



PALESTINE and ISRAEL **Articles and Press Releases**

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ARTICLES

"THE ACCOMPLICES"

"PALESTINE, A NEED TO BREAK THE SILENCE. ITALY AND EUROPE SHOULD ACT HERE AND NOW"

The late and uncertain reactions of the European Union are aggravating the isolation and the dramatic situation of the people in the territories.

Published in the Italian Newspaper LIBERAZIONE – 22/01/2008

More than forty Palestinians have been killed and hundreds wounded in just one week of heavy Israeli raids into the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Amongst the victims is a woman who died as a consequence of the attack on the Interior Ministry, carpet bombed on Friday, January 18 th, according to plan: a planned war and collective punishment against an "enemy entity" in which 1.5 million people live.

By this hour the crossing point for fuel and medicine has supposedly been reopened. Yet this happens only after four consecutive days of total siege during which the inhabitants of the strip were forced to stay for hours in the cold and darkness due to the fuel cut. The defense ministry, in reality the war ministry, led by Ehud Barak, has completely sealed all the borders, blocking even the humanitarian convoys from the United Nations in a strip already suffocated from months of closure, with patients in the hospital who can't receive care, generators and water pumps shut, long lines for bread in front of bakeries, and the UNRWA announcing: "If the present situation persists we'll have to stop distributing food for 860,000 people by Thursday or Friday." The UN agency that deals with assisting Palestinian refugees however, has repeated these denunciations over and over in recent months. Evidently though, this has been ignored by those "merchants of politics and wars" when we are still seeing, according to Amnesty International and other NGO's, at least thirteen patients with cancer or other severe diseases not allowed outside the strip for treatment and facing the risk of dying in silence. This is what happened to 62 others since the beginning of the siege due to lack of permits and what continues happening to even more people being wounded and killed now in the latest bombings.

Its hard to keep up with the number of the dead; they increase hour by hour at every time one checks with the news agencies. It's hard to explain that behind each number there are children, women and men: "we've killed 810 Palestinians," says Diskin, head of the Shin Bet and commander of the Gaza Brigade. Colonel Ron Ashrov congratulates himself for having conducted an operation with great success given his operation had killed eighteen Palestinians last week in Zeitun.

And there is no condemnation from the international community nor from the European Union, apart from the isolated statements of the EU commissioner for exterior relations, Benita Ferrero Waldner, who yesterday demanded that Israel "resume the delivery of oil and reopen the borders" to humanitarian aid, and the late voices from the Italian and French governments who express preoccupation over "an already catastrophic humanitarian situation." Apart from condemnation for the worsening of the humanitarian crisis and requests to allow the entrance of medicine and fuel, nobody has so far firmly demanded the reopening of the strip's crossings to people and merchandise and the end of the embargo that is strangling Gaza. Ending the siege also represents the only way to stop the Qassam rocket launchings on Israeli civilians by Palestinians, condemnable, counterproductive, and a sign of powerlessness and anger, not of resistance. The European Union, instead, has remained deaf to the resolution voted on last October in the European Parliament demanding that the Israeli government put an end to the siege of Gaza, and has demonstrated a complete lack of political efficacy for an immediate stand against all we are witnessing numbly, and yet are responsible for.

The EU should first ask forgiveness for not having helped end the Israeli military occupation and for not having helped the formation of two people and two states; ask forgiveness for the dead in the Strip, for not having ordered immediately and with a unified voice a stop to Israeli air strikes. Forgiveness for not yet having the strength to propose the immediate intervention

of an international force that would protect both civil populations, of occupied Palestine and of Israel, and can guarantee them the legality and security that forty years of Israeli military occupation have washed away, together with any hope for peace and notwithstanding the broken promises of Annapolis.

Yesterday a new international presence to protect civilians was demanded by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in an interview with the newspaper L'Unita "to create the minimal condition for negotiations to develop in the best way." He also appealed to the Italian government to "act, together with other European countries, on Israel, and make it end its collective punishment inflicted on the civilian population in Gaza."

Instead the policies of the EU and the international community have contributed to the division of the Palestinian population and the weakening of its political representation; wasting the chance to strengthen the cohesion by denying support to the national unity government, a government in which all Palestinian political entities were gathered around a table and agreeing on a shared political platform of resuming negotiations with Israel, the right of two states for two peoples based on the 1967 border and with Jerusalem as a shared capitol. We have contributed in the creation of this crisis and to the basis for a logic that is key to US and Israeli politics of *dividi et impera* consuming a people already exhausted, occupied, and under siege. Also we are now complicit in this logic if we do not promote the principle that only a policy of inclusion can lead the way for a just and lasting peace, if we don't concretely support the tenacious efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas and of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for the unity of the Palestinian people and territory, and if at last we don't at last send positive messages, even within tragedies, like a delegation of Fatah members did a few days ago visiting Mahmoud Az-Zahhar, Hamas leader and ex-foreign minister in the Gaza Strip to express condolences for the killing of his son Husam during one of the Israeli air strikes last Tuesday, or like the grief of the father of the Israeli soldier Shalit, kidnapped by Hamas and not released because the Israeli government does not want to free Palestinian prisoners.

With all of this blood, with all of these deaths, nobody can be absolved for their silence. The European Union, just like the policy of the Quartet, are responsible and need to assume responsibility: demand the end of the bombings and the siege of Gaza – as asked by civil society the world over reunited in the "End the Siege" campaign (www.end-gaza-siege.ps / email: end.gaza.siege@gmail.com) - that on the 26th will see Israeli, Palestinian and International organizations try to break the siege by marching together at the Eretz crossing into Gaza with a convoy carrying goods gathered by the Israeli population. Also in Rome, as in other cities in the world, people will gather to ask for the end of the siege of Gaza. But it should be the government and the United Nations to act to ensure an international protection of the civilian population, work for the unity of the Palestinian people and the end of the Israeli occupation. And overall it is time to put pressure on Ehud Olmert's government to respect the promises made to gain peace and security, starting with the end of the raids into Gaza and ceasing the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Olmert's current policy pushes for acts of war, spreads violence and incites revenge, destroying any possibility of peace and security for both populations.

We need to break the silence and act: Italy and Europe should respond to the appeal by Fayyad to "save Gaza from pain," it's also the way to stop the rockets that are raining on the city of Sderot and support the many Israelis and the majority of Palestinians who want peace and equal rights and who still find the courage to refuse and the tenacity to resist in the popular and non-violent fight.

**PALESTINE: TEL AVIV'S COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENTS
WAVE OF CAPTURES, ROUND-UPS AND KILLINGS IN THE WEST BANK.
STORIES BY WITNESSES FROM THE VILLAGE OF BEIT UMMAR.**

Published in the Italian Newspaper LIBERAZIONE – 19 February 2008

Friday 15th February: after three days in a row of siege and curfew, Israeli tanks eventually leave and water and electricity can be restored in Beit Ummar, a tiny village in the south of the West Bank, a few kilometres from Hebron, where some 10 thousand Palestinians live.

Israeli tanks together with Shin Bet agents - some 30 vehicles and bulldozers, according to eyewitnesses - entered the village on Wednesday the 13th at about one o'clock in the morning; soldiers carried out house by house searches rounding up a number of young civilian

men aged between 18 and 25, destroying buildings, infrastructure and shops, as was also confirmed by the Christian Peacemaker Teams: "Soldiers surrounded the mosque, preventing movement of people and cars but also of medicines and ambulances" they told Maanam News. "It was nothing less than a collective punishment, perpetuated against young boys and men who were brought to a schoolyard and repeatedly beaten up. Almost 85 of them were kept for hours outside, in the cold at below-zero temperatures" Ali Abu Awwad told us by telephone with despair and helplessness in his voice. He is a 35-year-old Palestinian Ghandian-pacifist who together with an Israeli citizen, Elik El Hanan, tells us and the world about their need for peace and justice.

Both have mourned a family bereavement caused by the conflict: Ali lost one of his brothers, shot cold-bloodedly by an Israeli soldier at a check point; Elik lost his sister, killed in a kamikaze attack in 1997. Today they are both activists of the Parents Circle, a Forum counting more than 500 Israeli and Palestinian families who, despite having lost some of their loved ones, have been spreading, for over 12 years, a very powerful message: "If we, those who have paid the highest price, keep talking about peace then it means that everyone can do it" says Ali at the end of "Mothers", Barbara Cupisti's documentary - presented last September at the Venice Film Festival - on the stories of 15 Israeli and Palestinian mothers whose children have been killed in the conflict.

Ali is a cofounder of Al Tariq (The Way), a Palestinian movement bringing together numerous Palestinian associations engaged in a daily battle for the recognition of a free Palestinian state, for the end of the military occupation, against every sort of violence and against the logic of contraposition. We also learned from him that some leaflets were left by the Israeli army in Beit Ummar that had occupied some houses in the village making them its headquarters: "You have not been able to teach your kids not to throw stones, now we will take care of that!" was written on those leaflets.

Moreover, during the invasion, the army of occupation demolished houses and shops, destroyed water and sewerage pipes, seized computers, cell phones and documents without providing any kind of explanation. In addition 25 people were captured who, up to now, have not been released. We do not know where these people are being held exactly; a number of minors are among them like 15-year-old Muntaser Fakhri Ikhlayel and his cousin Adam Hasan Ikhlayel, 16, both arrested on Wednesday night in Beit Unmar as was Youssef Hassan Abarneh, who is a local leader of Al Fatah and another cofounder of Al Tariq. These latest arrests are in addition to more than 11 thousand Palestinian political prisoners currently kept in Israeli prisons, in Israel as well as in the occupied territories.

Over the last weeks many demonstrations have been held in Beit Ummar, with people protesting against the local government run by Hamas. It cannot be a coincidence that among the 25 people arrested there are many Fatah leaders, who were given the key of the Municipality by the Hamas government as a sign of distension with the protesters.

In the meantime, closures, raids and invasions are ongoing in Gaza and in the West Bank: on Wednesday alone, at least 60 people were captured in the West Bank and on the 15th of February an elderly Palestinian woman died from an heart attack because she was unable to reach the hospital on time as her husband, Mahmoud Yussef Qab, was denied permission to pass through a check point by Israeli soldiers.

According to Palestine Monitor, since the Annapolis conference on the 28th of November, Israeli raids have increased of 220%, 178 Palestinians have been killed, including 3 children and some 617 people have been injured. All this has happened without a single protest from the International Community (and they do not even fire Kassam rockets from Beit Unmar...).

It seems clear that the Israeli government is unable or unwilling to stop its militaristic, colonial and land-conquering attitude as demonstrated by its policy of settlements expansion within the Palestinian territories. It seems to want to keep the Middle East in a situation of never-ending conflict, as demonstrated by the assassination of the Hezbollah leader, Imad Mughniyeh, in Damascus.

They kill and they destroy and they are convinced that they deserve to be loved and understood but in order to be loved they themselves have to love and respect others. This does not seem to be the case either of the Israeli government or of the Israeli army. But we should not despair because there are many people in Israel, like Elik, who try to defend the future of their country by demonstrating side by side with the Palestinians against the Wall in

Bi'lin or at the Eretz pass in Gaza and fiercely denouncing that this policy of military occupation and colonial expansion will only strengthen extremist and fundamentalist forces in both sides.

STORY OF IMPRISONMENT AND FREEDOM GAZA, A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER

After a few days of food and fresh air, 1.5 million Palestinians have been returned to the "cage." This is their story.

Published in the Italian Newspaper LIBERAZIONE -UE Feb 2nd, 2008

The fresh air of liberty breathed by thousands of Palestinians who flooded into Egypt after the breaking of the wall is running out: 1.5 million people have returned into the "cage" at the mercy of both Israeli military raids and rockets fired by extremist Palestinians at Sderot. However, many Palestinian civilians remain outside demonstrating in the cold of the last few days at Al Arish, Egypt: they are students, people with illnesses, business people, families that need to go abroad - but Egypt has closed the way to Cairo. And that's how the siege of the Strip continues: the Israeli High Court of Justice has authorized cuts to fuel and electricity supplies while the border at Rafah is again closed and Palestinian political parties can't reach an agreement, hampered by internal inflexibility and by the inadequacy of the international community, chiefly the US, UN and Europe. Between November 28th and January 20th, Israeli raids over the Gaza Strip killed 136 Palestinians and wounded 360 (Palestine Monitor); 87 Palestinian medical patients died in the recent months of total siege because due to lack of medicine and treatment, of these 16 were children. The siege means not being able to cook bread, filter water (which in Gaza is polluted), keep the hospital's generators running to power incubators and other equipment in departments as vital as intensive care.

