



Brussels, 22nd September 2022

Dear High Representative / Vice President Josep Borrell,

Dear Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the member states,

We were dismayed to read the announcement on 18 July that the European Commission intends to revive the EU-Israel Association Council.

This decision was taken at the time when a historic mass eviction and forcible transfer of over one thousand Palestinians is taking place in Masafer Yatta. Furthermore, the approval of the E1 settlement plan is looming which the EU repeatedly stated as its red-line.

Just a week before the above announcement, many of the signatories of this letter wrote to you requesting an urgent and robust response to prevent these disastrous developments which will forever ruin any prospect for peace in the region. The EU's own envoys called for international pressure to stop the mass deportations, and emphasized the need for accountability. Reconvening the joint talks that have been suspended since 2013 will be interpreted by the Israeli government as an implicit approval of all its illegal acts.

These recent developments are merely the continuation of the systematic policy of unilaterally advancing both *de jure* and *de facto* annexation. Since 1967, settlement activity has never ceased and has served as the main tool to create facts on the ground and expand the illegal Israeli control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory, decimating and fragmenting Palestinian communities. More than 50% of the land in the West Bank, as well as the bulk of its water resources, has been expropriated by Israel since 1967 for the construction of the settlements and their infrastructure and agricultural activities as well as for military use. Destruction of properties and civilian infrastructure including those funded by the EU and member states has been rampant.

While Israeli state policy advances its agenda of annexation on the ground without any meaningful reaction from Europe, Palestinians grapple with the reality of inhuman conditions without any prospect for justice after 74 years of dispossession, 55 years of occupation and 15 years of the Gaza blockade.

The situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been seriously deteriorating over these decades, as you yourself acknowledge and as attested by multiple reports by UN bodies, and recently by the WHO. However, reinitiating the Association Council with the intention of engaging Israel in addressing these issues without a clear mechanism of accountability, is a very dangerous step. A government which controls and subjugates 5 million people under occupation, which arrests and prosecutes children in military courts and which persecutes human rights defenders under the pretext of counter-terrorism law, cannot be an unconditional partner of the European Union. All these acts are hallmarks of an authoritarian state. In the absence of clearly stated conditions, endorsing an institutionalized form of cooperation with the Israeli government and resumption of the association council will send the wrong message.



Indeed, since the decision was taken to reconvene the EU-Israel Association Council, Israel has waged another brutal war on Gaza and intensified its attack on Palestinian civil society organizations. The message is clear. The EU is emboldening Israel to proceed with impunity by giving a signal that there will never be accountability.

The EU should not reward a government which pursues its policy of annexation and persecution in open defiance of international law and hundreds of UN resolutions. This dangerous complicity has to stop. The decision has to be revoked, or at least clear and concrete conditions should be set before reconvening the Association Council, including:

- An immediate halt to the demolitions and evictions in Masafer Yatta and elsewhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory;
- An end to the E1 settlement plan and all settlement building;
- Compliance with Israel's obligations under international law and an end to occupation, colonization and discriminatory practices, including that of barring family reunions for Palestinians;
- The immediate and unconditional lifting of the Gaza blockade;
- The immediate release of child prisoners and political prisoners;
- Co-operation with all investigations including those by the International Criminal Court and the UN Special Rapporteurs

The European Union and its member states should mobilize all diplomatic means to pressure Israel to comply before reconvening the Association Council. It is not only a moral imperative, but also a legal obligation of the international community to co-operate to bring an end to grave breaches of international law.

We call on you, as EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, to actively facilitate the discussion amongst member states to revoke / condition the upcoming Association Council meeting.

Sincerely,

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