

Socialist Group statement on Gaza

8 January 2009

The Group

1. Expresses its deepest outrage at the violence in the Gaza Strip, the consequences of the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army and the military escalation that is causing many hundreds of victims, most of them civilians, including many children. Strongly regrets that civilian and UN targets have been hit. Calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law and to allow the international press to be able to follow events on the ground. Calls on Hamas to end rocket attacks and to take its own responsibilities by committing itself to a political process aimed at restoring inter-Palestinian dialogue and at contributing to the ongoing process of negotiations.
2. Calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. The ceasefire, which should include withdrawal from territory re-occupied in recent days, and a negotiated truce, should be guaranteed by a mechanism to be set up by the international community. This will provide for the dispatching along the borders of the Gaza Strip of a multinational force with the inclusion of Arab and Muslim countries. Invites the EU to endorse any agreement reached by the UN Security Council.
3. Strongly requests the Israeli authorities to allow food, urgent medical aid and fuel to be delivered to the Gaza Strip through the opening of the crossing point and the lifting of the blockade. The announcement of the opening of a humanitarian corridor in Rafah is a first step that must urgently be implemented. Calls on EU Institutions and other international donors, in co-operation with the United Nations and NGOs, to provide adequate aid in view of the increasing needs and asks Israel not to undermine this essential humanitarian effort. This aid could contribute to the gradual resumption of basic economic recovery in the Strip and to restore decent living conditions for Palestinians, in particular young people.
4. Considers that the immediate resumption of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) and of the Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing (APRC) concluded in September 2005 by Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Authority after the unilateral disengagement by Israel of the Gaza Strip must be guaranteed without any restriction. The EU could make an essential contribution to this aim by resuming its Monitoring Mission at Rafah.
5. Reaffirms that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and considers that it is time for a lasting and comprehensive peace agreement on the basis of the negotiations that have been conducted until now by both sides. An International Conference, promoted by the Quartet and with the participation of all regional actors, on the basis of the previous agreement reached between Israelis and Palestinians, and the Arab League initiative, could help to achieve this goal. Considers that renewed efforts for inter-Palestinian reconciliation are an essential step.

6. Stresses again that any upgrading of political relations between the EU and Israel must be strongly conditioned on respect for international humanitarian law, on real commitment to a comprehensive peace settlement, on the end of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and on respect for full implementation of the EC-PLO Interim Association Agreement. As long as the situation remains so critical the Socialist Group shall maintain its negative position on the EP's vote of assent to further participation of Israel in EC programmes.

7. Is worried by the serious consequences of the resurgence of the conflict on the daily life of the citizens in the region and on hopes for a lasting peace in the whole Middle East. Underlines the risk of harming common understanding and dialogue among all communities in Europe.

8. Urgently calls for a stronger and united political role of the European Union as was the case during the Lebanon crisis of 2006 and the recent crisis between Georgia and Russia. In its action, the EU must take the opportunity to co-operate with the new US administration in order to put an end to the conflict with an agreement based on the *two States* solution, giving Israelis and Palestinians the possibility to live in peace and security side by side. This will be a huge contribution to the aim of a new peaceful regional security structure in the Middle East.

9. Invites its Members actively to promote a political campaign directed at European public opinion, in cooperation with European Socialist parties and other progressive movements and NGOs, based on a strong call for peace in the Middle East.