners

Jerusalem, 21 February 2005

On 21 February 2005, a press release was issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Jerusalem, the text of which is reproduced below.

Acting as a neutral intermediary, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today monitored the release process of 500 Palestinian detainees from Israeli detention places to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. ICRC delegates were present at the various locations of release, namely, the Tarqumiya, Beituniya, Tulkarm, Salem and Erez crossings. Prior to their release, the ICRC carried out individual interviews with all 500 detainees to confirm that they agreed to the location of their release.

Since 1967, under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the ICRC has been visiting Israeli places of detention in which Palestinian detainees are being held to monitor their treatment and living conditions. These visits are a standing priority of the ICRC and will continue in all Israeli places of detention.

Conclusions of the London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority

London, 1 March 2005

On 1 March 2005, a press release was issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland containing the conclusions of the London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority. The text of the press release is reproduced below.

This document sets out the political vision expressed and supported by the participants at the London Meeting, the Palestinian Authority's own plans for institutional renewal and a set of clear commitments by the international community in support of the Palestinian Authority's programme.

The London Meeting takes place at a moment of promise and opportunity for Palestinians and Israelis. Its purpose is to rally the international community in support of the Palestinian Authority's plans to build the institutions of a viable Palestinian State. In that way, it can help to sustain the political process that is now being renewed.

Participants condemned the bomb attack in Tel Aviv on 25 February and expressed their determination that terrorism should be brought to an end and not allowed to sabotage the peace process. They welcomed President Abbas' commitment to bringing those responsible to justice.

Participants reaffirmed their commitment to achieving a resolution of this conflict through direct negotiations leading to the goal of two States: a safe and secure Israel and a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Participants also reaffirmed their commitment to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement consistent with the road map and based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003).

Participants noted the continuing significance of President Bush's statement of June 2002. They also reaffirmed the importance, as noted in the road map, of the initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah, endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit. Participants urged all concerned to take forward this initiative.

Participants in the meeting reaffirmed their commitment to the road map and urged all parties to the conflict to respect and uphold the obligations set out therein. The London Meeting will help the Palestinian Authority in this context.

Participants welcomed the important steps forward taken by both parties in recent weeks, including the important progress announced at the Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 8 February. While participants noted that the situation on the ground remains fragile, they underlined the importance of working to establish a virtuous cycle and the renewal of progress towards peace through the full implementation of the road map.

The participants welcomed the sense of promise offered by a strengthened Palestinian Authority under a reinvigorated leadership. The participants also welcomed the Israeli disengagement plan as a step towards achieving the two-State vision envisaged in the road map. They supported the position set out by the Quartet that withdrawal from Gaza should be full and complete and be undertaken in a manner consistent with the road map. The Quartet also urged both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to coordinate closely the preparation and implementation of the withdrawal initiative. Participants reaffirmed that the disengagement plan should take place without prejudice to final status negotiations and in accordance with international law.

The participants welcomed the meeting of Quartet Principals on 1 March. The participants reaffirmed the central role of the Quartet in carrying forward the peace process in direct contact with the two parties, and asked the Quartet to reflect the conclusions of the London Meeting in future contacts with the two parties in cooperation with other major international players.

President Abbas outlined the Palestinian Authority's plans for the strengthening of its effectiveness and capacity. These were welcomed by the participants.

A central aim of the London Meeting was to help the Palestinian Authority to strengthen Palestinian institutions, thereby providing a sound basis for building the institutions of a future Palestinian State. Participants noted the significant progress made by the Palestinian Authority. Further work to build a more effective security apparatus and better governance, and to strengthen the Palestinian economy, with adequate and effectively targeted international support, should improve the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to deliver real benefits to the Palestinian people across the West Bank and Gaza, and to take over successfully the territories from which Israel withdraws.

The Palestinian Authority's sincere commitment to a viable plan to meet the benchmarks of good government should open the way for donor governments to provide renewed support in Palestine. It was noted that any support resulting from the meeting would be in accord with Palestinian priorities and that financial assistance would be in accord with the Palestinian medium-term development plan. Participants noted that the Palestinian Authority has a number of urgent short-term financing needs, and strongly encouraged the international community to help address them.

The participants in the London Meeting recognized that the implementation of the commitments made by the Palestinian Authority would constitute a major step in implementing its road-map commitments. At the same time, participants urged and expect action by Israel in relation to its own road map commitments.

The participants in the London Meeting supported and encouraged the set of steps outlined by the Palestinian Authority, and agreed steps for international support in the areas of Governance, Security and Economic development.

The participants welcomed the intention of the Task Force on Palestinian Reform (TFPR) and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) to establish follow-up mechanisms to give greater impetus to their activities in the areas of governance and economic development. The United States of America will chair a steering group on security.

Participants committed to follow up in all three areas of governance, security and economic development, specifically:

- (a) To review and publicize progress made by the Palestinian Authority against the vision set out at the London Meeting and on previous occasions;
- (b) To mobilize international assistance for PA efforts, particularly with reference to short-term priorities, as set out at the London Meeting and in response to further developments.

Participants noted that Palestinian Authority action in certain areas required the cooperation of and facilitation by Israel. In particular, as the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee has noted, the revival of the Palestinian economy will depend on a significant dismantling of the system of closures and other restrictions on the movement of people and goods imposed by Israel. The follow-up mechanisms will liaise with the Government of Israel to help ensure a climate conducive, in both the long and short terms, to strengthening of the Palestinian Authority, taking into account Palestinian priorities and Israeli security needs. These mechanisms and all international support should be fully consistent with international law. This would include indicators or benchmarks on the conditions for economic development to be developed by the World Bank in consultation with all relevant parties.

Declaration by the Palestinian Authority on institutional renewal

The Palestinian Authority thanks the participants in the London Meeting for this opportunity to present its vision of institutional renewal and of State-building. The State-building process is crucial for the Palestinian people, in order to ensure a fruitful and effective negotiation process that would lead to the

end of the occupation that began in 1967 and to facilitate the emergence of a sovereign, strong, independent and territorially contiguous State that would be economically, politically and socially viable. Such a process is particularly important for a nation emerging from a long and debilitating conflict situation, such as ours, and we hope that we have found the correct path towards such an emergence.

Governance

The Palestinians seek to strengthen Palestinian democratic institutions, including:

- (a) Elections;
- (b) Public sector and civil service reform;
- (c) Judiciary;
- (d) Basic law/constitution;
- (e) Civil society.

To that end, the PA undertakes to address the following elements:

(a) Elections

- Pass a new electoral law currently under discussion at the Palestinian Legislative Council
- Bolster the legitimacy of Government institutions by holding elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council on or around 17 July 2005
- Complete the programme of rolling local elections across the West Bank and Gaza by the end of 2005

(b) Strengthening the public sector and civil service

- Implement a sustainable pension law following consultation with donors
- Publish an amended civil service law

(c) Judiciary

- Formally abolish state security courts
- Approve and implement an amended judicial authority law
- Develop and implement a plan to construct and to administer court houses, police centres and prison facilities in the West Bank and Gaza
- Produce clear procedures and regulations in relation to the selection, appointment, promotion and transfer of judges and prosecutors

(d) Basic law/constitution

The executive and legislative branches of the PA will continue to function in accordance with the basic law and other laws

(e) Civil society

Involve broader Palestinian civil society in shaping the reform agenda and monitoring its implementation through the National Reform Committee

Security

Our overall national security sector development and strategy is intended to create the conditions conducive to the peace process with the immediate objective of restoring internal law and order and

preventing violence, among other objectives. To that end, the PA is undertaking to address the following elements:

(a) Legal framework

Create empowered national security structures with clear reporting mechanisms to the civil authority, set out in a national security law

(b) Command structures

- Support the Palestinian National Security Council as the central body responsible for policymaking and overseeing implementation of decisions consistent with Palestine's national objectives and plans
- The National Security Council will consider the appointment of a national chief of police to oversee all regional and municipal police chiefs in the West Bank and Gaza and to boost police presence on the streets
- Encourage coordination and coherence within and across the various institutions in support of the Palestinian security architecture, including those relating to intelligence functions
- Restore and revive lines of communication with the Israeli security establishment on security issues and seek to strengthen them in the process
- Continue the process of consolidating and unifying the security/intelligence services through the operational structures of the National Security Council, into the main branches of internal security, including police, preventive security and civil defence, national security forces, including military and border guards, among others; and intelligence
- Ensure strict financial accountability of services, particularly on payroll and procurement
- Ensure effective security implementation consistent with Palestine's national security plan, especially those highlighted in Phase I of the road map and the mutual declaration of the ceasefire.
- Continue working with Palestine's neighbours on issues of mutual interest and maintain strong coordination and cooperation

Economic development

We have identified opportunities for progress in the following areas:

- (a) Economic governance;
- (b) Stimulating private sector growth;
- (c) Responding to Israeli withdrawals.

