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Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton following her meeting with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas

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

"It was a great pleasure to welcome President Abbas and his delegation to Brussels today.

We have been engaged in a mutual and determined diplomatic effort throughout the past months concerning the Middle East Peace Process and the Palestinian United Nations bid. We continue to work actively and in partnership on these issues.

The overarching objective of the EU remains the creation of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The EU, along with its Quartet partners, has a key role to play in this process. A series of meetings have been held in an effort to advance the Peace Process including today in Jerusalem.

A calm and conducive environment is essential for progress. Developments on the ground, such as ongoing settlement activity in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, are an obstacle to our peace efforts and threaten to make the two-state solution impossible.

However, I believe we all share the understanding that ultimately direct negotiations are essential in order to fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood."
The EU has always been a strong supporter of the Palestinian people and remains one of the major supporters and contributors to the Palestinian state-building efforts led by President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. I trust the Palestinian Authority will continue with its institution-building efforts and will uphold current standards in terms of transparent and efficient public finance management.

We are keen to use the time ahead to improve the situation on the ground including in Area C of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We are also determined to further strengthen our bilateral relations.

The EU is committed to maintaining the current levels of financial assistance to the Palestinians despite the difficult economic situation. I take this opportunity to remind other donors to fulfill their obligations.

We also discussed the importance of Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas as a crucial element for the unity of the future Palestinian state and for the two-state solution.”