Joint Statement by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov on Middle East Peace Process

1. In light of recent developments in the Middle East the European Union and the Russian Federation firmly believe that now is the time to take bold and concrete steps towards peace between Palestinians and Israelis. The parties must engage in direct and substantial negotiations without preconditions in order to achieve a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ending all claims, on the basis of UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 1850, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the Roadmap, the Arab Peace Initiative and the agreements previously reached between the parties.

2. The European Union and the Russian Federation affirm that clear parameters outlining the basis for negotiations are key elements for a successful outcome. All parties must avoid acts which undermine confidence and the viability of a two-state solution. The European Union and the Russian Federation underline the urgency of renewed, structured and substantial peace efforts in 2013. Towards this end, they are ready to work with other international partners, including within the Quartet. There will be no sustainable peace until the Palestinians' aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and those of Israelis for security are fulfilled through a comprehensive negotiated peace agreement. The European Union and the Russian Federation will work with those who are willing to join in such a quest for peace, stability and prosperity.

3. The European Union and the Russian Federation are deeply dismayed by and strongly oppose Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank and in particular plans to develop the El area. These plans, if implemented, would jeopardize the possibility of a contiguous and viable Palestinian state. The European Union and the Russian Federation reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace.
4. The European Union and the Russian Federation will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.

5. The European Union and the Russian Federation call on Israel to avoid any step undermining the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority.

6. On 29 November, the UN General Assembly voted in favour of resolution A/RES/67/19 on the granting of non-member observer State status in the United Nations to Palestine. The European Union and the Russian Federation call on the Palestinian leadership to use constructively this new status and not to undertake steps which would deepen the lack of trust and lead further away from a negotiated solution.

7. The European Union and the Russian Federation welcome the 21 November ceasefire between the Gaza Strip groups and Israel and commend the efforts of Egypt and all those who engaged in mediation. This tragic escalation of hostilities underlined very clearly the unsustainable nature of the status quo with regard to the Gaza Strip. Fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security needs, the European Union and the Russian Federation call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of goods and persons to and from the Gaza Strip, the situation of which is unsustainable as long as it remains politically and economically separated from the West Bank. It is vital that all parts of the ceasefire agreement are implemented.

8. The European Union and the Russian Federation call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011, as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian state and a two-state solution.

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