All work and progress regarding the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority in terms of economic development will be in the context of and in furtherance of the outcomes, recommendations, indicators and commitments resulting from the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee process and an understanding of Palestinian needs. In addition, the medium-term development plan should provide the framework for all monetary support from the international community. To that end, the PA undertakes to address the following elements:

(a) Economic governance

- Take further action to combat corruption, including increased transparency consistent with the fact that the PA has already signed up to the Charter of the United Nations regarding corruption
- Ensure tight control over the civil service wage in the 2005 budget
- Implement further the recommendations of the World Bank's Country Financial Accountability Assessment especially on internal and external auditing

- Enact and implement a unified pensions law to enable reduction of public sector wage bills and facilitate a civil service reform
- Conduct a public expenditure review followed by move to introduce performance/programme budgeting
- Review the revenue transfer mechanism to local government with a view to improving its efficiency

(b) Stimulating private sector growth

- Develop and implement further the medium-term development plan and ensure that its priorities are linked to budgetary objectives and poverty reduction
- Improve the legal conditions for private sector access to financial resources
- Enhance the capacity of private sector associations
- Simplify business procedures and establish a business-friendly investment environment
- Help to improve conditions to facilitate internal and external trade to the extent possible, noting, as set out by the World Bank, that the most significant hindrance to trade remains Israel's closure system, the Wall and its associated regime and the lack of a reliable and secure link between the West Bank and Gaza Strip
- Review and enhance the transparency of public procurement procedures

Beyond the specific challenges of economic governance, the following broader conditions are necessary in order to underpin a market economy:

- Make further legislative amendments to establish legal infrastructure for a stronger market economy
- Design the judicial and security arrangements to create a more attractive investment environment

(c) Responding to Israeli withdrawals

Create a dedicated PA administrative mechanism to handle the transfer, management and disposal of evacuated settlement properties

International community commitments

Representatives of the international community present at the meeting strongly welcomed the declaration by the Palestinian Authority and expressed their desire to work with it in support of its programme. In that context, the international community made the following commitments, to be implemented in accordance with existing political relationships:

Palestinian governance

(a) Elections

- Provide financial support for elections and full political support to this process, to help the Palestinian Authority to build on the experience of the presidential election and to ensure that forthcoming elections are well organized and meet international standards
- Provide technical advisers if necessary, including on drafting election law

(b) Strengthening the public sector and civil service

Provide expertise and financial support in capacity-building and implementing changes in public administration, pension arrangements and broader civil service. This will include advice and support on structure of government and civil service roles, responsibilities and conduct

(c) Judiciary

- Provide expertise and financial support for implementation of reform, training staff and strengthening infrastructure in the judiciary
- Provide a package of professional training, including human rights training for prison service staff

(d) Basic law/constitution

Provide advice and support

Security

(a) Legal framework

Provide advice and assistance on legal, structural and organizational aspects of strengthening the security sector for example, through the European Union Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support, assistance programmes provided by the United States and the security sector development and reform assistance programme

(b) Command structures

- Provide technical advice and financial support for a plan for rebuilding the Palestinian Authority security services
- Provide financial support to re-equip the security/intelligence services, for example, cars, office equipment, radios and uniforms
- Provide training for operational officers and strategic commanders as the new structures are put in place
- Help the Palestinian Authority to establish a fund for early retirement of security personnel
- Help with addressing the cost of pensions for retiring/retired security/intelligence officers
- Help the Palestinian Authority to explore mechanisms that could further enhance the implementation capabilities of the security sector, as they pertain to phase I of the road map. Any such mechanisms must account for the changing dynamics on the ground, most notably the restoration of bilateral engagement on the security front. This shall be done through the United States-led security coordinating group, the purpose of which is to help the Palestinian Authority to fulfil all of its security-related obligations under phase I of the road map. It will also aim to achieve the goal that President Abbas set out at Sharm el-Sheikh to put “an end to all acts of violence against Israelis and Palestinians, wherever they are”

Economic development

(a) Short-term priorities

- Address short-term priorities identified by the Palestinian Authority and the World Bank, including through budget support and the Public Financial Management Reform Trust Fund
- Fund pensions and social assistance schemes, including Palestinian Authority arrears on civilian pensions, short-term costs of implementing the security services pension law and an early retirement scheme for the security services
- Provide assistance for activities related to withdrawal and economic revival including a pilot border passages programme, development of a Gaza seaport and other transport outlets and technical assistance to the mechanism handling disposal of settlement assets
- Work with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to develop a reliable link between the West Bank and Gaza

- Maintain momentum and set a target date to hold a meeting by the end of June of the consultative group of international donors in support of the Palestinian Authority's medium-term development plan
- (b) Delivery of existing pledges
- Encourage donors with outstanding commitments to recognize the importance of an early release of funds committed in support of the Palestinian Authority's budget
- (c) Economic governance
- Provide expertise and financial support in implementing pension reform, to be led by the World Bank
 - Provide technical advice on a legal framework and systems to combat corruption
- (d) Stimulating private sector growth
- Monitor the adherence by the Palestinian Authority and Israel to the World Bank's indicators resulting from the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee process
 - Establish a mechanism under World Bank leadership to encourage increased international private sector investment and support efforts, led by the World Bank, to hold a private sector business/investment event by the summer of 2005
 - Work up a donor-funded loan guarantee scheme to support small business and provide assistance to the Palestinian Monetary Authority to modernize the payment system
 - Reorient existing aid more closely behind Palestinian Authority priorities, including via the World Bank Trust Fund for Gaza and the West Bank
 - Work with Israel to maximize the effectiveness of the donor effort by significantly dismantling the closure regime and increasing freedom of movement for Palestinian people and goods between, within and from the West Bank and Gaza, as agreed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee
 - Provide assistance to Israeli and Palestinian trade and customs authorities to facilitate implementation of existing Palestinian Authority trade arrangements and simplify systems for the export and import of Palestinian goods; assistance should also be provided to upgrade the capacity of the Palestinian customs administration
- (e) Responding to Israeli withdrawal
- Encourage cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel
 - Work with Israel to protect infrastructure from damage, facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza and ensure full access to West Bank and Gaza for donor and aid agency staff and materials
 - Ensure the long-term economic viability of the Occupied Palestinian Territory after Israeli withdrawals

Follow-up

The Palestinian Authority and the international community stressed their determination actively to follow up the commitments set out at the London Meeting.

Review of international support mechanisms

The participants in the London Meeting underlined the importance of maximizing the effectiveness of the international support mechanisms, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the Task Force on Palestinian Reform to provide assistance and financial support to the Palestinian Authority. The participants asked the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, the World Bank and the European

Commission to consider, in consultation with the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations, and in discussion with other members of the donor and international community, a streamlined donor coordination and support structure. After discussion with the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and Task Force on Palestinian Reform, recommendations for a reformed structure will be presented to the Quartet, as soon as possible.

Immediate action

Until that process is completed, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the Task Force on Palestinian Reform will ensure that these structures drive through work effectively to implement the commitments made by the Palestinian Authority and the international community.

Governance

The participants recognized the important contribution of the Task Force on Palestinian Reform and welcomed the intention of the European Commission to develop a short-term strategy for action in consultation with the Palestinian Authority and members of the Task Force for it to accompany and support the Palestinian Authority in the implementation of commitments on governance issues made at the London Meeting and elsewhere.

This strategy will also aim to improve the way the Task Force supports the progress made by the Palestinian Authority towards its vision, as well as the fulfilment by the international community of its commitments of assistance. The European Commission will report its conclusions to the Quartet, via the Task Force. This work will be carried out in coordination with the local level task force.

Economic development

The participants also recognized the important and continuing contribution of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in promoting Palestinian development. It welcomed the decision taken at the Committee meeting in Oslo in December that the Chair and the World Bank, as secretariat, should regularly monitor the progress made by the Palestinian Authority and Israel towards the recreation of a positive economic environment using a set of indicators to be developed by the World Bank in consultation with all relevant parties, drawing on the 18 action points described in the World Bank's report entitled *Stagnation or Revival? Israeli Disengagement and Palestinian Economic Prospects*.

In the short-term, the World Bank will work with donors and the parties to enhance of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee by accelerating activity to help ensure that economic initiatives important to a successful withdrawal are implemented rapidly. This includes exploring opportunities to promote increased private sector investment in the West Bank and Gaza. This work will be carried out in full coordination with local Committee members and the co-chairs.

Participants at the meeting welcomed the intention of the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to call a meeting in April 2005, at which the first periodic monitoring report would be reviewed, and the results reported to the Quartet.

Security

The United States will form and lead a coordinating group of those countries and organizations providing significant practical support to the Palestinians in the area of security. It will meet in the region, with additional coordination at capital level.

The group will fulfil the objective set out by the Quartet in May 2004 to establish a United States-led oversight committee on security. This group will work closely with the Palestinian Authority to

oversee the restructuring and retraining of the Palestinian security services. Its purpose will be to help the Palestinian authority fulfil all of its security-related obligations under Phase I of the road map. It will also aim to achieve the goal that President Abbas set out at Sharm el-Sheikh to put “an end to all acts of violence against Israelis and Palestinians, wherever they are”.

The group will assist and monitor the progress made by the Palestinian Authority towards its commitments, as well as the international community’s commitment of assistance.

The group will coordinate the international provision of security assistance and report periodically to the Quartet on:

- Progress on legal framework and command structures
- Operational effectiveness of Palestinian Authority security/intelligence services
- Capacity gaps and recommended solutions

The group will also liaise, when applicable, with Israeli security services over the conditions required for development of Palestinian Authority security efforts.

**Excerpts of the statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France
on handing of security to the Palestinians in Jericho
Paris, 17 March 2005**

On 17 March 2005, the deputy spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France made a statement in Paris, an excerpt of which is reproduced below.

The handover of security to the Palestinians in Jericho yesterday was a positive step. We hope it will be followed by other handovers as provided at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit on 8 February, leading to Israel's withdrawal to the line of 28 September 2000 as per the road map.