"It's not by taking away bread and medicine from Gazan children that the children of Sderot will be rendered safer from the Qassam rockets," echoed Israeli, Palestinian and International movements around the world on January 26th, the international day against the Gaza Siege (www.end-gaza-siege.ps). The day was marked in solidarity with people demonstrating in the Strip with a network of conference calls that included Rome. Also a 17 year old from Sderot, Shir Shodzik, whose aunt and cousin were wounded by Qassam rockets, participated in a demonstration at the Eretz crossing, and launched her own appeal for the end of all violence. Today, together with European Parliamentary delegates from different parties, I will start traveling in Israel and Palestine, including the Gaza Strip. This trip is meant to communicate to Palestinians that the European Parliament has voted a resolution asking for the end of the siege in Gaza, the military incursion in the West Bank, and the unity of the Palestinian territories. It will represent a concrete way to break the embargo and directly verify the life conditions of Palestinians under siege and occupation. We are aware that the Palestinian issue is not just a humanitarian tragedy requiring aid, which is essential, but rather requiring liberty, self determination and a state existing in reciprocal security with Israel.

Hospital Al Shfia – Gaza City

Mansour Rahal was driving a donkey cart in Beit Lahiya when the town was hit by an Israeli missile, killing his mother and older brother. Now Mansour is in the intensive care department of al Shifa hospital, with grave wounds to the head. He is connected to an electric ventilator: his chances of survival depend on the fuel required for the five generators, the hospital's only electricity source. According to the doctors, if fuel were to run out, Mansour and another six patients would die. Cuts in energy supplies would also put at risk the lives of thirty infants born prematurely. According to an appeal from Oxfam, in al Shifa hospital there are 135 cancer patients who cannot receive essential treatments. Munir Mukheirz is among the few who obtained Israeli permission to leave the Strip to get treatment abroad after being stuck for months in a Gaza hospital with a malignant tumor. Mislih Mohammad Qalja and Fatin Majdi Al Hafnawi, two ten year old children, died on Saturday, January 26th after being denied permission to leave the Strip for medical care. It is Israeli policy to stop sick people at the border – not just water filters and film for x-ray machines. On that same day Israeli, Palestinian and International organizations sent basic commodities, food and medicines, to the Eretz crossing. Yet their humanitarian convoy was blocked by the Israeli army and even now is stuck in a nearby Kibbutz, waiting for permission to enter the Strip. Meanwhile for the sick any hope to live hangs by a thread – or, more precisely, a generator cable.

A mother without light, water and gas

"I don't care about politics, I don't shoot Qassam rockets, and I don't demonstrate in the streets: that's why its so difficult to explain the embargo to my four kids" says Iman Ahmed, 35 years old. Imam was forced, as were thousands of others in Gaza, to live for days without water, nor electricity or gas. With the tiny flame from a camping burner, she would cook dinner while trying to contain the kids without TV or music to distract them; hungry, cold and afraid of bombs falling outside their windows. The embargo is also this. Iman's day starts with one hundred twenty three stairs: the water pump for the building is off so every morning she has to go down three flights of stairs to fill up buckets of cold but precious water. "I can't waste even a drop of it," she says. A shower or toilet flush becomes a luxury, as well as do candles : "a candle lasts about 3 hours, and you can't light up more than one because even those are hard to find." Then at night the cold arrives, the heating is off and there aren't enough blankets. The cold is worsened by windows left slightly open to prevent the glass from shattering during explosions. I can imagine Iman's sigh of relief when she saw the opening in the wall of Rafah: like everyone else she must have thought of going to stock up on goods in Egypt. Like Um Muhammed, 50 years old, who together with her five sons crossed the border to get a big sack of laundry detergent. "In Gaza it was first very expensive, then impossible to find," she says. Through the Rafah opening have passed sheep, goats, cows and camels loaded with cement, tea, sugar, and cheeses. The prices for meats, however, are still prohibitive. Mohammed Suleiman Mahmoud, owner of a supermarket in Gaza, has ordered 20,000 Egyptian pounds worth of cheese, milk, fruit and vegetables, but the merchandise was stopped at the Sinai. "Shops in the Strip are empty and what is available is too expensive," says Youssef Ali, a Bedouin from Rafah.

In Search of a House...to Avoid Bombs

Maher Al-Nazil has asked all around about renting an apartment in the Al-Maghazi refugee camp. Maher has lived for years with his wife and three daughters next to a police station on the western border of the camp. Now, though, he's scared that Israeli bombs will fall close to his home: "The images of the family massacred by the bomb that fell on the interior ministry in Gaza city have remained in my mind. I don't want the same thing to happen to my kids," he says. Like Maher, the majority of those families that live next to the ministries and other Palestinian institutions of the Strip have looked into finding new homes to avoid becoming "collateral damage" of Israeli bombs. Chances to find one are very slim, though; next to zero given the general impoverishment, lack of building materials and consequent lack of new apartments. Officials of the agency for civilian security in Gaza have advised the population of the dangers: Israeli jets (F-16s) drop bombs weighing a ton, and all the buildings within 200 meters of the explosion are inevitably damaged. Thousands and thousands of houses, together with orange, date, and palm trees, were razed or uprooted by the Israeli military just before its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, and this same kind of aggression continues today in Rafah, Beit Lahia and Beit Hanoun.

Bride Traffic in Sand Tunnels

With the closures of crossings and permits, hundreds of families have been separated. The tunnels, through which arms and contraband are likely smuggled are also used to reunite families. There are wives who go back to their husbands or future brides who are forced to cross clandestinely in the underground tunnels between the Strip and Egypt: they too are victims of the Gaza isolation. And obviously there's also those who take advantage of the situation and make money. Abu Ashraf is the "King" of the smuggling of women. It started with him bringing in his friends' wives. Now entrusting your wife to him costs \$3,000. A tunnel averages seven hundred meters in length and crossing it takes 30 minutes: an infinite amount of time considering the darkness of the airless passages. Therefore, women are knocked out with an anesthetizing spray, tied to a stretcher and pulled through the mud by a cable until they reach the other end in Gaza. Women of various nationalities, not just Palestinians without ID's, are snuck in this way. Syrians, Lebanese, Egyptian, some Russians and Romanians, married to Palestinians met abroad and nearly always the same situation: the husband had come back to Gaza before the siege started so later they were forced to enter clandestinely. The opening in the wall has represented a moment of relief also for them. Hundreds of divided families were reunited without having to go through underground tunnels. Like Mohammed, who was stuck at el-Arish, a few kilometers from Gaza, separated from his family for five months, or Emran Labbad, a 33 year old from Gaza, tall, thin, and neatly dressed. Thanks to the opening, he is reunited with his Heba, a 25 year old Palestinian

refugee in Egypt who he promised to marry two years before but hadn't seen again until now. These are ordinary stories of occupation and denial of entry, which don't only involve Gaza but the entirety of the Palestinian occupied territories, and are the subject of the campaign for the right to enter the territories (<http://www.righttoenter.ps>). With the border again closed, women will go back to passing through dark underground corridors to then enclose themselves in the gigantic open-air prison that is the Strip. Abu Ashraf, "King of Bride Smuggling," will continue to make money until an Israeli missile destroys the tunnel. Tunnels, he says "are typically used to escape prisons, not enter them, therefore it's true love" that brings the women through them. We instead are active so that smuggling will be ended by the freedom of movement for all Palestinians.

ITALY SHOULD DENOUNCE YONA BAEZ: HE HAS STOLEN ISRAELIS MONEY AND PALESTINIAN LAND!

Published in the Italian Newspaper LIBERAZIONE – 06/09/2007

The flight of Yona Boaz, the building magnate and managing director of Heftsiba, the biggest construction company in Israel, who has been sought by the police for weeks accused of having organized a colossal fraud in Israel, ended the night of August 30th at Castelnuovo del Garda, near Verona, when the 47 year old businessman was arrested. He had fled Tel Aviv at the end of July and covered his tracks well. An international arrest warrant was hanging over him, issued August 12th by the Israeli courts in relation to the scandal in which at least 500 families have lost more than 50 million Euro in deposits paid into his accounts for apartments that were never built. The money, in fact, was moved to other accounts and used by Yoni for his own personal ends. Now he is accused of aggravated fraud, conspiracy to defraud, theft, and falsifying the company accounts. Up to this point the story is well known. The less-known part of the story is that Heftsiba, like many other Israeli construction companies, has based its business mainly on the construction of a good part of the settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories. In 2006 in the East Jerusalem area alone, the company built 330 new housing units in Har Homa, 180 in Maaleh Adumim, and more in Beitar, Adam, Barkan, Efrat, Ariel. In all the West Bank, despite the fact that the transfer of Israeli civilians to the occupied territories is illegal under international law, every year the number of settlers has grown by around 5.5%, reaching a population of around 450 Israelis (2.4 million Palestinians) in 2007. Currently, 38% of the West Bank is occupied by settlements, check points, military bases, infrastructure and zones that are off-limits the Palestinians – reserved for Israelis. This leaves the Palestinians (including Gaza) around 12% of the territory of the historical area of Palestine, and even that is divided into Bantustans between which contact is difficult, since freedom of movement is not guaranteed.

The Israeli construction companies bear a great responsibility for this policy of continual appropriation of Palestinian lands - often the most fertile and those with the best access to water. It's not just a logic of occupation of land, but also a commercial occupation that profits from the current situation - Israeli military control and absence of any appropriate jurisdiction - to make easy profits on the backs of dispossessed Palestinians and swindled Israeli families in open violation of international law.

In January 2006, the Israeli courts had already closed down the Heftsiba building sites where 1,500 housing units were being built for ultra orthodox Jews in Modiin Illit. The building was considered illegal because it was built on land that is the property of Palestinian farmers and because the project included double the number of housing units decided by the Israeli parliament. No construction company would have acted with such contempt for the law if the project had been within Israel. But companies like Heftsiba and their managers are not the only guilty parties: the finger must also be pointed at the Israeli authorities, the government ministers, and the local administrative powers who have, by their tolerance of such practices, created this Wild-West situation, facilitated the violence of a system - the Israeli system - that continues to annex Palestinian lands with 40 years of military occupation, with the building of the wall and the growth of settlements. Like in Bil'in, a village to the north-east of Ramallah, around six km from the green line that should mark the 1967 borders - not far from the large and continually expanding settlement of Modi'in Illit- which is within

zone A and so according to the Oslo accords should be totally under the control of the Palestinian authority. In recent years, Bil'in, has become a symbol for the non-violent struggle against the occupation and against the wall (www.bilin-village.org), which has appropriated around 60% of arable land from the 1600 residents of the village, who are mainly farmers. A real theft of lands and emblematic of what is happening in Palestinian villages in the entire West Bank thanks to construction companies who are without scruples, like Heftsiba, thanks also to the impunity that these companies are often guaranteed by the Israeli authorities and, finally, thanks to the complicit silence of an inert International Community. The protests against the wall, which started in 2005 on the initiative of a village committee supported by Israeli and international pacifists (last April they held the second international conference), have continued every Friday after prayers, with a march starting from the village and getting as close as possible to the zone where the wall is under construction, trying to block the bulldozers with non-violent actions, but each time subjected to brutal attacks, arrests, and injuries by the soldiers. Thanks to a petition and of the non-violent resistance of the village, on Tuesday September 4th the Israeli Supreme Court ordered the revision of the path of a section of the 1.7 km section of the wall built on land owned Bil'in farmers. This section of the wall runs close to the Matityahu East neighbourhood of the Modi'in Illit settlement. According to the Israeli government, the wall is necessary to protect the residents. In reality, the wall occupies 260 dunams (1 dunam = 1000 m²) of village land and impedes access to another 1.700 dunam of cultivated fields and orchards that are between the barrier and the green line. For this reason, the residents of the village appealed to the court and now await the destruction of some parts of the wall "within a reasonable period of time". "Wonderful" news commented the Bil'in committee, hoping that the ruling will really be applied. Cases of rulings not being applied are not rare.

It happened recently south of Hebron where the Israeli army refused to remove cement wall that is 82 cm high and 41 km long close to the villages for Palestinian shepherds, preventing them and their flocks from crossing the road 317, a road for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers. In December 2006, the court called for the removal of that part of the wall within 6 months, but "the Israeli armed forces have deliberately delayed the application of the ruling"- according to a new ruling by the Supreme Court, displaying arrogant behavior, lacking in respect for every principle of legality and the clear will to protect the settlers in defiance of every sense of justice. These episodes demonstrate the state of things in Israel: voices that call for respect for the law exist but they are isolated, unheard, and even repressed by the Israeli security forces, showing a dangerous clash between justice and its application. For this reason, the example of Bil'in, the protests and accusations of activists and associations like Peace Now - particularly active in denouncing the growth of settlements - are fundamental. Thanks to them, the construction of the Matityahu East settlement has been delayed for at least a year, a victory that in fact contributed to the collapse of Heftsiba, according to the settlers, who seem to be trying to illegally occupy the unfinished apartments. But the risk now, as the people of Bil'in remind us, is that it's doubtful that the Israeli courts will declare the whole settlement illegal and so the Israeli authorities will look for another construction company to finish the work, with or without Heftsiba. For this reason, Mohammed al-Khatib of the Popular Committee of Bil'in and the people of the village are asking Italy to take up the case of Yona Boaz, to denounce him for violations against international law or for crimes against humanity, reminding us that his company has stolen not only the money of Israelis but also the land of Palestinians. Yona, who is now in the Verona jail will probably appear in court in Milan on 10th September to state whether or not he intends to oppose his extradition. If he chooses not to, he could be extradited to Israel within a few days, where he could be condemned to up to 27 years in prison for fraud, but naturally, with no mention of the violations against international law, the theft of Palestinian land, the illegal practices that are an integral part of the Israeli occupation that still continues. The ruling of the Israeli Supreme Court on the Bil'in wall, the victory of the village committee and the case of Yona represent a chance to call on our government to take a clear position against the occupation and the wall, and the visit today in Rome of the new president Shimon Peres, should also be a chance to make an official protest to the Israeli authorities. But the pacifist movements, the associations for human rights, jurists

and parties too should mobilize to help the non-violent popular resistance movement in Bil'in to achieve concrete results and to stop the continuation of the illegal building of settlements that precludes any possibility of peace and of an end to the military occupation of the Palestinian territories.

