



Gaza: European Parliament calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and a negotiated truce

In adopting a resolution on the situation in the Gaza strip, MEPs call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire which should include the halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and the end of Israel's military action in Gaza. MEPs call for a negotiated truce that should be guaranteed by a mechanism which could include the dispatching of a multinational presence. MEPs encourage the diplomatic efforts so far undertaken by the international community, especially Egypt and the EU.

MEPs urge the Israeli authorities to allow the international press in the Gaza strip and to guarantee that there is continuous and sufficient flow of the aid through humanitarian corridors.

MEPs call for a negotiated truce that should be guaranteed by a mechanism, to be set up by the international community coordinated by the Quartet and the Arab League, which could include the dispatching of a multinational presence.

Humanitarian assistance

The House requests the Israeli authorities to allow an unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance and aid to the Gaza Strip and to guarantee that the continuous and sufficient flow of the aid through humanitarian corridors. MEPs agree on the necessity of urgently providing the re-opening of the crossing points, the lifting of the blockade and the prevention of smuggling of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition.

MEPs express their shock at the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza and deplore that civilian and UN targets have been hit during the attacks. They also express their sympathy for the civilian population affected by the violence in Gaza and in Southern Israel.

End to rocket attacks

The resolution calls on Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law. The European Parliament calls on Hamas to end rocket attacks and to assume its own responsibilities by committing itself to a political process aimed at restoring inter-Palestinian dialogue and contributing to the ongoing process of negotiation.

MEPs stress the need to renew the efforts for inter-Palestinian reconciliation between all the components of the Palestinian society based on the Mecca agreement of February 2007. This agreement implied the acceptance of the previous agreements includ-

ing the right of Israel to exist; and underline, in this respect, the need for a permanent geographical connection between, and the peaceful and lasting political reunification of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Debate - Wednesday, 14 January 2009

European Parliament debates the conflict in Gaza and Israel

In the debate on Wednesday, the vast majority of speakers called for an immediate ceasefire and a negotiated truce. In the resolution to be voted on in Strasbourg, MEPs express their shock at the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza and deplore that civilian and UN targets have been hit during the attacks. They also express their sympathy for the civilian population affected by the violence in Gaza and in Southern Israel.

Presidency of the Council

Opening the debate for the Council, Czech Foreign Minister Karel **Schwarzenberg** spoke of "the dramatic situation in the Middle East". He described the humanitarian crisis in detail and pointed out that "since 4 November of last year, foreign NGO personnel have not been allowed access to Gaza to deliver and monitor humanitarian aid properly".

The minister believed that "The outlines of a solution to the crisis have started to emerge. First and foremost there must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action to enable the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and the restoration of public services and badly needed medical treatment".

In addition, "The deployment of an international mission to monitor implementation of the ceasefire and to act as a liaison between the two sides could be helpful. In this regard, the European Union is ready to return its observers".

However, "even a durable and comprehensive solution to Gaza will not be sufficient to install peace in the region", he said. "We need a new and inclusive strategy that addresses the internal Palestinian political situation as well as the resumption of the peace talks".

Mr Schwarzenberg emphasised that the EU is prepared "to support any Palestinian government that pursues policies and measures reflecting the Quartet's principles" but that "urgent and greater effort by the parties will be needed to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders".

European Commission

The Gaza conflict is now in its third week, and every day the statistics worsen", said External Relations Commissioner Benita **Ferrero-Waldner**, citing evidence of extreme burns, acute shortages of food and medicine, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure. Immense human suffering has been caused both by Hamas' rockets and Israel's military action, she added.

Beyond its immediate impact, the conflict "pushes the prospect of peace ever further away", and "has a negative impact stability throughout the region", she continued.

Ms Ferrero-Waldner stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza strip, and then an "unconditional halt" to Hamas' rocket attacks and Israeli military action.

The EU Troika had "prepared the way" for the ceasefire plan tabled by France's President Sarkozy, who now chairs the Security Council, and their co-ordinated diplomacy had helped to achieve temporary ceasefire "lulls" to allow in humanitarian aid, she said.

The ceasefire call was a key item by UN Security Council Resolution 1860, noted Ms Ferrero-Waldner, adding that the smuggling of arms through the Gaza-Egypt tunnels must be halted, the "Philadelphia corridor" along Gaza's Egyptian border policed, and border crossings opened for humanitarian aid. The

Palestinian Authority had accepted these requirements, but Israel and Hamas were "still studying" them. "Maybe, in a few days, we shall have a real ceasefire" she said.