As it pledged in London, the international community will strengthen its cooperation with the Palestinians to help them maintain order in the Palestinian Territories.

This handover decision must of course be part of a much broader context consisting of the resumption of political negotiations between the two parties, a process undertaken since Sharm el-Sheikh.

**Comments by European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security
Policy Javier Solana on the Palestinian groups’ decision to extend period of calm
Brussels, 17 March 2005**

On 17 March 2005, Javier Solana, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, made a number of comments with regard to the decision taken by the Palestinian groups in Cairo to extend the current period of calm. The text of the comments is reproduced below.

I wish to renew my support to the commitment of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, to put an end to all forms of violence as the only way to advance the peace process. National reconciliation is an important element in stabilizing the situation.

All Palestinians must make the choice of achieving their political goals by legitimate political means and through negotiations. The agreement reached today in Cairo constitutes a very encouraging step in this direction. The Government of Egypt deserves support and congratulations on their efforts to facilitate this agreement. It is my sincere hope that this positive trend be sustained and consolidated, in the framework of a larger process towards stabilization and the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings, through a definitive renunciation to violence by all Palestinian groups."

Statement by Amnesty International on the removal of unlawful Israeli settlements

23 March 2005

On 23 March 2005, Amnesty International issued a statement regarding Israeli settlements, the text of which is reproduced below.

Removing unlawful Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories: time to act

For the first time in four and a half years, we are witnessing some positive developments in the human rights situation Israel and the Occupied Territories. In recent months, killings by both the Israeli army and Palestinian armed groups have significantly diminished, as has the destruction of Palestinian homes and properties by Israeli forces, and preparation is under way for the evacuation of the Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip.

These welcome developments have raised new hopes among the Israeli and Palestinian civilian populations, who have borne the brunt of the violence in recent years. Since September 2000, more than 3,200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and some 1,000 Israelis have been killed by Palestinian armed groups. Most of those killed were unarmed civilians and among them were more than 600 Palestinian children and more than 100 Israeli children.

But the cycle of killings has not been the only human rights tragedy that has wrecked the lives of so many men, women and children. Palestinians, who have been living under Israeli occupation for 38 years, have faced an unprecedented level of human rights violations in the past four and a half years. The unlawful destruction by Israeli forces of more than 4,000 homes, vast areas of agricultural land, commercial properties and infrastructure throughout the Occupied Territories has left tens of thousands of Palestinians homeless and destitute.

The impact of such mass destruction will be long lasting. For the Palestinians who lost their homes and their livelihood overnight, it will take years to rebuild their lives and they will need the assistance of the international community.

Hundreds of checkpoints, blockades and roadblocks hinder the movement of Palestinians between towns and villages in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, arbitrarily curtailing their access to their land and their jobs, to education and healthcare facilities and to other crucial services. As a result, unemployment and poverty have dramatically increased, pushing a growing number of Palestinians below the poverty line, and a growing number of people are suffering from poor health and malnutrition. Children, women and others among the most vulnerable members of Palestinian society have been particularly affected.

The ongoing construction by Israel of a fence/wall through the West Bank has exacerbated the problems of access for Palestinians to crucial services in the affected areas. These problems and the resulting deterioration in the humanitarian situation have been well documented by several United Nations agencies and by the European Commission's Special Rapporteur. The International Court of Justice, in its Advisory Opinion of July 2004, declared that the construction of the fence/wall inside the West Bank was illegal under international law and called for it to be dismantled.

The fact that most of the fence/wall lies inside the West Bank, and not on the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank, indicates that it is intended to encompass most Israeli settlements, rather than to stop Palestinian suicide bombers and other attackers from entering Israel, as Israel claims.

Israel's decision to dismantle all its settlements in the Gaza Strip and some sparsely populated settlement in the West Bank is a welcome development. However, the evacuation of some 8,000 Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip and from some very sparsely populated settlements in the West Bank must not be allowed to be used by Israel as an opportunity to expand other settlements in the West Bank, where some 400,000 Israelis live in violation of international law.

The international community has long recognized the unlawfulness of the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. In its resolution 465 (1980), the Security Council called on Israel to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.

However, the international community failed to take any measure to implement this resolution. Most Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories were built after this resolution was adopted, with the greatest expansion having taken place in the past decade. The establishment and expansion of settlements and related infrastructure in the West Bank is continuing on a daily basis, contrary to Israel's commitment under the United Nations-sponsored 2003 road map peace plan. This week, the Government of Israel confirmed its plan to built 3,500 new settlement houses in the East Jerusalem area of the West Bank.

As well as violating international humanitarian law, the implementation of Israel's settlement policy in the Occupied Territories violates fundamental human rights provisions, including the prohibition of discrimination. The seizure and appropriations of land for Israeli settlements, bypass roads and related infrastructure and discriminatory allocation of other vital resources, including water, have had a devastating impact on the fundamental rights of the local Palestinian population, including their rights to an adequate standard of living, housing, health, education and work, and freedom of movement within the Occupied Territories.

The European Commission collectively and member States individually have a responsibility to take measures to ensure that the Israeli and Palestinian sides comply with their obligations to abide by international law and respect fundamental rights. The international community must support the parties concerned when they take measures towards improving the human rights situation and must bring pressure to bear on them if they do not.

A crucial factor in the collapse of previous peace initiatives has been their failure to address key human rights issues. A human rights agenda must be a central part of any solution to the conflict.

In recent months, pressure from the international community has undoubtedly contributed to breaking the cycle of killings of Israelis and Palestinians. This pressure must be kept up on both parties to encourage them to build on the progress achieved so far. This includes taking the necessary measures to ensure that Israel halts the construction or expansion of settlements in the Occupied Territories and evacuates Israeli settlers living there, in compliance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980).

It is essential that the international community puts in place an adequate mechanism to monitor the degree to which each of the concerned parties implements its commitments. An international monitoring presence would appreciably enhance and build on efforts made by the concerned parties and provide a useful framework for enhancing their accountability. Recognizing that the deployment of international monitors requires the agreement of all parties to the conflict, Amnesty International reiterates its call on Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as States with influence with the parties, to take the steps necessary for the deployment of international human rights monitors.

Open letter by the World Council of Churches on activities by Israel in Jerusalem

31 March 2005

On 31 March 2005, an open letter was issued by World Council of Churches Director (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) Peter Weiderud, on the status of Jerusalem, the text of which is reproduced below.

The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned about actions by the Government of Israel that threaten the achievement of a just peace for both Israel and Palestine by pre-empting negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem within the framework of international law. This letter reiterates the position of the World Council of Churches on a matter of critical importance.

While the world's attention is drawn to its Gaza withdrawal plans, the Government of Israel has intensified unilateral programmes to consolidate control over Jerusalem and other occupied territory. These include:

- Creating a new de facto border by construction of the Wall on occupied territory, cutting off all of annexed Jerusalem from the West Bank in contravention of international law and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice
- Cutting the West Bank in two by adding 3,500 housing units to the Ma'ale Adumim settlement, a decision that mocks prospects for a viable, contiguous Palestinian State with a shared Jerusalem as its capital
- Repeated declarations by the Government's top leaders that large illegal West Bank settlements and all of Jerusalem will belong to Israel in any final agreement
- Ongoing violations of human and civil rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem, including building Jewish settlements in Palestinian neighborhoods while construction permits for Palestinians are denied, family homes are demolished and requests for family reunification are denied
- Threats and more threats, including an absentee property law allowing the confiscation of Palestinian property in Jerusalem and a new regulation to require permits for Jerusalem residents entering the West Bank

The World Council of Churches has long affirmed that the final status of Jerusalem must be part of a comprehensive peace settlement and be negotiated without delay; that the unilateral annexation of Jerusalem by the Government of Israel puts regional and world peace in jeopardy; that alterations of boundaries, population and settlements that change the religious, cultural or historical character of Jerusalem without the consent of the parties involved and the approval of the international community, are violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Irregular transfers of church-held land from one side to the other only add to the alarm of those who hope for justice; all such transfers must be annulled.

The World Council of Churches calls for an open and inclusive Jerusalem, a city of shared sovereignty and citizenship, a city of two peoples and three faiths, of Christians, Muslims and Jews. Now is the time to cease actions that pre-empt peace in Jerusalem and to begin negotiation of Jerusalem's final status within the framework of international law.

**Statement by the Quartet Principals on the appointment of a
Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement**
Washington, D.C., 14 April 2005

On 14 April 2005, a statement was issued by the Quartet Principals on the appointment of a Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, the text of which is reproduced below.

The Quartet Principals (United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Russian Federation Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan) announced the appointment of Mr. James D. Wolfensohn as Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement.

The Special Envoy is charged by the Quartet with leading, overseeing and coordinating the international community's efforts in support of the disengagement initiative. He will report to the Quartet.

The Special Envoy will be the single international interlocutor at the political level on disengagement and the address for specific needs for assistance to support disengagement. The Special Envoy will work with the Palestinians on specific reforms and steps to promote economic recovery and growth, democracy, good governance and transparency, job creation and improved living standards.

The Special Envoy's mission is to promote coordination and cooperation between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority on implementation of Israel's disengagement initiative from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank. This mission does not extend to the military and security aspects of disengagement.

This will require close collaboration with both Israel and the Palestinians to identify and implement those actions and policies to ensure smooth and successful implementation of the disengagement initiative.

