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Finland's EU Presidency

UNITED NATIONS
Security Council
Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Statement on behalf of the European Union

H.E. Ms. Kirsti Lintonen
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

New York, 9 November 2006

(check against delivery)

Mr. President,

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

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

*) Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The European Union is deeply concerned by the escalating violence in Gaza and in the West Bank. In particular, we are shocked by the large number of civilian deaths and injuries caused by the shelling of Beit Hanoun by the Israeli Defence Forces on Wednesday. We deeply regret the growing number of civilian casualties, many of them children, as well as the destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure.

While recognising Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, we urge Israel to exercise utmost restraint and underline that action should not be disproportionate or in contradiction to international humanitarian law. We call on Israel to end its incursion in Gaza. It is imperative that the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people be urgently alleviated.

The European Union also calls on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to the firing of rockets on Israeli territory. The deterioration of the situation will only aggravate the already grave circumstances in the region where a return to a comprehensive peace process with a clear political perspective is urgently needed. To achieve this, an immediate cessation of violence is imperative.

The process of reconciliation between Palestinians must be given a chance. We urge the Palestinians to continue their efforts to form a government of national unity with a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement.

The European Union reiterates its intention to actively contribute to the work within the Quartet to get the Middle East Peace Process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Roadmap, relevant UNSC resolutions and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005. The international community must provide its full support to the parties in this respect.

This terrible violence underlines clearly again that there can be no military or unilateral solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The only way forward for Israel and the Palestinians is the negotiation of a viable two-State solution. All

parties have a clear duty to act now to revive a credible peace process, and avoid further tragedies such as those witnessed in Beit Hanoun.

Thank you, Mr. President.