CHILDREN OF GAZA, ADD THE OFFENSE TO THE TRAGEDY

published on the Italian Newspaper LIBERAZIONE – 02/09/2007

"It's too late to stop the fire". Three Palestinian children were killed on the last Tuesday, as a consequence of the shooting of a military force unit of the Israeli Army, affirming to shoot for rockets launching stations, nearby Beit Hanoun. They were 10 and 12 years old and they were playing when they were killed. Today Israeli Government admits to have made a mistake, but in the last two days it accused Palestinian militants of using children as human shields to defend the Qassam launchers. This is not true: they are innocent victims. As many others, they are victims of Israel's occupation and will: since 2000 until today more than 800 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli Army. Nobody will be condemned as responsible for their death: add the offence to the tragedy.

Abir, 11 years old, the daughter of Bassam Aramin, -ex political prisoner and now member of the Combatants for Peace (an association composed of ex Palestinian activists and ex Israeli soldiers) was murdered by a bullet that hit on her head, while she was going out from school, in Anata, East –Jerusalem. Denied from evidence and medical exams, Israeli authorities did not confirm the girl was killed by a bullet or a stone. Often, if conducted, enquiries are opposed by any means or buried under sand in order to assure Israeli Army's impunity: children are killed for a second time, inflicting a new pain to mothers, fathers and to all the Palestinian people, who powerless suffer the ruin of any sense of justice and of the hope to identify those who committed crimes and still continue to.

Those bereaved families desperately retain the memory of their lost son, but poverty in Gaza is so deep that nobody has video cameras or cameras. No videos filmed to document the first steps of Yahya Ramdan Abu Ghazala, 10 years old, neither of Mahmoud Abu Ghazala, 12 years old nor of her cousin Sara, 10 years old.

No pictures are taken and downloaded on pc or mobiles to soothe – if possible – mothers' despair. Often only pictures remain, those taken by photo reporters in Gaza, when the tragedy has carried out and the children are lifeless bodies, their faces covered with blood.

Gaza is not a prison – as usual we define it – because the million and an half people living there are not criminals waiting to serve a punishment, even if they are collectively and unfairly punished; Gaza is a cage without oxygen, no resources for the civil population, that only seldom and optionally is opened to let food and aids in, just enough not to starve people.

I believe that Olmert-Abbas meetings and the open dialogue for the creation of two autonomous and sovereign States, are certainly positive and should be carried out. But Israeli policies do not present de facto the will to work for justice and peace, rather fulfilling the Apartheid Wall construction, targeted killing, closing the check-points, arbitrarily arresting, land confiscating and destroying all and everybody; a destruction which is provoked by the military occupation, while the Palestinian flag, symbol of the fight of a people for the independence, is replaced by those of Hamas and Fatah, Palestinians risking to be more and more divided.

Unfortunately, the International Community keep being silent. No efforts, nor a word about civilians' death – before everything women and children's death – neither incisive actions to hint the Israeli Government at ending a military occupation 40 years long. No political will to let the international right being respected and to break off a nakba 60 years long.

Hesitating and submitting to the pressure, the European Union aligns itself with the silence of Israeli policies, being a party to.

Held at the European Parliament in August 30th and 31st, the UN International Conference of civil society to support the Israeli-Palestinian peace, provoked controversies and a formal complaint by the Israeli Authorities and some parliament members. At last, the Conference was held and it represented an important example of grass- root democracy and participation:

associations, deputies and many representatives of the civil society repeated the demand of a common engagement for the respect of International law and brought to Europe and International Community's minds that respect of human rights cannot be meaningless and must be implemented.

ISRAELI LAND FOR JEWS ONLY. ISN'T RACISM?

In the Knesset, a bill discriminates against the Arab citizens of Israel

Published in the Italian Newspaper LIBERAZIONE – 20/07/2007

Yesterday, the Israeli Parliament approved, in preliminary reading, a bill that calls for all lands under the control of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to be allocated to Jews only. In this way Israel strikes another blow against democracy, fuelling discrimination and Apartheid. The proposal of the bill, initiated by the Israeli right wing, Kadima and Likud, prevents non-Jews from participating in bids to purchase land owned by the JNF (Jewish National Fund), 13 percent of all state land.

The bill passed by a massive majority of 64 MKs to 16, despite a pre-vote debate in the Knesset Presidency, in which many raised their voices against the bill, calling for it to be cancelled. These requests were rejected by the legal advisor to the Knesset on the grounds that "racism is not explicit in the proposal".

So what shall we call the exclusion of Arab citizens of Israel from participation in bids to purchase lands? What can we call it except racist, this bill defined by some Knesset Deputies an "abominable legislation", that serves only to institutionalize discrimination towards non-Jews and to legitimate a democracy on an ethnic basis? This law is just one more expression of racism and discrimination in Israel, where demolition houses owned by its Arab citizens, illegal expropriation of their lands, uprooting of their trees is ongoing. The only opposition to the proposal came by Meretz-Yachad Representatives, left wing party, committed in social justice. "The bill approved yesterday by the Knesset shows the real face of the government -they declared- and risks representing Israel as an apartheid state". The Arab parties, Balad and Raam-Taal, and Hadash, the Jewish and Arab left, also denounced the risk of legalizing the "great robbery of lands" that has continued since 1948 to our own days towards Israeli Arabs". The Knesset's real face cannot be the face of Uri Ariel, the radical of the settlers first supporter of this bill, otherwise the increase in the level of racism, and the consequent decrease in the level of democracy, will cause a serious shift in the direction of institutionalized apartheid and of the cancellation of all rights.

Broken Palestine

Published in Aprileonline– 17/06/2007

Blade is locked up to Gaza, smokes continuously and cries, from fear, anger, pain. One of the women that to Gaza always has gone in turn without to cover the head, engaged in the movements of the women is part of the International Commission for one just peace in Palestine and Israel with Palestinian, Israelis and international. It wants to be gone some, but it is all closing, the border with Israel and Egypt.

I speak with the European guarantors of the Rafah crossing, also consternate:

"We do not know if we will open Rafah, we are waiting for, Brussels would have give green line in order to speak to us with Hamas, the militias are enters to you in the premises of Rafah but they have not touched nothing, we would have to reopen but like? With who ". Like Blade, they are migliaia the inhabitants of Gaza that want to go themselves some, an other exodus, once again profughi and to the usual they are intellectual, professionals, entrepreneurs. The poor ones will remain at the mercy of the Gaza new under the flags of Hamas. That that he has been obvious with the Victoria electoral of Hamas was the end of a Palestinian identity you form yourselves above all in many years of military occupation and in the sacrifices of the first Intifadah. This identity has been crushed -already during the elections- not in the Palestinian flag but of the flags of Fatah and Hamas. Hour nobody knows what will happen, which slowly it has Hamas and which strategy will adopt to the Fatah or the other political forces minority and crushed from the exploded violence and the crimes store clerks against the civilians, with the

highly summarized executions, the vandalisms and the thefts. "I would want to be killed", says a Palestinian of Gaza, leader to me in the first Intifadah, imprisoned and tortured from the Israelis, it supports that only an external participation of the International Community will be able to resolve the situation. But just the international Community would have to be put under process. After forty years of military occupation, the International Community has not known to construct that for which it was thought engaged: respect of the International, fine legality of the occupation and two people for two states. It turns out to you are that today they are that there are two Palestinian territories separates to you not only physically but also politically. The territory of the West Bank, of which the Israelis they mean (have already made it with the construction of the wall), to annex of a good slice, perhaps it will maintain to the diversity of the cultures and religions that characterized the Palestinian, but sure will not be one be independent and independent. Some, also between the Palestinian are already proposing one federation with the Jordan. With the Palestinian and their dream broken of one Be independent secular democratic and, we have been defeats also that we have not known to answer to the need of justice of the Palestinian population and with politics of two weights and two measures we have allowed the Israeli governments who are succeeded, to continue to construct colonies, to confiscate Palestinian lands, to hold more in jail than 11 thousand Palestinian, to force the population of Gaza to living in one prison to open sky. Sure the UE has financed the Palestinian, also in these last times it has tried not to make to die of hunger the besieged population, allowing but the Israeli government to withhold the taxes collected to name of the Palestinian authority, than, if poured, would have resolved in great part the problem of the Palestinian budget. Finally we have paid politics of the Israeli occupation. And we have, like European Union, mistaken many times, would have had to recognize the government of Hamas and to deal endured instead following American and Israeli politics. Today we try to save the salvable; it must protect the Palestinian and Israeli population; endured an international force to Gaza and in West Bank. Israel must stop the military incursions and the murders aimed, apply to some time the agreements to you that ago and it does not respect never, are opened more than 500 check point for persons and goods, free the political prisoners. The Palestinian have need to see that their daily life changes and it is not more a hell. While the USA say to recognize the new government of Mahmoud Abbas, an other kiss of the dead women.

**“HOPE IS DEAD AMONG PALESTINIANS”
AN INTERVIEW WITH LUISA MORGANTINI, VICE PRESIDENT OF EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT**

«THERE ARE MODERATE FORCES, BUT THEY NEED A TRUE SIGNAL»

By Simonetta Cossu, From Liberazione 15.06.2007

Luisa Morgantini, MEP GUE/NGL is in Brussels. She is one of the Vice Presidents of the European Parliament and member of many committees, and her timetable is always full of meetings and commitments. Yesterday when we reach her to the phone in the office, her voice was in pain. In fact she is here, in Europe, but her hearth is in Gaza where lots of her friends are hostages of the civil war.

Which news do you have from Gaza?

Unfortunately, I have the news diffused by international media. I'm receiving messages and e-mails from many desperate people who would like to leave Gaza as soon as possible, who are feeling stalked by these internecine fights. It's happening something that never happens before: Palestinians want to move away. They want to escape from the land they always considered their own land and that today has changed into a hell. The poet Darwish said that "Palestinians are condemned to hope". But now even this hope is running out of steam, is flying away. And the chaos risks to extend to the entire West Bank. Yesterday, Fatah's militias appeared in the streets of Ramallah. An other nightmare is announced.

You know very well Palestine, could you explain us what is happening?

An internal fight among factions is ongoing. Within Hamas the fighting is between the most fundamentalist forces, linked to the Islamic vision – who had tolerated the National Unity Government instead of supporting it- and a part of Hamas who rather remains, such as in the past years, a religious movement but above all a nationalist movement, whom main priority is

the freedom of Palestine. By the other side, there is a part of Fatah that, de facto, has never accepted the election of Hamas – and the following loss of power and hegemony in the Palestinian Movement- causing the physical and also military fight against Hamas. These extremist wings have their own point of reference. Fatah's militants are mainly led by Mohamed Dalan, while Hamas' ones have their own point of reference in Mahmud a-Zahar (former Foreign Minister). Furthermore, there are also external forces who are shedding fuel on the fire, such as United States, who have fuelled the fight, jumping in internal issues of Palestinians. They even offered arms to Dalan in order to use them to put an end to the chaos and to stop the rocket attacks against Sderot by some extremist Palestinian groups. The problem is that some of these groups are connected to Hamas, but others are by now gangs out of control. Finally, there's the responsibility of the International Community. I mean the lack of the recognition of the electoral results and of the first Hamas Government. European Union de facto refused to recognize what she promoted. A mistake that has been reiterated after, without the full support to the National Unity Government.

How do Palestinian people live these decisions?

In Gaza Strip people live in a brutal way, without freedom neither job, 60% of the population is unemployed, daily victim of humiliation and injustices since 40 years. But did we ever ask to ourselves which kind of effects could have had this violence on Palestinian Generations? As European and as Occident, each time we assist to episodes of violence towards the children, we are worried about the consequences for them, if they could, for instance, generate other violence. On the contrary, we don't accept and we rather take into consideration the context in which Gaza is bursting.

Which are the Israeli responsibilities?

Huge. Israel has always encouraged internal divisions between Palestinians, fuelled the growth of Hamas and above all it is still military occupying those territories since over 40 years. Its destructive role is clear: when it imprisoned Arafat, when it didn't recognize any partner for Peace, for example when Abbas was elected for the first time and created a Government who predicated non violence and reinforced the respect of agreements. Which was the answer by Israel? It kept on with the building of the wall, which is de facto a colonial annexation's wall, it kept on with its policy of settlements and of extra territorial killings. Israel encouraged who was affirming that peace agreements didn't have any value, fuelling the frustration and the desperation. Today, Israel too is living a deep crisis, it's a lacerated country that is suffering the lack of leadership. It listens to the United States and refuses the Arab Initiative, that offers to Israel the chance to be one State among the Arab States in Middle East.

D'Alema talks about the need of supporting moderate forces. Which are these forces?

The moderate forces remain Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Hanyeh. But moderates are also within Fatah and Hamas itself and in those parts of the Palestinian civil society who still believe in dialogue and negotiations. The problem is that it's too late, the actual tragedy has been announced. This situation represents a failure for all, for international Community, for political Parties and movements, it's a failure also for Palestinians, whom military drift has been devastating. We still keep on requiring Palestinians to be perfect in a world where perfection doesn't exist.

Which kind of connection is there, between what is happening in Gaza Strip and the situation in Lebanon?

What is happening is a monstrous game in which only and always Palestinian and Lebanese people are paying the prize. I doubt that there is a direct responsibility by the Syria, there are many Syrian internal forces who are playing a destabilizing role. But Syria freed itself from the presence of Al Qaeda, pushing its members to escape outside and now it finds them again in Lebanon.

Which are the options remaining?

We have to admit our responsibilities and say to Israel to stop with the occupation and the settlements. The security of Israel is the security of Palestinians. Fighting can be stopped, but we have to show to the Palestinians that there is an exit way from hell and occupation.

MARWAN BELIEVES IN PEACE WITH JUSTICE

Published in *Liberazione* Italian Newspaper– 09/02/2007

Marwan Barghouti is a man blessed with a strong sense of irony, a little impatient perhaps, although the long years spent in Israeli prisons prior to the first Intifada and since 2002 seem to have ironed out this minor flaw. Marwan believed, and continues to believe in peace, with Israel and Palestine living side by side.

I met him for the first time in Birzeit, on the eve of the first Intifada, where he led the student organization. The next time I saw him, following his deportation to Paris and other European cities, he had become a leader of al-Fatah.

In those years, European cities often played host to meetings, conferences and assemblies between Israelis and Palestinians. At a time of widespread talk of peace, cohabitation and an end to the circle of hate, Marwan said: "I have been in prison for many years and, like many others, I have been deported, but I continue to believe that the realization of a Palestinian state, coexisting with an Israeli state, can only be achieved through a combination of negotiations and fighting."

He was in no doubt as to the reasons for, and opportunities given by this new intifada: "We only ask for what is ours by right. We ask for our land and our dignity, as every human being and people would." He never ceased to speak of the UN, symbol of an international community in which he still had faith despite the letdowns: "Israel must stop its military occupation, as has even been called for by an international resolution."

Marwan is a man who cannot stand humiliation and has never tolerated the sight of young men and women, boys and girls from "his" Palestine being coerced by the will of an Israeli soldier. "Here, we are but prisoners who enjoy no freedom of movement – he insisted – so you tell me how there can be a peace where there is a dominator and a dominated." On the outside world, he was unable to comprehend the utter silence in front of the injustices suffered by the Palestinians: "As far as the media is concerned, we do not hold much value. Our dead do not have names, nor do they have parents. Our dead do not have a story. They have not been killed, they are simply dead."

His abduction on 15th April 2002 was most painful for all of us and constituted a great loss for the Palestinian people. The trial saw Marwan, handcuffs around his wrists but with his dignity intact, revivify his, the Palestinian youth's and Palestinian people as a whole's right to freedom.

Sentenced to five life terms in prison, Marwan continues from his jail to be a hope for the large majority of the Palestinian population. Now no longer in isolation, he weaves relations with prisoners from other political currents and continues to be a point of reference and a voice of reason and unity within Fatah.

His was the initiative to promote the national unity government and the 21 points that became the basis for any discussions between the various Palestinian political factions.

At this time of infighting between Fatah and Hamas, a crisis that has seen brothers kill each other and children be shot by stray bullets in the streets of Gaza, Marwan, along with other prisoners, has launched a call for an end to hostilities and for Palestinians to prevent the triumph of hate and self destruction over the fight for freedom and independence. We should join him in making this call, we who continue to believe in the Palestinian people's right to statehood, we who consider the policies of the Israeli government racist and colonialist, and we

who act together, and ensure that it is heard by all those Palestinians and Israelis who believe that self determination and peace for both people is the only solution.

Marwan's call was directed at the Hamas and Fatah, not the Palestinian people as a whole, and comes from a concern that the clashes between the parties must not turn into a civil war, a small-scale Iraq. In spite of it, clashes have continued and the logic of vendetta seems to be triumphing: a triumph for methods not dissimilar to those of Bush and the Israeli army. Mohammed Dahlan, head of the Palestinian security services in Gaza, seems willing to stop at nothing in order to prevent Hamas from achieving domination. His men attack and kidnap the rival faction's men, whose new security force attacks and kidnaps men of the Fatah. Caught in the crossfire, civilians residing in the shadow city that has become Gaza are afraid of walking the streets, but also of remaining in their own homes; Eyad Serray knows better than most that a home in Gaza is no longer a safe haven, in particular if, like his, it is situated between a Fatah position and a Hamas position. His wife and son, who managed to dive to the ground in a terror-driven impulse, were spared from the bullets that flew into their house. Those bullets did not spare him however. For the first time, Eyad is grateful for the opportunity to leave Gaza for Israel, where he will be operated in Tel Aviv. Raj Sourani, director of the Gaza Human Rights Center, who has forever been calling for an end to the chaos and violence in Gaza, now says that if this situation continues, he will leave Gaza. He is not afraid, but his heart "cannot accept this fratricide clash."

Whilst Marwan continues, from prison, to call for unity to be rediscovered, the Hamas and Fatah delegations in Saudi Arabia are renewing efforts to reach an agreement, based on the 21 points proposed by the political prisoners. By entering the field, Saudi Arabia has, for the first time, shown itself to be autonomous from an American administration that is presently celebrating the inter-Palestinian fighting, obstinate as ever in believing that Hamas can be defeated by arms. The US's policy of laying down the law in the Quartet and of blocking the Europeans and the Russians does not date from yesterday. What is new is Saudi Arabia's recent engagement in solving the internal Palestinian conflict. It has been driven to this by a feeling that it is being accused by the sunni Islamic world of giving ground to the Iranian shias. Our fingers are crossed for a Palestinian agreement to be reached in Mecca.

It has never been as essential for the Arab League and Europe to unite in attempts to resume negotiations and give up the "peace process", angling instead for a solution to the conflict based on a definitive agreement that will provide for the immediate realization of a Palestinian state. In this sense, the Arab Peace Initiative has enormous relevance. For international intervention is indispensable if the Israeli government is to stop acting in all impunity, stop pursuing its policy of colonial annexation and stop keeping the Palestinians imprisoned between checkpoints, the wall, prisons and poverty.

This must happen soon, in order to give Palestinians new hope. It needs Marwan Barghouti to be free, for it is with his leadership that Palestinians will rebuild a democratic and secular Palestine.

In these times of Palestinian internal crisis, it is easy to forget the crisis presently unfolding in Israel, a "moral crisis", as David Grossman calls it. For Israel is a country who's president, along with one of the ministers, has faced allegations of rape, the chief of the army is accused of having made financial speculation hours after learning that two Israeli soldiers had been kidnapped by the Hezbollah last summer and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the son of Ariel Sharon facing charges of corruption. Resumption of negotiations has become essential for Israelis too, but showing that they are actually interested in peace can only come through the

release of Marwan Barghouti and more than 10,000 Palestinians, among them 38 parliamentarians, languishing in Israeli prisons.

Indeed, some Israeli ministers have started to talk openly of Marwan's release, not least Shimon Peres, Defense Minister Sneh and Environment Minister Ezra of the Kadima party. All are agreed upon the fact that Marwan Barghouti's release has become necessary, given that he is the most popular Palestinian leader and possibly the only one capable of assembling all Palestinians under one communal flag.

We too must play our part and make the Campaign to Free Marwan Barghouti & All Prisoners our daily engagement. We must inundate the Israeli authorities, the Italian government, the European council and the European commission with letters, show our solidarity for Marwan while he is locked up, fundraise on behalf of the campaign and continue helping the families of Palestinian prisoners with legal help. We must contribute to the resumption of negotiations and to ending Israel's military occupation. On this, the year of the occupation's 40th anniversary, it is high time the Palestinians lived without the rifles and racism and enjoyed their freedom.

THE SILENCE AND INDOLENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Published in *Liberazione* Italian Newspaper- 02/11/2006

The Israeli government must be stopped, the EU should suspend the economic agreements, the Italian government should revoke the military agreements and those on security stipulated with Israel, the UN should impose the respect of the UN resolutions and of the international legality.

The unilateral and military Israeli policy only leads to its own moral and political disaster, beside inflicting unbearable suffering, humiliation and collective punishment to the Palestinian population. After Lebanon, it came across the hypothesis of an international force in Gaza. Well, this must be done to protect the Palestinian and Israeli populations. The time has come.

Yesterday, during the meeting of the Israeli Security Council, the new Minister of Russian origins Libermann, famous for his racism and fascism (he supports the deportation of all the Palestinians, including of those who are Israeli citizens), seems to have said that the Israeli army should behave in Gaza as the Russians in Chechnya; but actually the Israeli army doesn't need to imitate anybody, its actions and those of its generals must be presented in front of International Court for War Crimes.

Two days ago, while with a delegation of 12 members of the European Parliament belonging to all political parties, we were leaving Gaza from Eretz border, the Israeli bombs were falling on the village of Beit Hanoun. While we were watching the industrial area of Gaza, just four days ago crumbled up by the Israeli bulldozers, we could clearly see the helicopters aiming at Beit Hanoun.

Our driver was ashen. Together with other 25 families he had left his house in Beit Hanoun at the end of August because the Israelis had informed them that they would have bombed them. Now he lives with his ten children and his wife in a rented house in Gaza, and he told us that for him every day is "like waiting to die".

Palestinian business men and traders were telling us how the demolitions and the bombings that destroyed houses, bridges, roads, the electric power station and all the infrastructures, together with the closure of Karni and Rafah check points are impeding all the import and export of Palestinian goods, not to mention the movement of people, and that all this is leading to a dramatic economic and humanitarian disaster in the Gaza strip, but also in the West Bank. The cost of the imported goods in Gaza is now higher than in any other European country, the black market is growing and so is the smuggling, both with Israel and Egypt.

The employees of the public sector, more than 150.000 in all Palestine, have not been receiving their salaries for more than 8 months now. The funds would be available if only Israel gave back the custom duties that they confiscated to the Palestinian Authority. The EU and the Quartet, instead of imposing on Israel to pay back the custom duties (trying as usual to solve the political issue through humanitarian aid), introduced the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM), in order to relieve the more needy cases, but has created a discriminating

mechanism among the workers; in fact, only the employees of the health and education sector received some allowances, while nothing was given to all the others, including the police, who should guarantee internal security, but if not paid, risks to give way to corruption.

In the Al Shifa hospital of Gaza we saw the torn bodies of women, men, children and elderliness. The doctors are calling for an international investigation, since the wounds seems to be caused by phosphorus and chemical weapons. The hospital is in shortage of medications and it is not equipped to treat such injuries. Cancer or terminally ill patients cannot receive anymore treatment in Cairo or Israel for the closure of the borders.

This is an unbearable situation, a humanitarian collapse, and a massacre of civilians happening with the silence and indolence of the International Community.

There are 10.500 political prisoners in a population of 3.500.000. Among them 400 are young boys and girls, more than 200 are women, and 1500 have been confined for years in administrative detention without a regular trial.

The Palestinian political forces seem not to have a strategy. The internal fight between Hamas and Fatah is not only political since it often leads to military fights, bringing insecurity for all. The effort for the establishment of national unity government is constantly undermined by internal power struggles, and most of all by the siege, by the Israeli policies and the American interferences.

The political factions that we met, with no discrimination since our delegation recognizes the freely and democratically elected Palestinians institutions, have reaffirmed that they will not give way to the civil war, that they will reach an agreement based upon the national reconciliation document and the 21 points document of the political prisoners, strongly wished for by Marwan Barghouti. The document recognizes the authority of the PLO, the signed agreements and the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders. The three requests of the International Community for the reopening of the relations with the Palestinian Authority, together with the cease fire that Hamas is respecting, are implicit. This is the only way for the reopening of the negotiations. Meanwhile Mahmoud Abbas is being pressurized to adopt unilateral decisions, which could be dreadful for the democracy and the future of the Palestinian people.

It is up to us, political and social forces, to act in order to avoid this, and to put an end to the Israeli policy of military occupation and to the isolation of the Palestinians.

Will our Italian government manage to carry on with the strategy undertaken for Lebanon, and to urgently call for an international force to be deployed to protect the civilian population and to convene an international conference for a just peace in the region? But the massacre of the Palestinians must be stopped now.

HAMAS, A VICTORY THAT WAS LONG ANNOUNCED!

Published in Liberazione Italian Newspaper- 31-01-2006

The landslide victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections has been coming for a long time.

It's a political earthquake and a transformation, for now completely legal, of the Palestinian liberation movement. The Palestine Liberation Organisation is no longer the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Hamas, which is not a part of the PLO, has been democratically elected by the Palestinian population of the territories under Israeli military occupation. Now it must govern and confront the complexity of day to day management.

Hamas, a politico-religious movement, has always treated the signatories of the Oslo accords as traitors and in recent years has pursued a policy of providing social services and economic assistance to the population, at the same time conducting an armed resistance that has had suicide attacks on Israeli civilians as its most tragic _expression.

There are many reasons, both internal and external to Palestine, for the extraordinary success of Hamas.

The international community has reacted with shock and has threatened to cut funding to the new Palestinian government. Hamas is in the list of terrorist organisations compiled by the US and accepted by the European Union. But this threat, issued both before and after the results of the elections, can only reinforce Hamas, because the Palestinians have understood in recent years and have said so many times above all the European Union that a political solution is

needed, that they cannot live at the mercy of the Israeli army, and that they ask for a little justice, to be allowed to live in freedom and with dignity in their own lands.

The youths of Gaza who were waving green, yellow and red flags said to us - the electoral observers - with a smile: we want to be free. We want independence.

The international community bears the greatest responsibility for not have wanted/known how to resolve the conflict and in this way for providing space to the religious forces. More and more often we have to ask ourselves if that isn't just what was planned. It's enough to see the results of the so-called western policies from the ex Yugoslavia, to the first gulf war and Bush's statements about the clash of civilisations. Nationalism and orthodox religious identity have been affirmed in opposition to the secular vision of politics and the state.

In the specific situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, no one has applied sufficient pressure to force Israel to comply with the accords signed with the PLO long ago in 1993, or with the UN and Security Council resolutions.

The murder of Rabin, by a fundamentalist Jew, and the victory of Netanyahu that followed, was a signal for the defeat of the peace process and the Oslo accords, but no one wanted to take any notice.

Since the first violations of the accords by the Israeli government, many Palestinian leaders, among them Arafat, but even more Faisal Hussein, the a leader who was loved and respected by all Palestinians, appealed to European leaders at every meeting: Don't leave us alone to negotiate with the Israeli government. They are strong and we are weak. They are occupying our land militarily. We have put away our dreams of living in the historic Palestine, where before the Balfour declaration Jews, Christians and Muslims lived together. On November 15th 1988 we declared our wish for a state in coexistence with the state of Israel, not within the borders drawn by the UN when it Palestine partitioned in 47, but within the borders of the lands that were occupied in 1967, - 22% of historic Palestine.

Do something so that the challenge that we accepted produces some results. Put pressure on Israel to proceed with withdrawal from the territories. If things continue as they are, if Israel continues to occupy and confiscate our lands, if the presence of the settlers increases, if the checkpoints and the separation of Palestinians into enclaves increases, we will not see peace, but instead the defeat of the Palestinian Authority and the forces that come to power will be religious fundamentalists, not secular parties like the ones that we represent.

Faisal Hussein, whose sudden death was a terrible loss for the Palestinian people, was much more explicit than Arafat. I remember that in a conversation with other MEP at the beginning of 2001s, he said that Europe must stop Sharon and his plans for the destruction of the Palestinian Authority because if he succeeded, Hamas would take power and he did not want to see his daughter one day forced to wear the veil or to lose his own individual rights.

Today, the great threat is a reality. Hamas has won the elections that were carried out by the Palestinians with procedures that were correct and without violence - like the other national elections in fact: those in 96 that approved the birth of the Palestinian Legislative Council in accordance with the Oslo accords but not a Palestinian state, and those that selected Mahmoud Abbas as president.

In those elections and in the current elections, international observers were able to appreciate not only the strong presence of women, but also the competence and organisation of the polling stations. The election campaigns were carried out with behaviour that surely we Italians must envy. No tricks. Intimidation and boycotting however did come from the Israeli side. Candidates were arrested or prevented from moving around during the campaign, not only in East Jerusalem but between different parts of the occupied territories, targeted executions, like the one in Gaza on January 23 two days before the vote that killed a militant of the Popular Front - which is now the third largest political grouping after Hamas and Fatah.

The Palestinians never cease to amaze. In these elections even the open violation of an electoral rule that prohibits canvassing or the display of banners or party symbols outside the polling stations on election day, was experienced as an expression of democracy and the united will of the Palestinian people to make the elections a real democratic process. "Look" they said to me " I have the Hamas cap and the green flag, and here next to me there's Fatah with the yellow flag and the Palestinian flag, next to Fatah the red flag of the Popular Front and then all the others that are giving out leaflets. We are here together without tension, we are celebrating our elections."

Now Hamas has won and must govern. It's leaders don't want to do it alone. They have asked the hated Fatah and others to join them.

Mahomoud Zahhar was very direct when we met him in Gaza the evening before the vote "In our list for Gaza we are supporting three independents, one of them a Christian, we are for pluralism. We won't recognise Israel until they recognise us but we can continue the ceasefire. We've been respecting it since we made an agreement with Mahoumud Abbas in 2004. We've done it despite the targeted executions, but the Israeli government must stop attacks on our population, stop bombing and killing us. The people will vote for us because we have been with them in these years. We have set up schools and hospitals, we have helped the population while the leaders of Al Fatah were making themselves rich and corruption was becoming a system.

Corruption has become the magic word behind which the real responsibilities are hidden. Undoubtedly it exists, but it's not true that all are corrupt and have enriched themselves. It's also true that the first criticisms came from within Al Fatah. To say that nothing has been done in these years and that all the money has been pocketed by the leaders is clearly false. According to investigations requested the European Parliament and conducted by OLAF, the aid from the EU has been used for the projects for which it was designated.

Since the provocations of Ariel Sharon on the Dome of the Rock and the military attacks by Israel, 330 millions Euro invested in Palestinian infrastructure has been wiped out by Israeli attacks.

The enormous spending for the security forces was requested by the international community and as a means of finding work for thousands of young people who had participated in the national struggle.

The politics of Sharon, but also those of Barak and Peres, have been aimed at destroying the PA, first with Arafat and then with Mahoumud Abbas, both when he formed the government from which he resigned and then as president. "There are no partners for peace, was the continual refrain as they built the wall that annexes Palestinian territory, unilaterally defining the Israeli borders to take account of the demographic realities, as the new leader of Kadima Ehud Olmert said at a recent conference of Hertzilya.

So, Al Fatah has no responsibility for this? Undoubtedly they have, firstly because they thought themselves irreplaceable and didn't notice the alienation that their manner of leadership created among the population and even among their own party members, many of whom voted for Hamas. They never really seriously confronted the problems that emerged between a leadership, which while remaining Palestinian was made up of those who returned to Palestine after paying the price of choosing the struggle - exile. They assumed power with a certain distrust from those who had lived in the territories under the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian population was never called up to participate in a continuous way in the difficult choices that had to be made. Even Arafat turned to the population to reassert the key points of principle, but without giving responsibility and involving the population in the daily work of building a state, that hadn't yet been achieved. Abuse of power, nepotism, and corruption did

their part together with the failure of the peace process, which Israel blocked definitively with the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza.

Another illusion soon shattered by Israeli control, notwithstanding the EU presence at Rafah and the position of special envoy Wolfhenson about the movement of goods and people and the increase in the number of settlers in the West Bank. The day after the elections in Gaza, at the goods checkpoint tons of tomatoes were destroyed.

Today Fatah must confront the defeat and step down from power. Up to now the reaction has been that of a normal democratic country. Fatah has declared itself ready for the peaceful transition of power and for the recognition of the will of the people expressed through the ballot box. President Abbas does not intend to resign - a move not requested by Hamas - and in his discourse he reaffirmed the choices of peace and negotiations and his wish to keep the powers conferred on him by the law, among these the direction of security forces. It is the security forces that have made the strongest protests. Dahlan, now a parliamentary representative for Khan Yunis, has said in a menacing way that the security forces must not be touched. When some of the security forces entered the legislative council in Ramallah, shouting out against the Fatah central committee and demanding their resignation, they also were demonstrating against Hamas who the previous day had raised their green flag in front of the seat of the council. One of the young Al Fatah members declared that he had come to put the Palestinian flag back in its place - instead of the Hamas or Al Fatah flag. But, in fact, the security forces have played their part, with their internal conflicts, shootings and killings, in the population's rejection of Fatah and the vote for Hamas.

Now all fear that Hamas will sack thousands of public employees and replace them with their supporters. This is an important test for Hamas.

I don't believe that the vote for Hamas is a choice of religious fundamentalism and of the islamisation of Palestinian society. It is a vote linked more to the conditions of life, the daily tragedies of the military occupation, the humiliations at checkpoints, the lack of freedom and work, than to religion. It is a protest vote and a criticism of the occupation of power by the great party of the PLO, al Fatah, and it is a challenge to the international community.

It is a vote for change from a population that since the Oslo accords instead of seeing the birth of a Palestinian state has seen the growth of settlements, that has seen the wall grow up and annex land to the Israeli state and that continues to see thousands and thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails.

But the danger of a turn to religion exists and it is for this reason that the women and the Palestinian civil society - which we have known in all these years - must come out openly for civil rights. At Qalqilya, where Fatah won, the new Hamas mayor prevented the holding of a music festival that had been held for years. The democratic and secular forces have come out badly from this election and are paying for their separation from the population and for the tradition of a left that never manages to find unity in a common project. Maybe for them as well, the victory of Hamas can lead to a political and cultural reawakening.

A great new challenge is before us: the EU and the international community must recognise the legitimate Palestinian government and put pressure on Hamas to induce it to definitively enter the democratic game, continue the military truce recognising the UN resolutions to go to the negotiating table that isn't there now, not because of the Palestinians but because of the Israelis. They must not await the results of the Israeli elections to put pressure on Israel that is openly violating international law. Action must be taken immediately. After all, Likud was accused by Labor of being the party of the terrorist bands of Irgun and the Stern Gang when they won the 1977 elections.

PRESS RELEASES

A CALL FOR TRANSPARENT INQUIRY FROM PNA ON THE DEATH OF MAJD ABDUL-AZIZ AL BARGHOUTI

Brussels, 24 February 2008

In a letter addressed to President Mahmoud Abbas and to Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, Luisa Morgantini Vice President of the European Parliament calls on the Palestinian National Authority for a serious investigation on the death of Majd Abdul-Aziz Al Barghouti, on 22nd February, inside a PNA Detention Center and in no clear circumstances, because he died for the fault of the heart muscle but according to a report (source Mezan) there were signs of torture to the victim's wrists and to his thigh.

"I knew with dismay the death of Majd Abdul-Aziz Al Barghouti - wrote Luisa Morgantini on her letter- the Palestinian Authorities has to support and start a transparent inquiry into the incident and in particular making clear the way he was treated inside the detention centre and his health conditions".

"Since Al Barghouti was arrested, on 14 February 2008 by the Palestinian General Intelligence in the West Bank, for political reasons and -it seems- without observance of the legal process, it's as well necessary to go beyond by examining the way he was caught under arrest, confirming or not that he was not presented before a prosecutor or a judge after twenty-four hours of detention as stipulated in Palestinian Penal Law" continued the letter.

"Refusing all logic based on doubled standards, I am convinced that it's necessary to condemn violence and human rights' violations, always.

In the European Parliament, on 27th February 2008 from 3pm to 5 pm in the framework of the EP Subcommittee on human rights, we will host a public hearing on the Conditions of Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli jails, denouncing the situation of more than 11000 Palestinian Political Prisoners actually in the Israeli jails, often detained without a fair trial and tortured, including adolescents and women. At the hearing will participate, among the others, Ashraf al-Ajami the Palestinian Minister for political prisoners, Fadwa Barghouti, lawyer and wife of Marwan Barghouti, but also representatives from Betselem, Israeli NGO, and from the Free Marwan Barghouti Campaign.

If we call on Israel for the release of all political prisoners and for the end of systematic violations of international and humanitarian law we have to ask the same respect of law and human rights to the Palestinians: justice needs transparency and coherence" affirmed Luisa Morgantini.

"I really hope that the results of the investigation will arrive and be published as soon as possible, clarifying the responsibilities of this episode. It's necessary that the detention centres of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service will be under continuous monitoring of the PLC to ensure that members of these services follow abide with the procedures and standards, in respect of the law.

I hope also that the Palestinian Authority will ensure that those who violate the law are brought to justice, as a signal of coherence and steadiness against the torture and for the respect of human rights, everywhere" concluded Luisa Morgantini.

EP RE-CALLS FOR THE END OF THE BLOCKADE IN GAZA : THE POLICY OF ISOLATION AND COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT HAS FAILED

Strasbourg 21st February 2008

Today the European Parliament approved a resolution that calls once again, after a previous resolution already voted on 11th October 2007, for the lift of the Israeli blockade on Gaza Strip.

"Now, European Union has no more excuses - declared **Luisa Morgantini**- We must immediately take effective actions to implement these resolutions and stop the illegal and collective punishment of civilians in the Strip, where 98 Palestinian patients, including 17 children, already died for the lack of medicines and treatments due to the siege: the MEPS

delegation visited the Shifa Hospital in Gaza and saw at least 30 premature babies still alive thanks to the incubators but that will die if generators would stop for the lack of fuel due to the cut off of refuelling supplies and to the closure decided by the Israeli Government. That's unlawful and inhuman".

"The resolution voted today, calling on Israel for an end to the blockade, for a controlled re-opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza, for guaranteeing the movement of people and goods at Rafah, Karni and other crossings, clearly affirms that "the policy of isolation of Gaza Strip has failed both at the political and at the humanitarian level"- she added. "Reminding that "civilian population should be exempt from any military action and any collective punishment" through this resolution, the EP strongly urges Israel to fulfil its international obligations, as an occupying power, guaranteeing "a continuous and sufficient flow of humanitarian aid, humanitarian assistance and essential goods and services, including fuel and power supplies" condemning at the same time the Israel's decision to introduce progressive five per cent per week cuts in power supplies to the Strip not enough for a minimum humanitarian needs and welcoming the petition from 10 Israeli human rights organisations against fuel and electricity cuts in the Gaza Strip".

"Finally- concluded Luisa Morgantini- today resolution reminds to Europe that it must be able to be more effective not only in condemning all violence, all military actions killing and endangering civilians and extrajudicial targeted killings actuated by Israel, as well as all Qassam rockets fired on civilians of the Israeli town of Sderot, perpetrated by some extremist Palestinian groups, but also through its deeds and commitments. The time of empty words and of betrayed promises is ended: all the Palestinians and the Israelis who want the peace deserve our support and efforts to work concretely for guaranteeing the respect of the international humanitarian law, for the resumption of all inclusive peace negotiations, including also the Arab League, based on the freezing of all illegal Israeli settlements in West Bank and in East Jerusalem, the end of the military occupation and for the establishment of a free, sovereign, united Palestinian State, composed by the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on '67 borders in coexistence , security and peace with the Israeli State".

Yesterday 20th February **Luisa Morgantini**, Vice President of the European Parliament (GUE/NGL), and General **Philippe Morillon** (ALDE) organized a press conference titled "Coming Back from Gaza and Sderot" with the participation of Members from different political groups of the European Parliament who took part to the fact finding mission to Israel and Palestine, 2-7 February 2008, in order to expose the results of their mission and report the situation found on the ground, in particular focusing on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza Strip. MEP **Jill Evans** (GREEN), who participated to the mission in Gaza and Sderot affirmed that "The situation in Palestine is reaching breaking point. The siege is an inhuman and illegal collective punishment of the people in Gaza and is causing huge suffering. It has to be stopped. There has to be international action to lift the siege, end the occupation and resume peace negotiations". MEP **Richard Howitt**, Vice-President of the European Parliament's Human Rights Sub-Committee and also in the delegation who went to Israel and Palestine added: "This is a state of siege imposing medieval conditions on the people of Gaza, and is today identified by the European Parliament as a clear breach of human rights. European countries should take the lead to secure support from all sides in their UN Human Rights Council to seek enforcement of international humanitarian law".

"In Gaza, there is a humanitarian crisis building and an economic breakdown happening which can only benefit the violent, the lawless and the zealots on all sides: we have to support those who want to live "normal", peaceful lives before that becomes impossible" - declared MEP **Jean Lambert** (GREEN) who also visited with the delegation Gaza and Sderot- "Both sides are hostages of their own extremists. That's why the International Community should enforce a sustainable peace both on Israel and Palestine: it's the basic interest of the peace-loving Israelis and Palestinians as well"- added MEP **Gyula Hegyi** (PSE) another participant to the mission.

THE SIEGE HAS BEEN BROKEN: MEPs IN GAZA STRIP IN SOLIDARITY WITH CIVIL POPULATION

Jerusalem, 7th February 2008

A delegation composed of 10 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from different political groups (see the list of participants below) and led by **Luisa Morgantini, Vice-**

President of the European Parliament, broke the Israeli siege and travelled to the Gaza Strip on 5th February 2008.

During a press conference, MEPs reaffirmed the need and the urgency to lift the blockade that represents "an illegal collective punishment on the civil population".

Visiting the Al-Shifa Hospital, the delegation expressed its deep concern and worry about the extreme difficulties under which the main hospital in the Gaza Strip is obliged to operate, where patients with cancer, but not only with cancer, do not avail of the necessary medical drugs or treatments and at least 30 premature babies, still alive thanks to incubators, risk dying if generators stop because of the lack of fuel due to cuts in refuelling supplies and to the closure decided by the Israeli Government.

In its mission to Gaza, the delegation also met many Palestinian businessmen who reaffirmed the impossibility for them to carry out their commercial activities because of the Israeli blockade, with disastrous consequences for the economy and the daily life of civilians: 80% of workers are currently unemployed without any compensation.

Refusing the idea of resorting to smuggling, currently the only channel open to access and trade goods in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian businessmen have on the contrary reiterated to MEPs their will and their right to free and honest trade. Palestinian businessmen also repeated that the siege does not affect Hamas' political and religious movement but that, on the contrary, the heaviest price is being paid by the civil population, as many Palestinian intellectuals and activists have been claiming for a long time and as they also claimed in a meeting with the MEPs in the offices of the "End the Siege" campaign (www.end-gaza-siege.ps; end.gaza.siege@gmail.com), with the participation, among others, of the doctor and human rights activist, Eyad Sarraj, one of the promoters of the demonstration for the International Day for the End of Gaza siege, on 26th January, held simultaneously in the Gaza Strip, at the Eretz Crossing, by Israeli peace activists, and all around the world.

The different organizations supporting the Campaign, but also many women from Gaza, meeting the delegation, reaffirmed the need for independence, freedom and peace for Palestinians, appealed for the lifting of the blockade and also for the right to security for all civilians, both Israelis and Palestinians. They restated at the same time that "Qassam rockets are fired not by the people of Gaza, but only by some groups of extremist Palestinians, and this must be condemned as well as all the bloodshed of civilians due to Israeli raids perpetuated by the army of occupation".

In the press conference, broadcast by major Arab television channels, the MEPs, expressing their solidarity, declared they were "deeply impressed by the dignity and the resistance of the Palestinian people and wished that Palestinian political parties could find unity so that the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would not be separated."

MEPs also urged an intervention to put a stop to the ecological disaster in Beitlaha area; that the Rafah border and all Gaza crossings be opened thereby allowing free movement of people and goods; that the violent spiral of action-reaction be immediately stopped. They also called for concrete deeds for the resumption of peace negotiations based on the freezing of all illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, the end to the military occupation and for the establishment of a free and sovereign Palestinian State based on the '67 borders in coexistence with the Israeli State.

The delegation also urged effective action by the International Community to secure the freedom of all political prisoners and Palestinian Parliamentarians who have been arrested, to improve living conditions in all the Occupied Palestinian Territory and, in particular, in the Gaza Strip, to encourage Israel to show a concrete will for peace, that has not existed up until now and that is denied every day through the raids, check points, roadblocks, the wall and closures not only in Gaza but in the entire West Bank, such as in Hebron - which the MEPs visited on 4th February - a ghost town, occupied by hundreds of Israeli soldiers defending 400 fanatic settlers.

During the fact-finding mission, from 2nd – 7th February, the Members of the European Parliament with 8 officials, assistants and some journalists also visited the town of Sderot, in Israel, under daily attack by Qassam rockets, as a sign of solidarity with the civil population, where they met, among others, Zvi Shuldiner, director of a Department of Safir College and peace activist.

The delegation also met the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, the Minister in charge of Prisoners' Affairs, Ashraf al- Ajami, Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council of different

political parties - Fatah, Al Mubadarah, Third Way, Peoples' Party, Popular Front, Independents and Change and Reform List (Hamas), some Members of the Knesset- Kadima Party and Labour Party, General Pietro Pistoiese, Head of the EUBAM mission in Rafah, EU and UNRWA Representatives, but also peace and human rights organizations from Israeli and Palestinian civil societies.

RAFAH: THE BREACH IN THE WALL IS AN ACT OF FREEDOM AND A STRONG WARNING TO THE EU, THE QUARTET AND EGYPT

Brussels, 23rd January 2008,

"The thousands of Palestinians crossing the Rafah border point these last hours, the breach in the wall and the breaking of the siege decided by Israel against the civil population, are all true acts of resistance and an affirmation of the freedom of that people, not the Qassam rockets being fired at Israeli civilians that contravene international law, or the bloodshed inflicted on the Palestinian civil population perpetuated by Israeli raids.

When walls fall down there's always a sense of freedom. The images we are getting from southern Gaza, with men and women pouring into Egypt in order to buy essential supplies such as food and medicines that are nowhere to be found because of four days of total closure and black out in the Gaza Strip, are the natural result of the inhuman siege imposed by Israel: as rightly declared by President Mahmoud Abbas, the responsibility lies with Israeli policy, which has forced people who are completely worn out to cross the borders of the cage in which they are imprisoned and collectively punished with complete disregard for humanity and international law.

This is the predictable outcome of a policy of isolation, not only towards Hamas, but also the one and a half million Gaza inhabitants, a policy that the European Union has also supported by endorsing de facto the embargo decided by Israel. Hamas risks to become stronger as a result of this situation, not weaker as can be seen by all the demonstrations that took place in the Islamic world during these cold and dark days in Gaza.

People pouring into Egypt and also people returning to Gaza after forced exile bringing any kinds of goods, show all of us the tragedy of a besieged but never resigned population, a population that has seen women in the front line of the demonstration struggling and being harshly repressed yesterday: these are the non-violent actions that should be supported and in which all Palestinians should gain renewed strength and unity.

I hope they will not be used by anyone to apply a definitive separation of Gaza and the West Bank in what should be the Palestinian State within the occupied territories of '67.

But for sure they are also a warning for the International Community as a whole, first and foremost the Quartet, the European Union and Egypt, which are responsible for the transit of goods and people through Rafah Crossing. Unfortunately, they have never been able to accomplish this task.

I sincerely hope that Rafah border crossing with Egypt will be immediately opened and the legal freedom of movement for people and goods be established, not the arbitrary closures by Israel. Arms trafficking can be stopped without bombing and without enclosing the population in an open-air prison.

I hope that Olmert's government receives this message: only the end of the Gaza siege, the end of the raids and of the military occupation can guarantee security for both people and the coherence needed for the respect of all commitments to peace."

23 PALESTINIANS KILLED, 55 INJURED INSIDE GAZA BY IDF: WHERE IS THE EU STRONG CONDEMNATION OF THESE MURDERS?

Strasbourg , 17th January 2008

"23 Palestinians killed and other 55 injured, children, women and men, by Israeli raids in only two days: where is the EU strong condemnation of these murders?" -asked Luisa Morgantini,

Vice President of the European Parliament expressing a deep concern regarding the escalation of violence of these days in Palestine and Israel.

"It is really astonishing- added Luisa Morgantini- that EU High Representative Javier Solana didn't say clearly that this Israeli policy is killing all hopes for peace and undermines the tenacious efforts by President Mahmoud Abbas and PM Salam Fayyad in seeking support and unity in their exhausted, occupied and besieged people.

Solana together with the entire International Community should strongly call on the Israeli Government to stop this violence and the collective punishment towards the civil population in Gaza Strip and in West Bank, as well as firmly reaffirm that all the settlements expansion's policy on the Palestinian land of West Bank and East Jerusalem must be immediately freezed: these are the urgent and urged steps for a just peace, as Annapolis' purposes reaffirmed.

Of course at the same time, the rockets from Gaza Strip on the Israeli town of Sderot must be stopped: they are aiming to kill civilian population and are a sign of impotence and not of resistance actuated by extremist groups of Palestinians. Besides, I feel a deep pain for the young Ecuadorian volunteer killed by Palestinian extremist fire while he was working in a kibbutz in Ein Hashlosha. But the tragedy goes on everyday in the occupied Palestine: 17 Gazans killed by Israeli forces in less than four hours, many other are dead in the following hours, including civilians and children, and not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank.

With all this blood, with all this deaths nobody can be absolved for his silence: EU, as the Quartet policy, also is responsible and must break this silence, taking the consequent commitment: to end the siege in Gaza, to provide international protection for the civilian population, both Palestinians and Israelis, to work for the unity of the Palestinian people and for the end of occupation. This is the way to dismantle every military action taken by Palestinian extremists. But above all, this is the time to make pressures on the Israeli Government to stand by their words of seeking peace and security: its policy on the ground is just destroying any possibility of peace and security for both people".

NEW SETTLEMENTS, GAZA SIEGE, TARGETED KILLINGS ARE ACTS OF WAR, NOT OF PEACE:

Annapolis little hopes are cancelled by Israeli policy of collective punishment and senseless fire of rockets by Palestinian extremist groups.

Rome , 7th December

"All this came immediately after Annapolis, which by the way was not making a final negotiation but only a joint statement for negotiations. The Israeli Government did not loose time and announced the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied East Jerusalem and every day Palestinians are being killed by the Israeli army or undercover units: in the last week 27 Palestinian people were killed by the Israeli raids in Gaza Strip and many others in the West Bank.

And what about closures, check points, confiscation of lands, no freedom to move for wounded and ill people both in West Bank and in Gaza Strip, and again many Palestinians arrested who join the more than 11 thousand political prisoners? Are these words and acts for peace?

No. The Israeli plan to build more than 300 new homes in Har Homa, a settlement built after the Oslo agreement on the confiscated land of villages next to Bethlehem, like Beit Sahour, and considered by the annexation policy of Israel part of the "Great Jerusalem", is dramatically bound to destroy newly revived peace talks held in Annapolis and also the next meeting which should be hold on 12th December.

Before what it is now the ugly cement block of the settlement, there was a fantastic beautiful green hill, Palestinians called it Jabal Abu Ghneim. Now, the new constructions, that are not even a demographic necessity due to growing of population of the settlement since many houses already built still remain unsold and empty, represent a true act of war.

The only way to create a sustainable peace and to end the 40 years of Israeli military occupation on the West Bank and Gaza is to show concrete deeds and acts producing real changes in daily life of the Palestinians.

The Israeli Government declares to want peace, and we want to believe it, but from what we can see it does the contrary, continuing to follow the way of violence and illegality and

forgetting that in the Annapolis Conference both actors agreed to base their negotiations on the road map where the freeze of all settlements' growing and the end of violence are stated. The current Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, who didn't share Rabin's choices in Oslo, continues now to do the opposite of what Annapolis Conference would like to publicize, preparing a massive military aggression plans against the Gaza Strip and declaring that settlements in West Bank won't be stopped.

On its side, the Palestinian Authority cannot do much more of what they are doing. The extremist groups who throw rockets from Gaza must be stopped but they are not under the control of the PA.

If President Mahmoud Abbas, who has already chosen the non violent way, won't show soon a real change in daily life of Palestinians and that their lives won't be anymore subjected to the Israeli army, he will be of course delegitimated and rejected by his people.

How is it possible to get the Palestinians (but also us) to believe that the Israeli Government wants peace if its policies continue to maintain the blockade on Gaza Strip and to spread out terror through their raids, if a policy of collective punishment is applied and there is no freedom of movement for people and goods? Even all ill people are prevented to cross the borders: more than 900 are waiting for the permit to leave Gaza Strip (Palestinian Medical Relief) in order to join Egypt or in West Bank for specialized treatments that don't exist in Gaza where hospitals are lacking of medicines and of all basic drugs, and in the last days they have been forced even to shut down their emergency power generators, resulting in a looming "humanitarian disaster" due to Israel's severe reductions in fuel supplies and total siege.

Even if the joint statement in Annapolis has *de facto* excluded the European Union, the UN, the Quartet and the Arab governments to be real players in the negotiations, establishing that the US have the responsibility to look out at the implementation of the negotiations, the entire International Community must have a political role in the agreements, condemning strongly all obstacles to the negotiations and reinforcing each signal of peace, starting by the end of the Gaza siege, as also asked by the European Parliament on 11th October with a resolution calling on Israeli Government for the lifting of the blockade of the Gaza Strip and to fulfil its international obligations under the Geneva Conventions".

The European Parliament calls for the lift of the blockade in Gaza and free movement for people and goods on all the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Brussels 11th October 2007

In a resolution voted today in the Parliament, MEPs, called on Israeli Government for the lifting of the blockade of the Gaza Strip and to fulfill its international obligations under the Geneva Conventions to guarantee the flow of humanitarian aid, humanitarian assistance and essential services, such as electricity and fuel. Luisa Morgantini, Vice President of the European Parliament, who was in the Parliamentary delegation in Gaza Strip, on her speech stressed the need to lift the embargo on people and goods and the end of the military occupation.

"I was recently in Gaza- Luisa Morgantini declared- and I saw how the Strip is suffocating in a serious humanitarian crisis due to the raids and the closure imposed by the Israeli Army: massive devastation of public facilities and private homes, the disruption of hospitals, clinics and schools, the denial of access to proper drinking water, food and electricity, and the destruction of agricultural land wanted by Israel create a true catastrophe for civilians. Furthermore, the blockade on the movement paralyzes the economy and contributes to an extremely high rate of unemployment, while the health system is under severe pressure, a significant proportion of the population is suffering from a lack of urgently needed treatment and medicines and many NGOs and humanitarian organisations are obstructed by the lack of freedom of movement and of resources.

European Union has to demand with force to the Israeli Government that human rights and International law must be fully respected in the whole area, ending the continued emergency of Gaza Strip but also the military occupation in West Bank, where the robbery of Palestinian lands continues without any condemnation and, in spite of the meeting between Olmert and Abbas, the Israelis change the situation on the ground which casts serious doubts if they want peace or just gaining time to grab more land: it is an example the recent decision by the IDF to expropriate 272 acres of land from four Arab villages in order to build, as declared by Israeli

Authorities, a new Palestinian road that would connect East Jerusalem with Jericho. But this decision would free up the existing E1 area between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adunim, allowing the construction of a new Jewish settlement consisting of 3,500 apartments and an industrial park, blocked by an international protest since 2004, that showed the risk of the cutting of the West Bank in two, separating East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. This unilateral and illegal policy by Israeli Authorities must immediately end.

EU must to face up to its full responsibility on the respect of the legality, first through implementation of the existent EU-Israel Agreements on Movement and Access, but also imposing Israel to respect the International law concerning human rights, to end the military occupation in West Bank and the closure of the Gaza Strip and of the WB: even if there is an humanitarian tragedy, its solution is political.

This is the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace and to give more credibility to the International Peace Conference in November, reinforcing the negotiations based on the UN resolutions and on the right of Palestinians and Israelis to live in two States, in peace and security".

**BLAIR MUST REDEEM HIMSELF AND HEED THE 10 EU FOREIGN MINISTERS.
FREE MARWAN BARGHOUTI FOR THE SAKE OF THE POLITICAL AND TERRITORIAL
UNITY OF PALESTINE AND PEACE**

*Speech By Luisa Morgantini,
Plenary Session European Parliament – 12th July 2007*

"I strongly hope that Tony Blair would redeem himself after the sins committed in the Iraqi war and that, in quality of Special Envoy of the Quartet, he would engage himself to give a real contribute for peace and justice in Palestine, Israel and in the whole region" declared Luisa Morgantini, Vice President of the European Parliament, during her speech in the Strasbourg Plenary during the discussion on Middle East.

"I would like to thank the 10 EU Foreign Ministers –continued Luisa Morgantini- who, through their letter, stated four fundamental points on which Blair and International Community must urgently work *.

In order to help Mahmoud Abbas, and both the Palestinian and the Israeli people, the only action to be taken is reaching a definitive agreement able to put an end to 40 years of brutal military Israeli occupation.

Meanwhile emergency remains. Europe has its responsibilities in Rafah with the EU-BAM mission: Rafah crossing must be re-opened. Six thousand people are waiting, in the desert and without humanitarian assistance, to come back to their homes".

"Gilad Shalit must be released through an exchange of prisoners. Nevertheless the issue of the Palestinian political prisoners regards about eleven thousand people, among them 45 parliamentarians. The release of 250 Fatah's members, who, however, had only few months left to spend in jail, having already served most of their unjust punishment, does not contribute to help Mahmoud Abbas but, on the contrary, it represents one mean more to divide the Palestinians. Releasing Marwan Barghouti, who is committed to the territorial and political unity of Palestinian people and to the peace between Palestine and Israel, would be a concrete signal for everyone who believes in the coexistence of two People and two States" concluded Luisa Morgantini.

**The letter was published in the French daily Le Monde on Monday 9th and was signed by the foreign ministers of France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus, Slovenia and Malta.*

The 4 points mentioned in the letter by the 10 EU Foreign Ministers to Tony Blair are:

a) Offer a hope, a genuine political solution to the region's peoples. This has to involve negotiations without prerequisites on the final status, even if it means acting in successive phases. Embracing the issues of Jerusalem, the refugees and the borders, these negotiations will make it possible to set a shared realistic objective.

b) Take account of Israel's need for security. The idea of a robust international force, of the NATO or UN chapter VII type, is worth considering. It would be able fully legitimately to maintain order in the territories and enforce compliance with a necessary ceasefire [...].

c) Obtain from Israel concrete and immediate measures to help Mahmoud Abbas. These must include the transfer of all the taxes owed, release of the thousands of prisoners without blood

on their hands, the release too of the main Palestinian leaders to ensure the succession within Fatah, the freezing of the settlement policy and removal of wildcat outposts [...].

d) Don't push Hamas to up the stakes. This means reopening the border between Gaza and Egypt, facilitating movement between Gaza and Israel, and encouraging Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as President Mubarak has proposed, to help get the resumption of the dialogue between Hamas and Fatah.

RELIEF AND HAPPINESS FOR THE RELEASE OF JOHNSTON: EU has to put pressure for Shalit release and the exchange of Palestinian Political Prisoners

By Luisa Morgantini, 4th July 2007

"It's really a big relief and happiness the release of BBC journalist Alan Johnston.

I really hope that this event won't be seen as a political success only of one of the parties concerned; on the contrary it should be an incentive for the immediate resumption of the dialogue between Hamas and Fatah, for the wellbeing and the unity of Palestinian Territory and People", declared Luisa Morgantini, Vice President of the European Parliament, commenting last night's release of BBC reporter Alan Johnston, kidnapped in Gaza Strip by an extremist Palestinian militant group 114 days ago.

"I wish that Hamas Representatives' declarations stating that kidnapping of journalists in Gaza Strip belongs to the past and affirming the willingness to "ensure full freedom of expression for all" are concrete. I also hope that the order that apparently reigns in Gaza does not result in restriction of freedom and fundamental rights such as the right of free expression and association, women rights and the right to participate in the political life of the country, regardless of ideological or religious beliefs. The unity of territory and people means also one authority, in these sense I really hope that the new situation in Gaza would be changed not through repression but through national dialogue.

"After Alan Johnston's liberation, we hope that the soldier Gilad Shalit will be released as well on the basis of an exchange with Palestinian political prisoners. Currently they are about 11.000 – among them, ministers and 45 elected deputies, but also women, sick people and children - they have been locked in Israeli jails often in an arbitrary way, without a just trial, they have been unlawfully kidnapped and many of them are tortured. If we want to achieve this objective, it is necessary to put pressure on the Israeli Government and not only on Hamas. Unfortunately the move of Israeli government to say it will release only 250 Fatah political prisoner is part of the old policy of "divide et impera",

"The European Union could play a fundamental role, not dividing but, on the contrary, providing incentives for the intra-Palestinian dialogue, restoring direct aid also in the Gaza Strip, where, as usual, civil society is paying the prize of the political and economic crisis.

Re-opening Rafah crossing is a political and moral imperative in order to tackle the dramatic situation of thousand of Palestinians who are in tragic conditions in Al Arish, among them many badly ill people. The re-opening of Gaza Strip to import-export activities and to free circulation of goods and people is equally important. The lack of free circulation strikes also the West Bank, where more than 500 check points and the wall prevent Palestinians working, having commercial exchanges and even reaching hospitals.

"The Quartet must relaunch negotiations. President Mahmoud Abbas and PLO are the interlocutors recognized by everyone, including by Hamas, to negotiate. I hope that the emergency Government could play its role and pave the way for new elections in which all Palestinian political forces could participate. I also wish that the International Community would never again repeat the same mistake, not recognizing a freely elected Government.

Peace is crucial for both, Palestinians and Israelis.

Of course rockets bombardment hitting civil population in Sderot has to be stopped, but it is necessary as well that the Israeli Government immediately puts an end to the violations of the international legality, by killing Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and in Gaza. It must concretely show its commitment for peace by ending the occupation beginning by accepting the Arab Initiative and respecting the UN resolutions".

SHAMEFUL HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY AT RAFAH – THOUSANDS OF PALESTINIANS STUCK WITHOUT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

By Luisa Morgantini, 28th June 2007

"While Israel carries on with its criminal air raids on the Gaza Strip, which have killed 14 people and injured about 50 people in the last two days, and Hamas persists with the rocket bombardments on Sderot, fortunately without victims, another shameful tragedy is taking place at Rafah", declared Luisa Morgantini, Vice President of the European Parliament.