The Special Envoy will focus his efforts on two areas in particular:

- Methodology of withdrawal, including disposition of assets
- Economic issues related to post-withdrawal revival of the Palestinian economy, including investment and financing issues

The Special Envoy will assume his duties effective 1 June for a mission lasting no longer than 31 December 2005. In view of the urgency of this mission, and taking into consideration the role the World Bank already plays in this process, its Board has authorized Mr. Wolfensohn to conduct some preparatory work immediately.

**Press statement by the League of Arab States on the Israeli plan to construct fence
around settlements in Hebron**
Cairo, 28 April 2005

On 28 April 2005, a statement was issued by the League of Arab States, the text of which is reproduced below.

The Arab League General Secretariat pursues with extreme concern the Israeli news over the plan set by the Israeli occupation forces to construct a fence for protecting the settlement zones in the city of Hebron, which is inhabited by 140 Israeli settlers among a Palestinian population of 140,000.

Such a negative orientation reflected in the Israeli plan, which comes within the framework of completing the Israeli wall, a matter that aims in the first place at confiscating further Palestinian territories, is strongly condemned by the Arab League of States.

The Arab League therefore calls upon the international community, represented by the United Nations and Security Council along with the Quartet Committee, to assume full responsibility and take the necessary moves aimed at urging Israel to stop the settlement activity and constructing the wall, in implementation of the road map and resolution of the General Assembly in which it condemned the construction of the wall for being illegitimate and demanded Israel to terminate construction works and removal of the fence from the Occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Introduction to a document entitled “Israel's disengagement plan: renewing the peace process”

30 April 2005

On 30 April 2005, the Government of Israel issued a document entitled “Israel's disengagement plan: renewing the peace process”, the introduction of which is reproduced below:

Introduction

Hope for the prospects of peace has revived in recent months. The death of Yasser Arafat and the election of his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, have fostered the expectation of a new era in relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Within this context, Israel's disengagement plan, introduced in December 2003, should be seen as an important step forward.

Ever since the 1967 Six-Day War brought Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and the Gaza Strip under Israel's administration, their status has been in question. Israel was forced to wage that war in self-defence, and the disputed territories were held not as the object of conquest, but to be part of eventual negotiations for lasting peace.

Although Israel has historic ties, security needs and other vital interests that are directly connected to these disputed territories, it was never Israel's intention to rule over a large Palestinian population. Israel is ready as always to address the vital interests of the Palestinians in these areas. The goal is to reach a just settlement that would allow both peoples to live in genuine peace and security.

Israel demonstrated its willingness to trade land for peace in its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, when it gave back all of the Sinai Peninsula. This decision entailed painful sacrifices, including the dismantlement of the town of Yamit and the uprooting of all the Sinai settlements.

Today, Israel is poised to disengage from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank, an initiative that will be the first practical test of the possibility for peaceful coexistence with the Palestinian Authority under the new leadership of Mahmoud Abbas. This bold move to end the stalemate in the peace process follows more than four years of terrorist bloodshed that have brought untold suffering to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Preparations for implementing the Government's disengagement plan, which was endorsed by the Knesset (Israel's Parliament) in October 2004, received a welcome boost at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit in February 2005. At the summit, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority Chairman Abbas both declared an end to the violence and formally renewed the dialogue for peace.

The disengagement plan does not replace negotiations, but could make an important contribution to the renewal of peace talks as envisaged by the road map sponsored by the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations provided, of course, that the Palestinian Authority eliminates the infrastructure of terrorism. It is Israel's view that the direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on the final status will result in the establishment of full peaceful relations between Israel and a Palestinian State.

This plan of course entails risk, but it is an opportunity Israel feels is well worth taking. As Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom stated in an address before the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard on 7 March 2005: "We recognize that the effort to resolve our conflict with the Palestinians can have a positive impact on a broad range of other issues of international concern and we are committed to this task. We are prepared to take risks for peace."

Report on Israeli assistance towards Palestinians following Palestinian elections and the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit

26 May 2005

The Government of Israel produced a document on assistance steps and humanitarian measures towards the Palestinians following the Palestinian elections and the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit. A background account of the document is reproduced below.

Background

Following the Palestinian elections on 9 January 2005 and the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit on 8 February 2005, Israel has taken a series of measures with the purpose of easing the everyday life of the Palestinian population. These measures are part of a policy aimed at utilizing the "window of opportunity" that was opened after the establishment of the new Palestinian Government and renewed cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Their implementation was possible due to the decrease in the number of terrorist attacks against Israelis and the improvement in cooperation between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian security forces.

The main areas in which measures were taken:

- Transfer of cities to Palestinian Authority responsibility
- Initial prisoner release
- Opening crossing points between Israel and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip
- Increasing work permits in Israel for Palestinians
- Easing restrictions over the entrance of Palestinians into Israel
- Lifting roadblocks and easing movement within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

These measures have been implemented in parallel to Israel's preparations for the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, which will result in the removal of Israeli settlements and military presence from the Gaza Strip and areas of the Northern West Bank.

In addition, Israel has decided to employ a new security system based on the concept of "minimal friction" between the Palestinian population and Israeli security forces. Israel is examining a new approach for managing the movement of people and goods from Palestinian controlled areas into Israel

and vice versa. To this end, Israel has started constructing new terminals that would enable smooth passage with minimal friction between civilians and security personnel.

The disengagement plan: a humanitarian perspective

Israel's implementation of the disengagement plan carries with it the potential for improvement of the Palestinians' everyday lives. When he first outlined the disengagement plan on 18 April 2004, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated that: "The relocation from the Gaza Strip and from Northern Samaria will reduce friction with the Palestinian population, and carries with it the potential for improvement in the Palestinian economy and living conditions."

Israel sees the Disengagement Plan as an opportunity for the Palestinians to rebuild their economic and social infrastructures and is willing to assist the Palestinian Authority in achieving these ends. Israel is also seeking the collaboration of the international community on these issues.

On 3 May 2005, Vice Premier Shimon Peres met with Quartet special envoy on disengagement, James Wolfensohn, along with the heads and members of the inter-ministerial teams for economic and civilian coordination of the disengagement. Peres emphasized that coordination of the disengagement between the Israelis and the Palestinians was important to facilitate the disengagement's success, and to leverage the economic potential embedded in the process. He also stressed the importance of focusing on projects that provide concrete, tangible economic benefits in Gaza in the short term, such as the issue of the crossing points. Peres noted that "preserving the residential structures in the Gaza settlements is in our mutual interest".

Israel offers the Palestinian Authority a concrete dialogue related to trade relations, economic development, transfer of assets, passages and access, as well as the Gaza seaport.

Transfer of security responsibility to the Palestinian Authority

The transfer of security responsibility over certain areas to the Palestinian Authority is part of Israel's policy aimed at reducing the friction between Israeli security forces and the Palestinian population. Following the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, Israel agreed to gradually hand over security control in the towns of Jericho, Tulkarm, Qalqilyah, Bethlehem and Ramallah, even before completing the implementation of the Disengagement Plan. Israel's view is that this process should be coordinated and implemented on a gradual basis, serving as a mutual confidence-building measure.

Accordingly, Israel has initiated a gradual process of transferring security responsibility for Palestinian cities to the Palestinian Authority, starting with Jericho on 15 March 2005 and Tulkarm on 21 March 2005. Consequently, all military checkpoints, closures and curfews in these areas were removed.

The success of the process depends on the commitment of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian security forces to implement their obligations to combat terrorism, to maintain public order and to promote security for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Minimal friction: a new security system in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

As part of the preparations for implementing the disengagement plan and in the wake of the improving cooperation between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian security forces, Israel has decided to adopt a new security system in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, based on the concept of "minimal friction" between the Palestinian population and Israeli security forces.

Accordingly, Israeli security forces will transfer the bulk of their monitoring and control efforts from checkpoints inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to crossing points along the revised route of the security fence. This will mean a sharp reduction in the number of roadblocks and barriers within the

Gaza Strip and the West Bank, alongside the construction of new terminals and crossing points between Palestinian-controlled areas and Israel.

The new system will enable enhanced freedom of movement for residents of the areas in which it becomes operational.

The new system will be introduced first in the Jenin area, where some roadblocks have already been removed. It is expected that the shift to the new system in that area will be completed by the end of the summer of 2005. The plan is to implement the new system in the entire West Bank gradually, starting from the north and going southwards.

Passage between Israel and Palestinian controlled areas: a new approach

Israel is examining a new approach to managing the movement of people and goods from Palestinian controlled areas into Israel and vice versa. The new approach is based on an "open concept", meaning that the interruption to the flow of people and goods caused by security considerations will be reduced to a minimum.

To this end, Israel has started constructing new terminals that will replace old crossing points between Israel and the Gaza Strip and between Israel and the West Bank. Unlike today, the new terminals will be run by civilian operators in order to reduce unnecessary friction between the military and civilians. Inside the terminal, the use of sophisticated technology will reduce the inconvenience caused by long security checks. Thus, for example, passengers will get smart cards that will enable them to cross without any physical security check.

In the Gaza Strip, most interaction between Israelis and Palestinians is expected to take place within the two major terminals:

- Erez Terminal
- Karni Terminal (for the passage of goods)

Seven other terminals will be built in the West Bank and in the Jerusalem area:

- Bitunia Terminal
- Jalameh Terminal
- Kalandia Terminal
- Qalqilya Terminal
- Sha'ar Efrayim Terminal (Ma'ale Efrayim)
- Tarqumia Terminal
- Terminal 300 (near Bethlehem)

The cost of each new terminal is estimated at 120 million to 170 million shekels (NIS). Altogether, Israel is expected to invest approximately 1.1 billion to 1.3 billion NIS in the project.

