



European Union

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

17th Session

(30 May - 17 June 2011)

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Item 7

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Statement by

H.E. Ambassador András DÉKÁNY

**Permanent Representative of Hungary
to the United Nations Office in Geneva**

on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 14 June 2011

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General Debate

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Mr President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The fundamental changes across the Arab world have made the need for progress on the Middle East Peace Process all the more urgent. Recent events have indeed shown the necessity of heeding the legitimate aspirations of peoples in the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood, and of Israelis for security.

Within the context of its ongoing engagement, the EU is deeply concerned about the continuing stalemate in the Peace Process and calls for the urgent resumption of direct negotiations leading to a comprehensive solution on all tracks. Our goal remains a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. Recalling the Berlin Declaration, the EU reiterates its readiness to recognize a Palestinian State when appropriate.

Justice, rule of law and respect for international human rights and international humanitarian law are the cornerstones of peace and security. After her visit to Israel and occupied Palestinian territory in February 2011, High Commissioner Pillay was concerned at (I quote) "*the lack of accountability on many fronts*". She assessed that the "*culture of impunity leads to more abuses against and between civilians, stimulates anger and resentment on all sides, and impedes the peace process.*" The EU calls on the parties to ensure that the principle of accountability is upheld.

The EU reiterates that Israeli settlements, the separation barrier where built on occupied land, demolitions of homes and evictions are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. The EU urges the government of Israel to end all settlement activities, in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank.

The rights of Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights Defenders protesting peacefully against settlements and the separation barrier are severely curtailed. While the EU welcomed before this Council in March the release of Abdallah Abu Rahma, the EU is concerned that other human rights defenders continue to be detained for their non violent protests. The EU is observing the trial, which opened on 5 June before an Israeli military court, of Bassem Tamimi, an activist of the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh affected by the illegal settlement expansion. The EU is also concerned by reports that journalists in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are exposed to severe harassment as this affects negatively the right to freedom of expression. Impunity for such acts is unacceptable.

The EU welcomes the agreement of 3 May, following the successful mediation of Egypt, allowing for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas as an important element for the unity of

a future Palestinian state and for reaching a two-State solution. Palestinian reconciliation should also contribute to a better fulfillment of human rights, including the right to participate in free, fair and democratic elections that are open to all, and a moratorium on death penalty. Reconciliation should be in the long term interest of Israel, and its legitimate right to exist, as it helps to engage all parties in a process leading to a sustainable peace agreement.

The EU also hopes that this new context will favour the unconditional release of detained Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The International Committee of the Red Cross must be allowed to visit him immediately.

Israel's closure of the Gaza Strip should come to an end and links between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank need to be developed, taking into account Israeli security concerns. Flotillas are not the right response to the situation in Gaza. The extended opening of the Rafah crossing point by Egypt, which is welcome, for the movement of persons, is not enough. Israel needs to take further meaningful and far-reaching steps in the framework of UNSC Resolution 1860 to allow the movement of goods and persons to and from Gaza. The ICRC should be able to resume its program for Gazan families to visit Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons, suspended following an Israeli decision in June 2007 after Hamas has violently taken control over the Gaza Strip.

As the winds of change sweep across the Middle East and North Africa, the EU is committed to support the creation of a more democratic, stable, prosperous and peaceful Southern Neighborhood.