Both Israel and Hamas had rejected Resolution 1860, noted Ms Ferrero-Waldner, who nonetheless hoped that with the help of Egypt and Turkey, a lasting solution could be worked out soon. "We must halt the endless cycle of destruction and reconstruction", she said.

In the long run, the conflict would weaken confidence between Palestine and Israel, she added, stressing the need to resume talks for a negotiated political settlement as soon as hostilities cease. "Israel cannot afford to waste time in achieving peace", she said.

Political group speakers

"Seventeen days' fighting have left a deeply depressing balance sheet, of destruction, chaos, hatred, and vengeance", said José Ignacio **SALAFRANCA SÁNCHEZ-NEYRA** (EPP-ED, ES), adding that "you can win all the battles except the most important one, which is for peace".

Mr Salafranca called for an immediate ceasefire, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1860, and for humanitarian measures to alleviate the misery in the Gaza strip. "Hamas is both a cause and a consequence of these dreadful circumstances", he said.

Martin **SCHULZ** (DE), speaking on behalf of the Socialist Group, acknowledged that debates of this kind are difficult for all concerned. "Israel is a friend of ours," he said, "but that makes it all the more important that we can talk to them about controversial aspects of these matters." "Israel has the right to defend itself against those who want to destroy it; but it has to use proportionate means, within international law, and I think we would agree that the means they are using are not proportionate," he said.

While recognising that Hamas does not share our values, Mr Schulz insisted that it should be possible to talk to them, and if Israel is not able to talk to Hamas, we should be looking for other means of dialogue through the Quartet. "Neither terrorism nor conventional weaponry will find a solution; this must come from international mediation," he said.

Annemie **NEYTS-UYTTEBROECK** (BE) speaking for the ALDE group, said that an international force may well be needed to end this conflict and urged the EU to participate in such a force. "The EU needs to act and to speak clearly," she said, "The USA also needs to be involved, as does the Arab League and its members," she said.

Cristiana **MUSCARDINI** (UEN, IT), asserted that dialogue with terrorists should not be justified by civilian deaths, because there was a risk that this would justify terrorist violence in the future. But the EU needs to make sure that humanitarian needs are met so that 'Israeli and Palestinian needs can be met side by side".

For the Greens/EFA, Daniel **COHN-BENDIT** (FR) said hope for peace and security is "evaporating very quickly", adding that security has to be nurtured. Recalling Mr Shultz words, he said we need to both protect Israel from itself and protect the Palestinians from Hamas. Council should stop thinking about upgrading its relationship with Israel, and the Palestinians need help to revolt against Hamas, he concluded.

Luisa **MORGANTINI** (GUE/NGL, IT) pointed out that that while people are dying, so too are human rights and the dream of Europe for universal respect. "We are not being effective," she said. "We need to understand with absolute clarity that this war, and Israel's attempt to solve things militarily, won't help Israel, it will put an end to Israel as a moral force."

Bastiaan **BELDER** (IND/DEM, NL) said that Palestine is inextricably an Islamic territory. The Islamic movement has stuck to this principle, he said. It is supported by the Muslim movement in Iran. There is no place for the State of Israel in the Middle East. The effect of this totalitarianism is this bloody conflict. As far as Hamas is concerned it benefits from all of this warfare. If Europe wants to ensure the survival of the state of Israel then there will be a confrontation with Hamas. The ceasefire is simply a break for Hamas; it won't be a permanent one, he concluded.

Luca **ROMAGNOLI** (NI, IT) said that the vast majority of the House would agree to the calls for peace. I think we need to have the idea of an international peace corridor and it can't simply be something in Gaza, he said. It must cover all Palestinian territory. We need to find a two people - two state solution, he said. A military solution simply won't be workable and viable. And war never solves the problems in the holy land.

British and Irish speakers

Jim **ALLISTER** (NI, UK) said that the situation is demonstrably clear. Israel, he said, accepts a two-state solution while Hamas cannot even abide the right of Israel to exist and thus unleashes endless relentless terrorist attacks upon its territory. And when after much forbearance, he said, Israel hits back, they cry victim. "Sorry: they are the perpetrators and if they want peace the answer lies in their own hands. Stop shelling Israel."