Press release by Human Rights Watch on attacks by Hamas against civilians

Jerusalem, 9 June 2005

On 9 June 2005, Human Rights Watch in Jerusalem issued a press release, the text of which is reproduced below.

Hamas must cease immediately Qassam rocket and mortar attacks against civilian areas, Human Rights Watch said today.

Hamas mortar shells and Qassam rockets killed three civilian workers, including two Palestinian and one Chinese, and injured an Israeli woman and her two children in an attack that struck a packing plant in the Israeli settlement of Ganei Tal in Gaza and the Israeli town of Sderot yesterday. Both Israeli and Palestinian analysts suspect that Hamas's continued use of mortar and Qassam attacks against civilians is an expression of the group's displeasure at the cancellation of local election results in localities that favoured Hamas and the recent postponement of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections.

"Hamas has repeatedly failed to respect a fundamental rule of international humanitarian law by attacking civilians and civilian objects," said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of the Middle East and North Africa Division of Human Rights Watch. "It is unacceptable for Hamas to express its unhappiness with the political situation by firing on civilians."

Any party to any armed conflict in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories are obligated to abide by international humanitarian law and the laws of war. International humanitarian law prohibits direct attacks against civilians and civilian objects as well as indiscriminate attacks and attacks that cause disproportionate damage to civilians. A prohibited indiscriminate attack includes using weapons that are incapable of discriminating between civilians and combatants or between civilian and military objects.

Human Rights Watch said that Qassam rockets, named after the armed wing of Hamas, Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, are by their very nature problematic weapons because it is not possible to direct them at military targets with any degree of precision. They are primitive, short-range, home-made rockets that do not have the technical capability to be guided. Typically, a Qassam is made up of a 1-meter-long tube filled with six kilograms of explosives and has a range of between 3 to 10 kilometres. The longest shot to date was an eight kilometre attack on Ashkelon, an Israeli town eight kilometres north of the Gaza Strip. Because Qassams are not capable of accurate targeting, it is unlawful to use them in or near areas populated with civilians.

"If Hamas wants to be considered a legitimate political actor in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, it must show respect for the most basic principles of humanitarian law," said Whitson. "To date, it has failed to do so."

According to the Israel Defense Forces, Hamas has launched more than 300 Qassam rockets since September 2000. All of the victims of the rockets have been civilians. Including this most recent attack, there have been eight civilian deaths from Qassam rockets, including four children, as well as many civilian injuries and damage to civilian infrastructure, such as homes. Not a single one of these attacks has hit a military target.

In the past, Israel has retaliated against Qassam attacks with large-scale military operations that have resulted in the deaths of civilians, levelled land and demolished homes and other buildings. The most destructive Israeli response to a Qassam attack, a 17-day-long operation in October 2004, named by the Israeli army as "Days of Penitence," targeted the Jabalya refugee camp, from where it was believed Hamas launched Qassams resulting in the death of two Israeli children in the town of Sderot in September 2004. The operation led to the death of approximately 107 Palestinians, a quarter under the age of 18, and the injury of 431, as well as the demolition of at least 91 homes. When questioned by Human Rights Watch about the destruction in October 2004, Israeli General Israel Ziv could not articulate a military purpose for the attack, but said the attack was necessary to punish Jabalya residents for their support of the armed groups.

Human Rights Watch said that unlawful attacks committed in response to another unlawful attack are a form of reprisal, which is a violation of international humanitarian law, and Israel should refrain from repeating them.

Declaration adopted by the European Council on the Middle East peace process
Brussels, 17 June 2005

At its meeting on 16 and 17 June 2005, the European Council adopted a declaration on the Middle East peace process, the text of which is reproduced below.

The European Council stresses the global strategic importance of peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean. This is the context in which the European commitment to the resolution of the Middle East conflict must be seen. The European Union is firmly resolved to continue its action with a view to achieving this goal.

The European Council welcomes the positive developments in recent months. Thus, the peaceful transition of power in the Palestinian Authority with respect for the institutions, the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, and the materialization of the withdrawal from Gaza and from certain parts of the northern West Bank have all created an opportunity for tangible progress towards the resolution of the conflict. It is crucial that the parties to the conflict, along with the international community, make every effort to make the most of this context and avoid a new escalation of violence.

The European Council recalls in this regard the importance of full implementation by the parties of the obligations incumbent upon them under the first phase of the road map. It notes that the latter provides for measures to be taken in parallel by the two sides.

The European Council stresses the importance for the Palestinian Authority of fulfilling all its obligations with regard to security, including those accepted at Sharm el-Sheikh, where all parties undertook to cease all acts of violence. The Palestinian Authority must in particular demonstrate its complete determination to combat terrorism and continue with the reorganization of all security services. The European Council calls on the Palestinian Authority to continue with the ongoing reform process, to intensify consolidation of the institutions and to set as soon as possible a date for the organization of free and fair legislative elections.

The European Council calls on all parties to take all necessary steps to enable those elections to be held in all the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

The European Council also stresses the need for a halt to Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian Territories. This implies a complete cessation of construction of dwellings and new infrastructures such as bypass roads. The European Council also calls for the abolition of financial and tax incentives and direct and indirect subsidies, and the withdrawal of exemptions benefiting the settlements and their inhabitants. The European Council urges Israel to dismantle illicit settlement outposts. Settlement policy is an obstacle to peace and threatens to make any solution based on the coexistence of two States physically impossible.

The European Council, while recognizing the right of Israel to protect its citizens from attacks, remains concerned by the continuing construction of the separation barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, which is contrary to the relevant provisions of international law.

The European Council commends the political courage shown by the leaders of the two sides with regard to the withdrawal from Gaza and certain parts of the northern West Bank. The Council calls on countries in the region to facilitate the Palestinian Authority's efforts to establish control in its territory and to step up their political and economic support. It stresses the importance of a successful disengagement, including for the advancement of the peace process. The European Council confirms the European Union's support for the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, Mr. James Wolfensohn, and its determination to work in close cooperation with him to ensure the success of the

project. To ensure the social and economic viability of Gaza, the European Council stresses the need for access to the outside, particularly through the borders with Egypt and through a port and an airport, and to establish a meaningful link with the West Bank.

In this context, the European Council reasserts that the Israeli withdrawal must be carried out in the framework outlined in the conclusions of the European Council of March 2004, and in particular form an integral part of the process specified by the road map.

The European Council undertakes to intensify its assistance to the Palestinian Authority to pursue institutional consolidation.

The European Council reiterates the importance it attaches to compliance with international law by the parties. In particular, no party should undertake unilateral measures or prejudge questions relating to final status. The European Union will not recognize any change to the 1967 borders other than those negotiated between the parties. A just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the conflict must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the principle of land-for-peace.

The European Union encourages the parties to move forward resolutely in implementing the road map on the basis of these principles. It undertakes to assist Israelis and Palestinians in advancing the peace process and achieving the goal of coexistence of the two States through the creation of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours in peace and security. The European Union cannot commit itself to any other path.

The European Council reaffirms that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace must meet the legitimate aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and includes Lebanon and Syria. It calls for a relaunch of efforts to make progress on all the tracks of the peace process.

The European Union will continue to oppose all those who have recourse to violence and to support all those who reject violence and strive for peace and security in order to construct a better future for the region.

**Excerpts from the Gleneagles Communiqué by the Group of Eight regarding the
Middle East peace process
Gleneagles, Scotland, 8 July 2005**

On 8 July 2005, the Group of Eight issued a communiqué during its summit held at Gleneagles, Scotland. The text of the segment on the Middle East peace process is reproduced below.

A comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict is critical to peace in the world and prosperity in the region. In this context, our common goal remains a final settlement of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict based on the creation of a viable, democratic Palestinian State living in peace, dignity and prosperity side-by-side with a secure, universally recognized Israel. We now have a real opportunity to advance peace in the Middle East.

We welcome Israel's planned withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank. The success of this courageous step will require close coordination between the parties.

We welcome and endorse the approach presented to us by James Wolfensohn as the Quartet's Special Envoy for Disengagement, to support economic regeneration and further Palestinian governance reform. Mr. Wolfensohn's work should complement that of General William Ward on security issues. These efforts will build on the London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority held on 1 March

2005. We urge the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to engage fully and constructively in implementing Mr. Wolfensohn's plans.

We support Mr. Wolfensohn's intention to stimulate a global financial contribution of up to \$3 billion per year over the coming three years. Domestic and international investors should be full partners to this process. We are mobilizing practical support for Mr. Wolfensohn's efforts and look forward to further development of his plans and their presentation to the Quartet and the international community in September. We note the strong interest of Arab States and members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and encourage them to provide substantial additional support.

Both parties must meet their commitments under the road map, which would be reenergized by a successful withdrawal. The Government of Israel should meet its road-map commitments on settlements and fundamentally ease the system of movement restrictions that prevent Palestinian economic recovery, consistent with Israel's security needs. Palestinian economic revival also requires systematic reform driven by the Palestinian Authority, which must re-establish internal law and order, and take effective action to confront terrorism.

The global significance of this conflict requires strong international engagement. We underline our resolve to support both sides in meeting their road-map commitments and call on others to do the same.

Transcript of the Quartet teleconference of the implementation of the road map
Moscow, 13 August 2005

On 13 August 2005, a transcript was issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the Quartet teleconference at the ministerial level, the text of which is reproduced below.

