



Brussels, 27 April 2014
140427/01

STATEMENT

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the latest developments in the Middle East Peace Process

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement today:

"I am extremely concerned at recent developments related to the peace process, which are putting into question the continued negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians beyond the original deadline of 29 April 2014.

I reiterate the EU's full support to the US-brokered peace efforts and I call on both parties to remain focused on negotiations and on the unprecedented benefits which peace can bring. Negotiations are the best way forward. The extensive efforts deployed in recent months must not go to waste.

The EU calls on all sides to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid any action which may further undermine peace efforts and the viability of a two-state solution.

The EU has consistently supported intra-Palestinian reconciliation but on clear and certain terms. The EU reiterated that such reconciliation should take place behind President Abbas in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011. The EU expects any new government to uphold the principle of non-violence, to remain committed to achieving a two-state solution and to a negotiated peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, accepting previous agreements and obligations, including Israel's legitimate right to exist.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 584 9780- Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu @EUHighRepSpox
Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu @AshtonSpox Maja
Sebastien Brabant +32 460 75 09 98 - Sebastien.Brabant@ec.europa.eu
Nabila Massrali +32 460 75 41 75 - Nabila.Massrali@ec.europa.eu

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Reconciliation on these terms is an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian state and for reaching a two-state solution and a lasting peace.

The EU welcomes the prospect of genuine democratic elections for all Palestinians. The fact that President Abbas will remain fully in charge of the negotiation process and have a mandate to negotiate in the name of all Palestinians provides further assurance that the peace negotiations can and must proceed."
