Statement by  
EU High Representative Catherine Ashton 
following her visit to the Middle East

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, made the following statement:

"I am pleased to be here in Jerusalem. I came here directly from the United States to express my personal commitment and that of the European Union and its 27 Member States to the continuation of the peace talks – talks that should lead to a viable two state solution within one year.

Yesterday and today I have had a positive and constructive dialogue with President Abbas, Prime Minister Netanyahu, Prime Minister Fayyad and Senator Mitchell.

Those of us engaged in the process have been very concerned that the ending of the moratorium puts at risk the possibility of long term peace. I have urged Israel to continue the moratorium in order to allow the talks more time to make progress.

I regret that so far they have chosen not to.

I also came to discuss with the Palestinian Authority the work they are doing to build the machinery for statehood. All of us who are supporting this – the EU is the biggest donor and partner – are very encouraged to see the progress that is being made.

We wish PM Fayyad every success in his work. Palestinian statehood is critical for any peaceful, workable and lasting solution. Political and financial support from the international community is essential. I urge those who have made financial commitments to deliver on their promises.

Gaza is never far from my mind, having visited twice this year, and I continue to call for the crossings to be opened to enable trade – especially the chance for businesses to export. My discussions with the Palestinian Authority have also focused on how we can support exports to allow the people of Gaza to gain a greater stake in their economy and their future.

These are the elements of the future – strong economies, security, and investment – and they need to be nurtured. But nurtured in the context of serious ongoing talks which lead to a solution on all final status issues. We will continue to offer whatever support we can so the talks continue and a comprehensive and sustainable solution is found, with the state of Israel and the state of Palestine living side by side in peace and security."

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