A teleconference of the Middle East Quartet took place on 12 August at the ministerial level, attended by Russian Federation Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. Issues related to the implementation of the road map for Middle East settlement were considered.

In discussing the situation in Palestinian-Israeli relations on the eve of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the northern part of the West Bank, the importance was noted of preserving calm and maintaining security in all the stages of implementation of this plan. The Quartet members pointed out the importance of the coordination of actions by the sides. They gave a positive assessment to the efforts by the Quartet special representative James Wolfensohn and his team in dealing with practical issues arising in connection with Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, and expressed support for his mission in fostering engagement between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority and carrying out projects for the economic and social development of the Palestinian territories.

It was agreed to carry on contacts within the Quartet framework with the aim of assisting Palestinian-Israeli settlement. Agreement was reached to hold a ministerial Quartet meeting in New York on 20 September in the course of the work of the General Assembly. At this meeting, it is borne in mind to consider the initiative of Russia for the convocation in Moscow this autumn of a high-level working meeting of experts for a comprehensive assessment of the state of affairs in Middle East settlement at the stage after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank.

**Press release by the Organization of the Islamic Conference on
Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip**
Jeddah, 15 August 2005

On 15 August 2005, the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Conference Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, issued a press release on the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the text of which is reproduced below.

The Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, has stated that the withdrawal of the Israeli army and settlers from Gaza strip was a positive step that will enable the Palestinian people to regain their national rights. He also stressed that the withdrawal should be neat and total from all Gaza Strip territories, including land, sea and air crossings, and should preserve the geographical unity of the Palestinian territories in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Secretary General said that the withdrawal should be an integral part of the road map and should be followed by other Israeli withdrawals from lands it occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. It should also include the dismantling of Israeli settlements, the separation wall and all barriers on the Palestinian territories, the ending of all Israeli practices and measures against the Palestinian people as well as the release of all Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

The Secretary General, while congratulating the Palestinian people and leadership over this achievement, expressed his hope that the withdrawal process would not be marred by any clashes, and that the Palestinian national unity would be a guarantee for the Palestinian people to continue their just struggle for the sake of freedom and independence.

Excerpts of the PLO Negotiation Affairs Department report on the Israeli disengagement plan
Ramallah, 1 September 2005

On 1 September, the Palestinian Authority Negotiation Affairs Department issued a report on the Israeli disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip, excerpts of which are reproduced below.

Legal analysis

Israel's "disengagement" plan from the Gaza Strip states that once fully enacted "there will be no basis to the claim that the Strip is occupied land," even though the plan envisages indefinite Israeli military and economic control over the Gaza Strip.

Israel's eagerness to declare an end to the Gaza Strip's occupation illustrates the strategy behind the plan. First, Israel seeks to proclaim an end to the Gaza Strip's occupation ostensibly in order to absolve Israel of all legal responsibilities as an "occupying power" while simultaneously retaining effective military control over the Gaza Strip and its inhabitants. Second, it hopes to garner international support for retaining and even expanding illegal colonies in the Occupied West Bank in exchange for a withdrawal from Gaza. This strategy's success was most apparent in the Bush-Sharon press conference held on 14 April 2004, during which President Bush praised Sharon's withdrawal plan and announced that "existing Israeli population centres" in Occupied Palestinian Territory would become part of Israel in any permanent status agreement. Third, as Israeli Bureau Chief Dov Weisglass confessed, Israel hopes to indefinitely freeze the peace process.

Variations of this strategy are not new. During the interim period of the Oslo Accords, Israel similarly carved away Palestinian population centres while retaining control over Palestinian movement, economy and natural resources. Although Israel maintained effective military control over the evacuated Area A and was therefore legally bound by its legal obligations as an occupying power, some Israeli

Government advisers argued that Area A was no longer occupied territory and absolved themselves of all legal responsibility. In public and even some diplomatic discourse, the occupation disappeared, occupied territory became “disputed” territory and the conflict was no longer one between an occupying power and an occupied population but rather a land dispute between two equal parties.

Notwithstanding the terms of the plan, Israel will remain an occupying power under international law after disengagement from Gaza and is therefore bound by the obligations of an Occupying Power under international customary law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

This updated legal analysis was originally released in October 2004 and is still accurate today, despite recent developments along the occupied Gaza Strip’s border with Egypt and coordination activities with the Palestinian Authority.

Conclusion: constructive solutions

Israel will retain effective military, economic and administrative control over the Gaza Strip and will therefore continue to occupy the Gaza Strip even after implementation of its disengagement plan as proposed. Because Israel will continue to occupy Gaza, it will still be bound by the provisions of the 1907 Hague Regulations, the Fourth Geneva Convention and relative international customary law.

This is not to say, however, that removing Gaza’s settlers or reducing the Israeli military presence in and around the Gaza Strip could not usher in a better age for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Palestinians appreciate any movement on Israel’s part towards compliance with international law. Compliance with international law brings Palestinians closer to liberation and the region closer to stability. By providing non-violent channels to achieve fair results, international law helps silence extremist positions and activity while bringing both sides closer to a negotiated peace. Additionally, respect for international law affirms the credibility of more powerful nations who routinely invoke it as the legitimate basis for their own actions.

However, Israel’s disengagement plan does not represent a good-faith effort at advancing peace. Rather, Israel is selectively complying with some international legal standards in the Gaza Strip to preempt criticism for massive violations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In so doing, Israel ensures that the conflict will continue and perhaps intensify. If Israel maintains effective control over the Gaza Strip, denying it the ability to develop internally or trade externally, Gaza could become a greater humanitarian disaster than it already is. Or if Israel eventually proclaims Gaza the “State of Palestine”, the freedom guaranteed under international law might become ever more distant for Palestinians elsewhere.

The international community should ensure that whatever unilateral measures Israel takes conform to international law and are not used to justify violations of international law elsewhere.

Today, however, Israel is making room for over 30,000 new settlers in the occupied West Bank this year alone, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem or almost four times the number of settlers that were evacuated from the occupied Gaza Strip as part of disengagement.

We now have a historic opportunity for peace in the Middle East. Rather than an illegal declaration of an end of occupation on less than 4 per cent of the Palestinian territory that Israel occupies, Israel should join the new Palestinian leadership in negotiating an end of conflict.

Peace is the best security for both Palestinians and Israelis and the only secure peace is an agreed peace. We know the contours of any final status agreement, we have the opportunity and both the Palestinian and Israeli people have the will. An immediate return to bilateral negotiations, with the international community as mediator, would help to bring permanent and positive change to the Middle East.

Statement by the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France on the agreement to deploy Egyptian border guards
Paris, 2 September 2005

On 2 September 2005, the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France made a statement on the agreement between Egypt and Israel to deploy Egyptian border guards along the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, excerpts of which are reproduced below.

We welcome the agreement between Egypt and Israel on the deployment of Egyptian border guards along the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

We strongly encourage Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Authority to continue their dialogue to permit the opening of crossings on the land border between Gaza and Egypt for persons and goods.

France, along with its partners in the European Union, will make every effort to ensure the withdrawal from Gaza is a success and leads to a real resumption of the road map.

Statement by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on the completion of the Gaza withdrawal
Washington, D.C., 12 September 2005

On 12 September 2005, the United States Department of State issued a statement, the text of which is reproduced below.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has welcomed the completion of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and has called for cooperation from the entire international community in efforts to restore the Palestinian economy and security forces as the Palestinians lay the foundations for a future State.

This is a historic moment for both sides and the commitment of both sides to a successful disengagement process has been impressive," Rice said in a 12 September statement.

Israel withdrew its last military forces from Gaza on 12 September, just four weeks after officials called on residents of the 21 Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip to evacuate the territory. This marks the first time that Israel has withdrawn settlements from land it occupied during the 1967 war. Israel also withdrew from four settlements in the West Bank as part of the disengagement.

Rice said the withdrawal will enhance Israel's security and allow the Palestinians to begin building the institutions necessary for a future State. She praised the cooperation of the Israelis and Palestinians in ensuring that the process moved forward smoothly.

Press release on transport office agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority
Jerusalem, 21 September 2005

On 18 June 2005, the European Commission issued a press release regarding the signing in Jerusalem of an agreement by Israeli and Palestinian Transport Ministers on establishing a joint transport office. The text of the press release is reproduced below.

On Wednesday, 21 September, the transport ministers of Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed an agreement in Jerusalem for the establishment of a joint transport office. The role of the office will be to study and promote the implementation of projects of mutual interest, especially in the domain of road and railway transport. The agreement was facilitated by the European Commission and the joint transport office will be supported financially by the European Union.

The signing of the agreement by Israeli transport minister Meir Sheetrit and Palestinian transport minister Saed el Din Kharmah was the culmination of a process that began at the fifth Euro-Mediterranean Transport Forum held in Brussels on 21 and 22 December 2004, at which Israeli and Palestinian representatives had expressed an interest in the establishment of a joint office for transport infrastructures. Since that time, the two sides, accompanied by European Commission officials, had met several times to discuss the relevant issues.

Reacting to today's signing, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner said:

I warmly welcome today's establishment of a joint transport office and congratulate the two ministers for taking this positive step. Regional cooperation in the transport field is part of the Action Plans agreed with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The joint transport office will join a similar initiative that has already been developed in the energy domain. I would like to wish both sides every success in this new joint venture.

The Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Transport, Jacques Barrot, also added:

I consider this initiative very important. It will identify and promote key infrastructure projects within and between the Parties, thereby facilitating the transport of people and goods in the region. I am convinced that this type of technical cooperation can contribute very positively to the Peace Process.

Background

The specific activities of the Joint Transport Office as agreed by the parties will be to:

- Initiate, identify, evaluate and promote thereafter the execution of transport infrastructure projects of mutual interest, including for road and rail, and facilitate measures for the efficient transport of people and goods
- Conduct joint analyses of such common projects, including feasibility studies and provide related technical advice
- Prepare proposals for agreed projects to be submitted for consideration by international financing institutions and other donors
- Promote the exchange of data and information related to the transport sector
- Reinforce administrative capacity-building in the field of transport;
- Promote regional transport

Joint statement following meeting of the Israeli Palestinian Steering Committee
10 October 2005

On 10 October, the Office of the Prime Minister of Israel issued the following joint statement following the meeting of the Israeli Palestinian Steering Committee the text of which is reproduced below.

The Israeli and Palestinian Steering Committee, headed by Dov Weisglass and Saeb Erekat, met in the past few days to express its commitment to the full implementation of the road map commitments and the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and reiterated its commitment to stop violent activities.

In order to prepare the agenda for a successful and productive meeting between the two leaders, it was decided to resume work of the joint committees in order to advance the issues on the agenda including:

- Resume the work of the joint security committee to discuss, inter alia, the handover of additional Palestinian cities and their surrounding areas to Palestinian authority control
- Resume the work of the fugitives and deportees committee
- Resume the work of the prisoners committee
- Resume the work of the steering committee

During the preparation meetings, issues related to the Disengagement Plan were discussed including the Rafah border crossing, the movement of people and goods between Gaza and the West Bank and between the Palestinian territories and Israel, the status of the areas in the northern West Bank from which Israel exited, and the issues related to the Gaza airport.

It was decided that the expert teams from both parties would meet regularly to intensify the discussions and reach agreements regarding all the abovementioned issues according to the parameters that were outlined in the letter of the Quartet Envoy, James Wolfensohn, to the Prime Ministers.

It was agreed that the two leaders would meet on a regular basis in order to personally accompany and review the process and solve disagreements through negotiations and discussions. It was also agreed that the committees would meet frequently so that during the coming meeting between the two leaders they could review the progress that had been achieved on these issues.

Israel specified its intention to initiate steps to ease the humanitarian and economic conditions of the Palestinian population.

It was agreed that following the return of the Palestinian President from Washington, D.C., the two leaders would meet in order to review the progress made by the committees.

Excerpts of Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin's message to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on the peace process following the Israeli disengagement

Moscow, 18 October 2005

On 18 October 2005, Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin sent a message to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas concerning continuation of the peace process following the completion of the withdrawal from Israeli settlements and military infrastructure from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Excerpts of the message are reproduced below.

The task now is not to wait too long before pursuing the peace process, otherwise the positive dynamic that has been reached with such hard work could be lost. Israel's withdrawal

from part of the Palestinian territories is a prologue to implementing the road map for a Middle East peace settlement and the return of all the Palestinian territories.

Mr. Putin said he was sure that continued negotiations between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel, with energetic support from the international community, would ultimately settle what for the Palestinians is the key objective of creating a viable, territorially contiguous and sovereign democratic State living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security.

The President expressed a number of views on the further development of the situation. The Russian Federation will continue to actively assist the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process both through bilateral contacts and through the work of the Quartet. Likewise, the proposal still holds to organize an international high-level expert meeting in Moscow on the Middle East, at which it would be possible to analyse the situation in the context of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, discuss the next steps to take to implement the road map and look at renewing the activity of multilateral working groups working on the peace process.

**Statement by United States President George W. Bush welcoming Palestinian Authority
President Mahmoud Abbas to the White House**
Washington, D.C., 20 October 2005

On 20 October 2005, United States President George W. Bush made a statement welcoming Palestinian Authority President Abbas to the White House the text of which is reproduced below.

It is my honour to welcome the democratically elected leader of the Palestinian Authority to the White House for the second time this year. We just had some good talks. Mr. President, thanks. A good, open, exchange of ideas.

President Abbas is a man devoted to peace and to his people's aspirations for a State of their own. And today the Palestinian people are closer to realizing those aspirations. It's a really interesting period of history, I think. I was just commenting to the President when we were in the Oval Office how much things have changed in the Holy Land. After all, he got elected in January; there were successful Palestinian municipal elections; and then we witnessed the completion of Israel's disengagement from Gaza and parts of the West Bank. It's been an eventful year.

And I say it's an eventful year because the ultimate objective is for there to be two States, living side-by-side in peace; two democracies living side-by-side in peace. And I believe that's where we're headed. Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and parts of West Bank was a bold decision, with historic significance. President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority contributed to the success of the withdrawal in significant ways. Mr. President, thank you.

Through the active coordination and ground-level cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, the disengagement has been completed successfully and calmly. Israeli withdrawal creates new opportunities, creates responsibilities for the Palestinian people.

The way forward must begin by confronting the threat that armed gangs pose to a genuinely democratic Palestine. And those armed gangs must confront the threat that armed gangs pose to lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Now, Mr. President, you ran on a platform of peace. That's why the people voted for you. I strongly support your rejection of terror and your commitment to what you have called one authority, one law and one gun. The United States, in cooperation with the international community, has helped you achieve this through the efforts of our senior United States security

coordinator, General Kip Ward. I appreciate your service, General Ward. Thank you for being here and thank you for all your hard work to help the Palestinian security forces at a critical time. Job well done.

In the coming days, I'll be naming our new coordinator to build on the progress General Ward has made. This person will take on an enhanced mission to help President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority carry out their responsibility to end terror attacks, dismantle terrorist infrastructure, maintain law and order and, one day, provide security for their own State.

The way forward must include rebuilding the Palestinian economy. This goal has the support of the Quartet: the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and the Russian Federation. Quartet Special Envoy Jim Wolfensohn is coordinating a broad effort to generate economic and financial support from the international community for the Palestinian Authority, and he's doing a good job. I'm going to continue to consult with our Quartet partners to ask Jim to extend his mission until next spring.

It's important that we make quick progress on the issues that Jim has identified as most critical for the Palestinian economy, including opening the Rafah crossing, connecting the West Bank in Gaza, improving the ability of Palestinians to travel in the West Bank, and beginning work on the Gaza seaport. These are all practical steps that will help the Palestinian economy grow and flourish. I believe that Arab States have a particular responsibility to help the Palestinians build a strong and prosperous economy, and I urge them to create an environment in the region that strengthens the possibility of peace.

The way forward must continue to include democratic elections. The upcoming elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council offer an opportunity to open the door to the next generation of Palestinian leaders. They'll be responsible for building a peaceful and hopeful future for their country.

In the short term, the Palestinian Authority must earn the confidence of its peoples, by holding elections and having a functioning Government that delivers economic opportunity. The Palestinian Authority must also earn the confidence of its neighbours by rejecting and fighting terrorism.

As I have stated in the past, achieving peace demands action from all parties. Israel must continue to work with Palestinian leaders to help improve the daily lives of Palestinians. At the same time, Israel should not undertake any activity that contravenes its road map obligations or prejudices the final status negotiations with regard to Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. This means that Israel must remove unauthorized posts and stop settlement expansion. It also means that the barrier now being built to protect Israelis from terrorist attacks must be a security barrier rather than a political barrier. Israeli leaders must take into account the impact this security barrier has on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

This is a time of great possibility in the Middle East and the people of the region are counting on their leaders to seize the opportunities for peace and progress. This work isn't going to be easy, but the path forward is clear. I want to thank President Abbas for his hard work. I appreciate your service, Mr. President. I assured him that the United States will use our influence to help realize a shared vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security.

Main results of the European Union Council, committing to police mission in the Palestinian territory and to assist with Gaza border operations

Brussels, 7 November 2005

On 7 November 2005, the General Affairs and External Relations Council on the Middle East peace process issued its main results, excerpts of which is reproduced below.

Concerning the Middle East, the Council:

- Decided to launch a police mission in the Palestinian territories under the European Security and Defence Policy. The mission, which will have a long-term reform focus and will provide enhanced support to the Palestinian Authority in establishing sustainable and effective policing arrangements;
- Noted the European Union's willingness in principle to provide assistance with the operation of crossing at Gaza's borders on the basis of an agreement between the parties. This followed a request by Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn on behalf of the parties that the European Union consider playing a third party monitoring role at the Rafah crossing point on the Gaza-Egypt border.

Middle East peace process: Council conclusions

The Council underlined the need to maintain forward momentum towards full implementation of the road map and of the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh. It reiterated its commitment to the goal of the coexistence of two States, by the creation of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours in peace and security. It recalled that the European Union would not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties.

The Council condemned unreservedly the recent terrorist attacks on Israel that have resulted in a number of Israeli fatalities and injuries. The Council also condemned the further violence perpetrated by Palestinian militants. While recognizing Israel's right to protect its citizens against terrorist attacks, the Council called on Israel to act with restraint and to refrain from all extra-judicial killings, which are contrary to international law.

The Council expressed its grave concern at continued violence in Gaza and the West Bank. It underlined the need for the Palestinian Authority to take full control of law and order in the Occupied Territories. The Council also stressed the importance of the Palestinian Authority taking urgent action against Palestinian militants and to dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.

