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REMARKS

Opening Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the Situation in Israel and Palestine at the European Parliament plenary session

28/10/2015

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Mr President, Honourable Members,

The last time we met here to discuss our common work on the Middle East peace process, on Israel and Palestine, it was only six weeks ago. We all agreed back then on something: the stalemate in the peace process, the lack of peace process, could only lead to more violence. And this is what we are seeing today. It has happened time and again, and it is happening in dramatic ways in these last days and weeks.

The new wave of violence and terror is affecting innocents Israelis and Palestinians alike. There can be no excuse for terror: the incitement and the violence must end. The response of security forces needs to be proportionate and consistent regardless of who is the perpetrator.

But it is mostly up to the political leaders on the two sides to get out of the current impasse and to show leadership. Most of all to show leadership, showing leadership is much more difficult when the situation gets more difficult, but it's also when it's more needed. Both leaderships have responsibility to contain the situation of violence and to promote calm. They have an interest in doing this for their own people and they have a general responsibility towards the region, and I would say towards the rest of the world, to make sure that the situation doesn't inflame on the religious level and gets spread or across the globe.

Last week I met with Prime Minister Netanyahu and just yesterday evening in Brussels I met with President Abbas to pass exactly the same message: you need to take leadership, strong positions and try to calm down the situation on the ground first and foremost and the international community will and will be with you in this respect. They acknowledged that they need to work together in partnership to end the current unrest. And this is something relevant, but also something that needs to be tested for real.

Our thoughts today and in these days are with all the victims and their families who are suffering on the ground. But as we try to de-escalate the crisis, we must not lose sight of the underlying causes of tensions – the frustrations, the sense of insecurity, the lack of hope, the lack of political horizon. Without a political horizon, any de-escalation that we might even get, will only last for a limited time and we will go back again, and again, and again to the cycle of violence.

We have said this last year at the end of the conflict of Gaza, we are here a year later saying the same.

Our first priority must be to build the conditions for final status talks based on mutual steps. For this to happen, we need significant policy shifts on the ground, and we need these policy shifts to happen in line with past agreements that are there and need to start being implemented. We have to find an entry point to have the process restarting again. When we say this, it is not just a reference to restarting the political process, restarting the talks, restarting negotiations, we all know very well, and the Israeli and the Palestinian people know that very well that talks for talks, negotiation for negotiation would not bring anything real on the ground, unless we in parallel create the conditions, the real conditions, for the people first of all to live and secondly to live better in their respective lives.

When we talk about this, we talk about concrete steps in the context of a political process. De-escalating, the security aspect, violence, implementing concrete steps on the ground in line with prior agreements and creating the condition for political horizons, these are the elements we need to work in parallel on with the support of the international community.

We talk about measures that help the Palestinians take control over their lives, while upholding Israel's security. Not just for negotiating, not just for the sake of doing something, but to reach concrete results.

These two goals must be pursued in parallel: de-escalation on the ground, concrete steps to implement agreements that have already been signed, that are there already and keeping the perspectives of the political horizon of the final settlements.

These elements must go together and I think this is more urgent than ever. In New York last month and in Vienna last Friday, all the Quartet Principals passed this message loud and clear. And let me say that it was the European Union's choice to invest in the Quartet

as the format for international backing of these efforts.

From this recent round of meetings, including with Secretary of State Kerry in Berlin, I retain the commitment of Prime Minister Netanyahu to guarantee the status quo of the holy sites and the desire of all parties to de-escalate the situation on the ground. I also welcome and support Secretary of State Kerry's initiative to address the situation in the holy sites, highlighting the role of Jordan in this, which is key.

In the next few weeks the Quartet Envoys will engage directly with the parties. It is now up to the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership to demonstrate with acts that their commitment to the two-state solution is real, and not just fake, not just a slogan. If Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas fail now to work together, if they don't cooperate to stop the violence, if they don't rebuild a credible political process – the situation for their own people will only get worse and worse.

The regional context is as tense as it could be. Even if this is a sentence we should never say, because it could also always turn worse. But we don't want to see an old conflict, such as this one, mix with the newer crises in neighbouring countries. The conditions around Israel and Palestine are today much, much more dangerous than they used to be decades ago. This is a risky time also and mainly for the people in Israel and in Palestine alike. And if the leaderships don't understand that now, that it's not business as usual even in the management of the old conflict where all "used to" – let me use this because we never got used to a conflict that brings so many deaths and sufferings – if they don't realise that it is more urgent today to solve this, then there will be little that the international community can really do to support the process. The mix of old and new, of history and religious elements in this moment in the region, could be explosive, not only for the people involved, for all.

Peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians is an interest we all share, in the region and beyond. For this reason we invited, again, on an European initiative, key Arab countries to join our Quartet meetings. Think of how relevant can Egypt be for Gaza, and Jordan for the holy places, which is something we are seeing every day, and Saudi Arabia for re-launching the Arab Peace Initiative and adapting it to these times. Only in a renewed regional framework is peace possible. Arab partners have stressed to me their readiness to work with the Quartet in the coming months. We actually have started already to work together with them. But like us, they need to see determined leadership by the parties. We can build all the international and regional support, but they have to take responsibility for showing responsibility inside. First of all, inside their own societies and their own communities.

Recent events should serve as a warning. If anyone still believes that we can just manage the current crisis, contain it a little bit and wait for the next one to come, they are wrong. This is not going to continue like this. Every cycle of violence is going to be worse than the previous one and this will destroy the Middle East. So, now it's decision time. Israeli and Palestinian leaders will have to take courageous choices, difficult ones. But this is the only path they have towards peace. They can either move forward, or watch chaos prevail

in their own societies.

This is the message we have been passing, I have been passing personally to the two leaders, together with my Quartet colleagues and with my Arab friends. This is the line on which we are all committed to work and I have asked both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to receive the Quartet envoys in the coming days - not weeks, days - to start working together on concrete steps that can be immediately taken on the ground to de-escalate on one side, and to improve the living conditions of the people.

We have to find this entry point, because talks for talks, the big horizon - today, I don't see the conditions. Internally, the two societies need to allow the leaderships to invest credibly in this, while the security situation is at it is and while the confidence needs to be built.

So we need to find first and foremost this entry point, making sure that at the end of the process the two-state solution is preserved and not pre-judged, but we have to start, we have to help them start implementing issues on the ground that can deliver for the people, for the ordinary people that today are seeing their children dying on both sides, with different numbers, but on both sides, to start having a future in their lands.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I110866>