



Statement by the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, following his visit to the Middle East

The President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, visited the Middle East from 27 to 31 May. During his visit he had high level political discussions with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, in Gaza, with the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and with the acting President of Israel and Speaker of the Knesset, Dalia Itzik, in Jerusalem. He also met King Abdullah of Jordan in Amman.

In addition, President Pöttering used the visit to inform himself of the situation in the Qalandia Refugee Camp (a UNRWA project) and the so-called security barrier in Bethlehem under the guidance of the UN Office for Coordination and Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA). On 30 May the President delivered a speech to the Knesset in Jerusalem.

On his return from the Palestinian Territories, Israel and Jordan, President Pöttering stated:

"This visit has brought it home once again that it is only through dialogue that bring about mutual understanding and, in due course, a resolution of the conflict. The basis for a resolution lies in a two-state solution and the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to live within secure borders, with the people of Israel and Palestine afforded the same dignity.

The economic, social and humanitarian situation in the Palestinian Territories made a deep impression on me. We must ask ourselves what will become of those children growing up behind the wall, what kind of behaviour will this lead to? For this reason it is an essential measure that the Israeli Government releases the almost 700 million dollars of Palestinian monies in customs income to President Abbas, so that he can pay the salaries of the police and teachers.

There is no alternative to the Middle East Peace Process and we must support all those who are working for it. A lasting peace can only come through dialogue, reconciliation and forgiveness. The European Parliament is on the side of all those who are working towards this goal. The open talks with both sides made very clear that the EU can play a vital role as a reliable partner and mediator within the framework of the Middle East Quartet (EU, UN, USA, Russia).

Furthermore, I am pleased that the statement by the Quartet meeting in Berlin on 30 May was in harmony with the content of my own speech in the Knesset with regard to

resolution of the Middle East conflict."

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