The Council underlined the importance of the forthcoming elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council as an essential element for progress in the peace process. The Council emphasized that violence and terror are incompatible with democratic processes and urged all factions, including Hamas, to renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm. The Council urged Israel to facilitate the preparations and conduct of the elections, including in occupied East Jerusalem.

The Council reiterated its support for the work of James Wolfensohn, the Quartet Special Envoy for Disengagement, and welcomed his recent report to the members of the Quartet. It urged the parties to reach rapid agreement on the issues contained in the Rapid Action Plan, including arrangements for Gaza's borders and crossings; the Gaza seaport and airport; movement of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank; and freedom of movement in the West Bank. The Council called on both Israel and the Palestinians to work with equal determination towards the resolution of the outstanding issues. It

underlined the importance of progress on these points for the growth of the Palestinian economy, including support to the private sector and in particular small and medium-sized enterprises. The Council noted James Wolfensohn's letter of 2 November in which he requested on behalf of the parties that the European Union consider playing a third party monitoring role at the Rafah crossing point on the Gaza-Egypt border. The Council noted the European Union's willingness in principle to provide assistance with the operation of crossings at Gaza's borders on the basis of an agreement between the parties. It looked forward to receiving a full report from the scoping mission visiting the region, as the basis for an early decision on European Union involvement and timely planning.

The Council urged the Government of Israel to cease all activities in the Palestinian territories, including settlement-building, the construction of the separation barrier as well as the demolition of Palestinian homes. Such actions are contrary to international law and threaten to make any solution based on the coexistence of two States physically impossible. The Council was particularly concerned about the implementation of these policies in and around East Jerusalem. The Council called for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem in accordance with the road map, in particular the Orient House and the Chamber of Commerce. It called on the Government of Israel to cease all discriminatory treatment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, especially concerning work permits, access to education and health services, building permits, house demolitions, taxation and expenditure.

The Council underlined the important role played by European Union Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support and by United States Security Coordinator General Ward in the reform and strengthening of Palestinian security and police structures. In this regard, the Council decided to launch a European Security and Defence Policy police mission in the Palestinian Territories to build on the work of the Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support. This mission will have a long-term reform focus and will provide enhanced support to the Palestinian Authority in establishing sustainable and effective policing arrangements. The new mission, which will have a three-year mandate, will assist in the implementation of the Palestinian Civil Police Development Plan, advise and mentor senior members of the Palestinian Civil Police and criminal justice system and coordinate assistance to the Palestinian Civil Police by the European Union and, where requested, other international bodies. The mission will act in close cooperation with the European Commission's institution-building as well as other international efforts in the security sector and judicial reform.

The Council welcomed the Commission's detailed communication entitled "EU-Palestinian cooperation beyond disengagement: towards a two-State solution" and the comprehensive medium-term strategy and suggested priorities it sets out for European Union engagement with the Palestinians. The Council welcomed the Commission's proposal to consider ways in which European Union assistance to the Palestinians could be more effective and coordinated and looked forward to further discussion of this issue."

**United States Department of State press release on the movement and access agreement
between Israel and the Palestinians**

Washington, D.C., 15 November 2005

On 15 November 2005, the United States State Department issued a press release, the text of which is reproduced below.

Secretary Rice

Two months ago, Israel and the Palestinian Authority took an unprecedented step on the road to peace with the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, returning control of that territory to the Palestinian people. Israeli and Palestinian leaders have been hammering out practical arrangements to gain the benefits of that withdrawal and improve conditions in the rest of the Palestinian territories.

I am pleased to be able to announce today that Israel and the Palestinian Authority have concluded an agreement on movement and access. The Quartet's Special Envoy Jim Wolfensohn has played a key role. Thank you, Jim. We also had important help from the European Union and I am glad that Javier Solana can join us here today. The European Union, as you will learn, will play an important role in implementing this agreement.

This agreement is intended to give the Palestinian people freedom to move, to trade, to live ordinary lives. The agreement covers six topics.

First, for the first time since 1967, Palestinians will gain control over entry and exit from their territory. This will be through an international crossing at Rafah, whose target opening date is 25 November.

Second, Israel and the Palestinians will upgrade and expand other crossings for people and cargo between Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. This is especially important now because Israel has committed itself to allow the urgent export of this season's agricultural produce from Gaza.

Third, Palestinians will be able to move between Gaza and the West Bank; specifically, bus convoys are to begin about a month from now and truck convoys are to start a month after that.

Fourth, the parties will reduce obstacles to movement within the West Bank. It has been agreed that, by the end of the year, the United States and Israel will complete work to lift these obstacles and develop a plan to reduce them.

Fifth, construction of a Palestinian seaport can begin. The Rafah model will provide a basis for planned operations.

Sixth, the parties agree on the importance of the airport. Israel recognizes that the Palestinian Authority will want to resume construction on the airport. I am encouraging Israel to consider allowing construction to resume as this agreement is successfully implemented; construction that could, for instance, be limited to non-aviation elements.

This agreement is a good step forward. With the international community, Israel and the Palestinian Authority must keep working hard to make these measures work in practice. As they are implemented, trust can grow. Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas have shown real statesmanship in making the decisions that led to this agreement.

Meanwhile, our commitment to security is strong, as always. Progress like today's agreement cannot continue unless there is also progress in fighting terror and obviously we all have a great interest in working together to ensure that anyone involved in criminal activities or violence will be prevented from passing through Rafah or any other crossing.

For our part, the United States will work closely with the parties to be sure that reliable security arrangements are in place.

Earlier this year, the United States dispatched General William Ward to lead a mission working on security with both sides. As General Ward completes his tour of duty, I am pleased to announce that President Bush has nominated General Keith Dayton to replace General Ward and take over as the United States Security Coordinator in an expanded mission to assist the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel.

Palestinians and Israelis have many other concerns to address on the road map toward two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace. But today's steps show that progress continues. As

Palestinians move back and forth to the outside world, as they trade with their Israeli neighbours, the lives of ordinary people on both sides will change for the better.

Thank you very much, and now I would like to ask Javier to make a few remarks.

High Representative Solana

Thank you very much, Condi. I think what we have transmitted here today is a very, very important agreement. It has taken a long time to finalize but it will give the Gaza disengagement the full content in particular because the border between the Gaza and Egypt will be now opened.

And as you know from the document that you are going to read in a moment, the European Union will take the third-party role in that very important and complicated border. We are ready. We have the plans already done and prepared and by the end of the month, we will be in a condition to take the full responsibility and have the border function.

I hope very much that it will be a successful operation. It's not an easy task, but it will be successful and it will contribute for the first time to Palestinians to have from Gaza a border open and controlled by them with a third party there to go to Egypt.

As you know, the Philadelphi Road will be controlled by the Egyptians but the crossing border will be - the third party will be the European Union. We assume that responsibility with full responsibility and with full to have a very important contribution to the finalization of the Gaza disengagement.

I want to say that Jim Wolfensohn has played a fundamental role. He is responsible for the Quartet for this negotiation and I want to thank him very, very warmly, and I want to thank Condoleezza Rice for the long hours that we have to spend in the past days.

Mr. Wolfensohn

Well, thank you very much, Javier and Madame Secretary. For us in the Quartet, this is a very important day. For more than six months we have been negotiating these points and I am very grateful to you, Madame Secretary, for giving us the push in these last hours to try and ensure that the parties would reach an agreement, and I'm grateful to them also for agreeing to come to a solution that is valid and with which we can move forward.

The Quartet will continue to do its work in trying to assist the parties in implementing the agreements and will go further in terms of materializing the programmes and the projects so that we can get beyond the issue of these preliminaries to the real question of assisting the Palestinians to build an area of hope and an area of peace. And this is something that I think now both the Israelis and the Palestinians are committed to and I appreciate very much the work that you have done, Madame Secretary, and we look forward to the next months.

Statement by European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana on the opening of Rafah border crossing Brussels, 25 November 2005

On 25 November 2005, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana issued a statement on the occasion of the opening of Rafah border crossing, the text of which is reproduced below.

The opening of Rafah is a great opportunity, it is a turning point. For the first time, Palestinians assume the responsibility to manage external borders. It is one important step towards eventual statehood. The European Union, assisting in a spirit of partnership, will help to make the agreements between Israelis and Palestinians work, through the mission led by Major-General Pistolese. The opening of Rafah is a welcome opportunity to improve living conditions for Palestinians.

Our presence in Rafah is proof of our commitment. The EU is determined to ensure that the agreements facilitated by Quartet Envoy Jim Wolfensohn work. This is done in full cooperation with the United States and our other Quartet partners, and in partnership with Egypt, whose positive contribution I welcome.

We are also in Gaza because we want to revive the peace process. Resolving the conflict is a key priority for Europe. We want to promote cooperation and trust between the parties and to contribute to Palestinian State-building. I am encouraged by the open and cooperative attitude we have found from both sides.

Today's events provide us with a chance to turn Gaza disengagement into a real opportunity to relaunch the peace process. Let us build on this positive momentum."

Press release by the European Union announcing the deployment of an election observation mission to the West Bank and Gaza
Brussels, 20 December 2005

On 20 December, the European Union issued a press release on the deployment of 172 electoral experts, as part of its election observation mission for the 2006 parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The text of the press release is reproduced below.

The European Union has begun to deploy one of its largest election observation missions for the parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza scheduled for 25 January 2006. The mission is headed by a Chief Observer, Ms. Veronique de Keyser, who is a Member of the European Parliament. Ms. De Keyser is from Belgium and sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament.