

Dear European Foreign Ministers, dear EU High Representative,

The beginning of the Biden presidency provides a much-needed opportunity to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with renewed effort. The previous US administration left the conflict farther away from peace than ever. The Biden administration presents a chance to correct course and creates greater space for meaningful European engagement and leadership. In parallel, the announcement of Palestinian elections to be held in the coming months offers an opportunity for Palestinian political renewal and reunification.

The recent regional normalization agreements with Israel led to the suspension of plans to formally annex West Bank territory. However, developments on the ground clearly point to a reality of rapidly progressing *de facto* annexation, especially through accelerated settlement expansion and demolitions of Palestinian structures.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, last year saw the highest number of demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures in four years, including humanitarian structures funded by European donors. This included the demolition of nearly an entire community in Khirbet Hamsa al-Foqa, in what the UN described as the largest forced displacement incident in over four years.

At the same time, the advancement of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory has skyrocketed, reaching the highest numbers since 2012, according to Peace Now. The recently approved construction of the Givat Hamatos settlement, previously referred to as Europe's red line, is of particularly serious concern.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate under the Israeli blockade, which is compounded by intra-Palestinian divisions. Gaza remains at risk of violent escalation at any moment.

No efforts to restart dialogue and rebuild trust can succeed if these negative trends on the ground continue. These policies are eliminating the possibility of a two-state solution and entrenching a one-state reality of unequal rights and perpetual conflict. For this to be the future of the region is both unacceptable and strategically unviable.

During the Trump administration, Europe played an indispensable role in holding the line: preserving internationally agreed parameters and international law as the framework for a just resolution of the conflict while these principals were under immense pressure.

Now is the time for Europe to move from holding the line to progressing forward. Europe must work with the Biden administration, countries in the region and the parties on the ground to prevent unilateral action undermining the possibility of peace, advance the rights and security of all people under Israel's effective control and build conditions that make a future negotiated agreement possible.

In this effort, the EU and European countries should demonstrate their leadership, making use of their range of available policy tools. Of key importance are concrete steps to secure effective differentiation between Israel and the settlements in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2334. Diplomatic, legal and financial support for Palestinian communities at risk of demolition and forcible transfer should be increased. Active European support for

Palestinian reconciliation and elections across all the Palestinian territory is vital, including as a basis for ending the isolation of Gaza.

We look forward to working with you to advance these policy priorities and to achieve our shared goals of peace and equality for all Israelis and Palestinians.

Yours sincerely,