Reporting that he was in Gaza three days ago, Chris **DAVIES** (ALDE, UK) said that "this is not a proportionate response of a civilised power. It is evil. Yes, the Hamas rockets must stop. I have said so to Hamas representatives in Gaza myself before now, but let us have no more sanctimonious talk from Israeli officials about the need to fight terrorism, because Palestinians being bombed could name terrorists and they would name Olmert, Livni and Barak." "Mr Davies could think of no occasion in the past that the European Union ever backed up its criticism of the treatment of Palestinians by the Israelis with any kind of action. "We give a green light to Israel to proceed as it would wish and we have compounded that failure by ignoring the lessons of history. You cannot make peace without talking to your enemies, yet we refuse to talk to the elected representatives of the Palestinian people. Now we are completing negotiations with Israel on an enhanced cooperation agreement. We do not plan to condemn Israel: we intend to reward it. Those who want peace in the Middle East, those who want to see justice for both sides, must recognise that it is time to think again."

Speaking in Irish, Seán **Ó NEACHTAIN** (UEN, IE) said that the war going on in Gaza is terrifying and scandalous. A military solution will never succeed in the Middle East - a political solution is the only way of ensuring peace and reconciliation in that area and an end must be put immediately to this violence. Mr O'Neachtain said that he supports the setting up of a Palestinian durable independent state but it must have a proper economy and proper political plan. Our aim, he said, must be that there will be two states that will mutually respect each other. Israel certainly has the right to defend itself but it has gone much too far with these attacks which are immoral and the international community cannot condone them. The peace process in the Middle East must be revived immediately and he hoped that the newly elected President of the United States Obama will work and prioritise this and he wished him every success in this and in his future post.

While Kathy **SINNOTT** (IND/DEM, IE) wholeheartedly agreed that Israelis have a right to live without the threat of rocket attacks, what is being done in Gaza is not justice, it is slaughter.. That the devastation is perpetuated by a supposedly western nation is unfathomable. There is no excuse, she said, there is no possible justification. Ms Sinnott called on Parliament and all EU bodies to impose trade sanctions on Israel immediately and to keep them in place until a meaningful ceasefire is agreed. "If we do any less than our utmost to stop this killing, we become accessories to the slaughter."

Struan **STEVENSON** (EPP-ED, UK) said that Iran has supplied missiles, munitions and other sophisticated weaponry to Hamas for years. "It has provided money and training for Hamas fighters. Its objective was to provoke Israel into a ground war and the bloody result, with gruesome photos of dead children on TV screens and newspapers around the world, is the best possible recruiting sergeant for fundamentalist Islam and the Iranian mullahs' vision of a global Islamist movement united against the West". The West, he said, has done nothing to confront or expose Iranian aggression. Faced with mounting evidence of the Mullahs' sponsorship of terror, the West has gone out of its way to appease Teheran, even agreeing to its primary demand of disabling the main Iranian opposition movement, The People's Mujahedin of Iran by placing it on the EU Terror List. This must stop, he concluded.

Richard **HOWITT** (PES, UK) said that the UN Security Resolution should be implemented without delay. We

must, he said, see a ceasefire and an end to the blockade so that the people of Gaza can begin to live their lives. There is, he said, an issue of respect for international humanitarian law. "Human Rights Watch and Islamic Relief have told me that the three-hour daily pause is simply woefully inadequate to get in and to distribute aid. It is an issue of proportionality. Save the Children say that the killing of 139 children since the conflict began, with 1 271 injured, cannot be justified as self-defence. "Mr Howitt welcomed the statement today by the EU envoy in Israel, Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal, who said that the EU and Israel have put negotiations on the upgrading of relations 'on hold' at this time for these reasons.

Geoffrey **VAN ORDEN** (EPP-ED, UK) expressed his deepest sympathy to all the innocent people, both in Israel and in Gaza, who have suffered in recent weeks and months as conflict rages. But, he said, we need to take care that our natural humanity, our very justified concerns, do not distort our view of the true nature of the situation that we are dealing with. The sad reality, he said, is that the Palestinian people have been atrociously served over many years by those who have control over Palestine Authority areas; by the international community, which has tolerated extremism and corruption; and by the Arab world, which has done nothing practical over many decades to improve their lives or prospects. We need a Marshall Plan for the Middle East. It is not just peacekeepers that the Palestinians need but a decent civil administration, free from corruption. The civil administration needs to be put under international control, but, first, the terrorist lifeline – weapons, monies and political indulgence – must be cut.

