



PES Presidency Declaration on the Middle East

Adopted on 19 December 2024

The Israeli Palestinian conflict has deep historical roots predating the brutal attacks of Hamas on October 7, 2023, where more than 1200 Israelis have been killed. Nothing can justify the largest loss of Jewish life since the Shoa. Since then, the escalation has brought about a level of immense suffering and instability that needs to be addressed to mitigate the spillover of the conflict into the wider region.

Since the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on October 7, 2023, we are witnessing a crisis which is reshaping the Middle East's political landscape, destabilising regional dynamics, and challenging our traditional approaches to peace. Since October 7, 2023, over 100 Israeli hostages are still held captive, over 42,000 Palestinians and more than 4,000 Lebanese have been killed, and two million have been displaced. This constitutes a humanitarian catastrophe. We condemn the disproportionate military actions by the far-right Israeli coalition.

Developments in the region over the past year have shown the destructive impact of Hamas' acts of terror alongside the detrimental policies of the on-going occupation of Palestinian territories by Netanyahu's far-right coalition government, which have created a climate of insecurity for both sides. We support the right of Israel to defend itself against Hamas and other terrorist groups. It must be within the boundaries defined by international law whose compliance is currently undermined by the far-right coalition government. There must be a change of approach to resolving this conflict, moving away from violence, and moving towards peace negotiations, with the support of all the main regional players and the international community.

We believe in peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as peace in the wider region. Progressive forces must work together to address and defeat the enemies of democracy. With our partners in Israel and Palestine, both sides should find common ground, to end violence, and prepare for a long-lasting peace. Working together, progressive forces on both sides can rebuild trust between Palestinians and Israelis and re-establish a society that can peacefully co-exist.

While this work is dependent on the commitments and initiatives of both peoples, we believe that the international community, including the EU, has a fundamental role to play



www.pes.eu



www.facebook.com/PES.PSE



www.twitter.com/PES_PSE



Party of European Socialists

10-12 Rue Guimard

B-1040 Brussels

Belgium

in reaching a peaceful and sustainable two-state solution, one that reflects the concerns of both parties equally and addresses the root causes of this enduring crisis. And, therefore, we support the continuation of the diplomatic efforts initiated by former HRVP Borrell in the framework of the Global Alliance for the implementation of the Two-State Solution.

We are committed to working towards this objective with our partners in the region through the achievement of short-term and long-term objectives for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

- We uphold our stance that an immediate ceasefire together with **the unconditional release of all hostages** and the protection of all civilians on both sides is the only way to address the current crisis. We believe that Netanyahu's government is undermining any possibility of achieving an agreement to release the Israeli hostages. We stand with our Israeli partners, the Democrats, as they continue their work to bring the hostages home.
- **Access to humanitarian aid** in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank must be allowed, increased, and guaranteed. UNRWA must be allowed to continue its work in providing vital support to Palestinians. We condemn the ban on UNRWA adopted by the Knesset preventing it to fulfil its mandate. We continue to express our support to all United Nations agencies engaged in providing relief to those in tragic conditions and who defend the importance of the rule-based international order, including the fundamental role of the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres.
- Furthermore, **settlements** constitute one of the biggest challenges in the path towards a peaceful solution. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements, forced evictions, the impact of movement restrictions on social and economic rights, and settler violence, in Palestinian territories hinders the viability of a future Palestinian state. On 19 July, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) declared that Israel's ongoing occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, is unlawful, along with the associated settlements, annexations, and use of natural resources. Throughout 2023, Netanyahu's government has approved a record number of building permits for new settlement housing units. Following the ICJ declaration, Israel must end its occupation, dismantle its settlements, and facilitate the return of displaced people.
- The EU needs to deploy instruments for the Netanyahu government to comply with international law, including with sanctions. Government officials calling for war crimes and crimes against humanity, as Minister Ben Gvir, and Minister Smotrich, must be held accountable. In light of current events, we call for Israel to comply with the human rights clause of the Association Agreement. It must be put on the agenda with measures such as trade bans against products coming from illegal settlements.
- We believe that **strengthening our support to our regional counterparts** is essential to move forward. This starts with the reform and political renewal of the Palestinian Authority. The role of the Palestinian Authority is vital to the reconstruction of Palestine, and to avoid terrorist organisations like Hamas from rebuilding their strength in future. It is therefore crucial that the Palestinian Authority has an active presence in all Palestinian territories, including in Gaza. All regional actors should support and facilitate this reform process.

- Achieving a peaceful solution will require concerted **international cooperation**. We strongly condemn any direct or indirect attempt to undermine this stance, and the role or the prerogatives of the ICC, the ICJ, the UN and other international organisations, and we reiterate our support for a rule-based international order.
- Moreover, a comprehensive **international peace conference**, involving all key stakeholders, including the UN and all regional key players, is essential. This conference must actively facilitate an equitable two-state solution, in line with UN Resolution A/79/L.23, that fully upholds the fundamental rights and responsibilities of both Palestinians and Israelis, including, but not limited to, the right to self-determination, freedom of movement, access to resources, and protection from violence and displacement. The framework for this solution must also address the critical issues of borders, settlements, refugees, and security arrangements in a manner consistent with international law and the principles of justice and equity. The inclusion of Palestine as a full UN member should also be part of this framework, and we encourage to continue the diplomatic efforts towards the recognition of the State of Palestine by all EU member states. Moreover, sustained international monitoring and support will be crucial in ensuring the successful implementation and long-term viability of any agreed-upon solution.

Finally, the PES commends the recent ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon as a crucial step towards de-escalation and urges all parties to honour their commitments under this accord and UN Security Council Resolution 1701. It also stresses the importance of addressing Lebanon's political and economic crises by empowering state institutions, electing a President, and supporting the stabilising role of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon.

Over the past few years, we have seen how the escalation of national insecurities in the region have contributed to the outbreak of wider instability in the Middle East. The EU must play an active role in guaranteeing peace and security in the region. The recent developments in Syria, with the end of Assad's dictatorship, which we welcome, opens uncertain horizons for the country and the region. The direction for this change depends on the support of the international community. We must encourage any new opportunity which grants freedom and peace for all Syrian peoples based on territorial integrity and respect for all minorities. We should work with our partners in Syria and in the region to ensure a better future. The new developments in Damascus may present an opportunity to break the cycle of impunity and ensure justice for the victims of war crimes and human rights violations in Syria. We call on the international community to build on the evidence collected by the UN and to take action on crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Syria.