The fundamental point for Proinsias **DE ROSSA** (PES, IE) is that: we have to stop the bombing, whether it is coming from Hamas or coming from Israel. He hoped the resolution accompanying this debate will receive a strong vote in this House tomorrow, and he also hoped that it will strengthen the hands of the Commission and the Council in pressuring both Israel and Hamas to stop the killing. "Since Israel withdrew from Gaza it has turned it into the largest prison in the world, and for the last three weeks it has turned it into a slaughterhouse, illegally using terror against terror, killing civilian men, women and children, and killing the possibility of a viable two-state solution in the process. "There can, he said, be no upgrading of Europe's relations with Israel so long as it fails to engage in constructive and substantive negotiations with its neighbours and all the Palestinian elected members, including Hamas. It should be made clear by Europe that any escalation of this war on Gaza will be followed by an escalation of our reaction to that war, he concluded.

Gay **MITCHELL** (EPP-ED, IE) said that Israel has a right to peaceful coexistence in the region, but we would have to be turnips not to feel emotional upset and moral shame at what is happening at present in Gaza. The Israeli response is totally disproportionate and the deaths of young children are particularly shameful. He added that yesterday a note on the humanitarian needs of the region was distributed to those of who attended the joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Development Committee. He urged the Commission and the Council to ensure that a totally comprehensive humanitarian aid package is ready so that we can move in there and help these suffering people at the first opportunity.

Clearly the EU cannot resolve this crisis said Sajjad **KARIM** (EPP-ED, UK). We need the resolve of the USA. Their disappointing response has been imbalanced and unjust. The timing of these actions by Israel has been strategically calculated, but, Mr Obama, 20 January is fast approaching. The world is waiting and the EU is a willing partner. Colleagues wanting to break Hamas with military means alone, go and see Gaza and the West Bank. Reawaken your basic humanity and you will see why Hamas gains strength. This is not the way to help Israel or Palestinians. An immediate ceasefire is only a necessary start.

Colm **BURKE** (EPP-ED, IE) said that there must be accountability in international law where such warfare principles as proportionality and non-discrimination are not respected. While acknowledging the fact that Hamas began the rocket attacks against Israel, Mr Burke was of the opinion that the Israeli reaction has been disproportionate. The numbers speak for themselves: over 900 Palestinians have been killed in contrast to a much smaller number of Israelis. Israel must realise its responsibility to measure its use of force right away in compliance with international law. On the other hand, he said, it cannot be overlooked that Hamas is still listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU and continues to refuse to renounce its arms struggle. Not only that, but Hamas has consistently declined to recognise Israel's right to exist. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups must recognise that the people of southern Israel have a right to live without

bombardment, he concluded.

Neena **GILL** (PES, UK) said that calls by the world community for an immediate ceasefire are falling on deaf ears. Palestinians need urgent access to food, medical aid and security. Israel must, at the very least, respect the principles of international law. Unless it does so, Israel should lose any remaining support it has from the international community. It is unfortunate, she said, that the UN's resolution has been sidelined. It is also regrettable that the EU still needs to find a role. Perhaps it can do so if it takes stronger measures than it has done so far. It is not enough just to put the upgrading of the relationship on ice. We have leverage. We are a major trading partner. We are a major funder in that region. So we are able to exercise that role.

Christopher **BEAZLEY** (EPP-ED, UK) said that the Israeli people are a just and honourable people who have suffered miserably throughout the centuries in this continent. They will understand your recommendation to the Council of Ministers now that the EU should withdraw any contact with the Israeli authorities until they stop the bombing.

Speaking in Irish, Bairbre **DE BRÚN** (GUE/NGL, UK) supported those who condemned Israeli attacks on Gaza and showed solidarity with the people of Gaza.. The EU, she said, should abandon the upgrading of relations with Israel and put all current agreements on hold with Israel until it lives up to its obligations under international law. Even before the escalation of Israeli violence, we saw Israel's collective punishments of Palestinians in Gaza. The type and scale of attacks by a modern army on the besieged Palestinian people already weakened because of isolation and occupation is terrible. Simply blaming the Palestinians is wrong. We must be clear when we say that the main victims of this war are the innocent people of Gaza, she concluded.

Contact :

Richard FREEDMAN

E-mail: press-EN@europarl.europa.eu

BXL: (32-2) 28 41448

STR: (33-3) 881 73785

PORT: (+32) 498 98 32 39

Jack BLACKWELL

E-mail: jack.blackwell@europarl.europa.eu

BXL: (32-2) 28 42929

STR: (33-3) 881 76712

PORT: (32) 0498.983.400