"4000 Palestinians: elderly and ill people, children, women and men are currently stuck at the Rafah border crossing, the southern border of the Gaza strip with Egypt. They are waiting under the burning sun, 42 C° degrees, without money and with scarce water and food".

These 4000 people do not receive any humanitarian aid, any assistance from international organizations or from the Egyptian government.

The hygienic and logistical situation is completely improper, especially considering that in the group there are a lot of ill people, who are coming back from Egyptian Hospitals, trying to go back to their homes.

Those who can afford it spend their nights in very expensive hotels, others are completely abandoned and they have not even the means to buy medicines.

After Israel's withdrawal from the Strip in September 2005, the border was controlled by the Palestinian National Authority with the support of about 70 European observers.

Since June 2006, when the Israeli soldier, Ghilad Shalit, was kidnapped in Gaza, Israel has authorised the opening of the border for only 74 days out of 365.

After the recent inter-Palestinian clashes, that have resulted in victory for Hamas in Gaza, Israel has decided to make the crisis even worse, through indiscriminate raids on the Strip and through the closure of the border crossing both for people and commercial goods.

"This situation has to stop, but Egypt declares itself ready to re-open the borders - the only way out to the rest of the world for the million and a half Palestinians living in Gaza -only when the Europeans in charge of supervision return.

Thus, completely ignoring, just like Israel or the international community, that there are thousands of people who live in desperate conditions for the last two weeks".

"I call on the European Union and the whole international community not to stay static in front of the Palestinian population which has been wounded for the hundredth time. I call on them to put pressure on the Israeli government instead, to immediately re-open all the border crossing points at the Gaza Strip, in which Palestinian civilians are arbitrarily and unilaterally imprisoned and forced to survive with no food, nor water and with a health service on the verge of collapse. Finally, I believe that the endorsement of this appeal by the new elected Special Envoy of the Quartet, Tony Blair, would be a significant signal, a first step to give credibility to his role towards the Palestinian and Arab population, sceptical to the neutrality of one of the main promoters of the Iraqi disaster and strong supporter of an aggressive US foreign policy." "The solution to the Palestinian tragedy, which is not just a humanitarian matter, lies in the end of the Israeli military occupation; nevertheless we must act now on daily living conditions", Luisa Morgantini concludes.

MEPS STAND UP FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF 45 PALESTINIAN MPs IN ISRAELI JAIL

Brussels 6th June 2007

45 Members of the European Parliament, from different political groups, have decided to express their solidarity towards the 45 Palestinian colleagues imprisoned by Israel, and called for their immediate and unconditional release.

All the 45 MEPs stood up symbolically in the plenary, right before the beginning of the debate with Mr. Solana on the situation on the Middle East, representing the 45 Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council detained in the Israeli jails in a clear violation of the international legality.

"Each of us, MEPs, is deeply concerned about the imprisonment of the President and of 1/3 of the Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, democratically and legitimately elected by the Palestinian people", MEPs said in their declaration.

Through this initiative, MEPs want to strongly condemn these arrests by the Israeli Army, but also remind the anniversary of the beginning of the Israeli military occupation in the Palestinian territories, which is during 40 years exactly today.

"We are deeply worried not only for the plight of the 45 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council but also for the near 11000 Palestinian political prisoners currently imprisoned by the Israeli Army, without a true process and often brutally abducted by the Israeli soldiers.

They have to be released and, at the same time, also the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit must be freed by the Palestinian group that kidnapped him in Gaza Strip, as a change of prisoners-affirms Luisa Morgantini, one of the 45 MEPs participating to this initiative.

"40 years of military occupation are enough: now it's urgent to implement a political solution of the conflict, based on "two People and two States" and it's necessary that the Palestinian Legislative Council could continue its activity, instead of preventing its work because of the check points, the arrests, the summary killings kept on by the current Israeli policy of military occupation", concluded Luisa Morgantini.

MEPs participating to the initiative:

Adamou Adamos, Andria Alfonso, Aubert Marie-Hélène, Auken Margarete, Beer Angelika, Brepoels Frieda, Bourzai Bernadette, Bowis John, Carnero González Carlos, Cohn-Bendit Daniel, Davies Chris, De Brún Bairbre, De Keyser Véronique, Demetriou Panayiotis, De Rossa Proinsias, Evans Jill, Flautre Hélène, Gottardi Donata, Guerreiro Pedro, Hammerstein Mintz David, Isler-Béguin Marie-Anne, Kasoulides Ioannis, Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou Rodi, Locatelli Pia Elda, Lucas Caroline, Madeira Jamila, Matsakis Marios, McMillan-Scott Edward, Menendez Del Valle Emilio, Meyer Pleite Willy, Morgantini Luisa, Napolitano Pasqualina, Patrie Béatrice, Portas Miguel, Purvis John, Resetarits Karin, Romeva i Rueda Raül, Roure Martine, Saïfi Tokia, Savi Toomas, Sudre Margie, Svensson Eva-Britt, Toussas Georgios, Triantaphyllides Kyriacos, Wurtz Francis.

LETTER CONCERNING THE YEHOSHUA INTERVIEW ON L'UNITA'

By Luisa Morgantini, 29th May 2007

Abraham Bet Yehoshua, in his interview published on an Italian Newspaper, L'unità, on May 28th, describing positively the Saudi (and Arab) Initiative, that he considers "sincere and full of promise", sees Palestinians as the main "obstacle" for its implementation, "among which – Yehoshua said- predominate an absolute chaos, the main heritage left by Arafat".

I regret that the Israeli writer doesn't admit clearly the responsibilities of the Israeli Government, which has refused the historical opportunity represented by the Peace Initiative advanced by the Arab League and keeps on occupying and building settlements, putting away Palestinians in a segregation, living such as prisoners in Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, as targets of continuous arrests, targeted and extra legal killings by the Israeli Army.

The Palestinian National Unity Government has already expressed his favourable opinion regarding the Arab Initiative. Israeli Government has not done the same, but Yehoshua seems to forget this fact.

Yehoshua has been, among other things, one of the main supporters of the construction of the wall as a strategy for defence and also –considering it positive- for the separation of two different entities, the Israeli one and the Palestinian one, in view of a solution based on "Two People and two States".

Unfortunately, by one side, if that wall, declared as illegal by the international Court of Justice, succeeded to avoid some armed attacks by Palestinian extremists, by the other side it represents the Israeli instrument to annex fertile lands of Palestinians, who live effectively confined in ghettos, in a state of segregation and apartheid.

Of course it would be positive if Yehoshua, instead of blaming Palestinians, thinks about the responsibilities of his Government and at the same time if that International Community, that continues to apply two-tiered policies- starts to see seriously and in an objective way that the responsibilities of the conflict, of deaths and of the enduring occupation, are the main obstacles on the way for Peace. These are mainly Israeli Government responsibilities, which refuses to come back to negotiations and persists unpunished to keep on systematic violations of the legality.

Undoubtedly, also the Palestinian leadership has its responsibilities.

I strongly condemn every violent act by Palestinian extremist groups, firstly the shoot of rockets on Sderot. But these groups don't represent the whole Palestinian people, who is instead collectively punished in a situation of evident violation of international legality.

LET'S RECOGNISE OUR FAILURE: WE ARE COMPLICIT IN THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

By Luisa Morgantini, 22th May 2007

Israelis and Palestinians are paying the price of our lack of capacity to act politically with responsibility and justice in the Middle East.

Once again, the devastating consequences overwhelm the Palestinian civilians, the thousands of refugees in Lebanon who are facing the attacks of the Lebanese army. Once again the Palestinians are subject to collective punishment because of a group of extremists, enemies of the Palestinian people - Fatah El Islam.

The European Union, the international community must feel morally responsible for the escalation of violence, morally implicated in the killing of helpless civilians in Gaza and in the Lebanese refugee camps. The risk of externalisation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is the business of us all. It is necessary to maintain the autonomy of the Palestinian cause and of the rights of the peoples of Israel and Palestine to have two sovereign states, recognised and secure. The time for words is past: It is an indispensable duty to recognise our failure, that of the international community, of the parties, of the movements to uphold international law and put an end to a military occupation that has lasted forty years. The tragedy of these days was announced long ago. We've been repeating the slogan "Two peoples and two states" since 1980, but only one state exist, the Israeli state, an occupying power without security. On the other side is an occupied people, humiliated and without freedom.

Humanitarian aid from the European Union is no substitute for what is indispensable: a political solution and a transparent diplomatic effort, working for the unity of Palestinians and not for their division and able to impose respect for international law on the Israeli government.

Why are we helping extremists to undermine the power of the national unity government?

What more must the Palestinian government do?

The steps that are needed now from the EU and from the quartet are the recognition of the Palestinian national unity government, which in all its complexity of political representation, responds to the conditions set by the quartet with its own programme and expresses the will to return to the negotiating table, accepting the historic opportunity of the Arab League peace initiative. Secondly, it is urgent to apply pressure on the Israeli government in every possible way so that it ceases the systematic abuse of international law; the unpunished target killings, the theft of land with the construction of the Wall, and the Palestinian taxes and revenues arbitrarily withheld. The military occupation kills every hypothesis of security, every hope of peace, for both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The Palestinians must recover their unity and stop their fratricidal fighting and do everything possible to stop the rocket attacks on neighbouring Israeli cities. Palestine is falling to pieces and with it the entire Middle East: the consequences of these injustices and for this violence will come back on us after they have destroyed thousands of innocent civilians.

LUISA MORGANTINI CALLS FOR REVIVAL OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

By Luisa Morgantini, 13th May 2007

Luisa Morgantini (GUE/NGL), Vice President of the European Parliament called for the revival of the Middle East peace process during a meeting of the International Women's Commission (IWC) in Jerusalem on 13 May. The IWC is a commission of Palestinian, Israeli and international women established under the auspices of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to implement UN resolution 1325 calling for women's involvement in conflict resolution with the specific mission to work for a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. Ms. Morgantini said: "It is more important than ever to resume peace talks, taking advantage of the historical opportunity represented by the peace initiative of the Arab League. A just and lasting peace is the only way to guarantee security for Palestine and Israel and to put an end to the conflict based on a 'two peoples, two states' solution." "Each

spontaneous voice in favour of peace should be supported and strengthened, making room for a strong presence of women," Ms Morgantini said, adding that the IWC calls for active support of the political negotiating process, for an end to the Israeli military occupation and for the international community to recognize the new Palestinian National Unity government. "This constitutes an important positive step forward if we want to avoid a dramatic situation of fratricidal violence, which in the last few days has caused four deaths and 11 injured as result of clashes between Hamas and Fatah." "The Palestinian government of National Unity, which is struggling for the 'two peoples two states' solution, including the creation of a Palestinian state within the borders agreed in 1967, represents a broad coalition of different parliamentary groups of the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Legislative Council supports all the existing agreements signed by the PLO, expressing confidence in President Abbas and putting him in charge of leading negotiations as the legitimate Palestinian negotiator. The Legislative Council has demonstrated its respect for the ceasefire, an agreement violated by the Israeli army, which is engaged in targeted murders and summary executions." Ms Morgantini described ending the occupation as "an essential precondition for the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict," adding that an exchange of political prisoners "is necessary, as well." She estimates that there are currently almost 11,000 Palestinians jailed in Israel, including 40 MPs, 400 children, 100 sick people and 117 women. "The Palestinian government has expressed its openness to work in cooperation with all the parties concerned towards the release of Gilad Shalit on the basis of an exchange of prisoners; now it is the turn of the Israeli government and the international community to remove the obstacles for finally achieving a fair agreement for both parties," she said. "A just and lasting peace is the only way to guarantee the security of both peoples and for the whole region and a sustainable peace rests on a sincere commitment by all parties to protect women's rights and promote gender justice," Luisa Morgantini concluded.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STOP THE EXECUTIONS AND THE IMPUNITY OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT

By Luisa Morgantini, 3rd May 2007

The delegation calls unanimously for a full engagement with the Palestinian National Unity Government and urges the EU to give it support with every possible means of technical and political assistance. The delegation considers that the European Union should resume direct payment to the Palestinian Authority.

The European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Palestinian Legislative Council's visit came following the formation of the National Unity Government, based on the Mecca Agreement, and the re-launch of the Arab Peace Initiative. The members of the European Parliament's official delegation talked in Ramallah with President Abbas who emphasized the need to recognize the government. The delegation has also met with Prime Minister Haniyeh, other members of the cabinet and MPs as well as NGOs, private sector representatives, and the EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah. Based on these meetings, the delegation considers that the National Unity Government programme, which is binding for all ministers of the cabinet, regardless of their political affiliation, reflects the three requirements laid down by the Quartet. The delegation calls on the European Union to engage fully with the Unity Government, to urge within the Quartet in favor of its recognition, and to resume direct aid to the Palestinian Authority as a matter of urgency. The MEPs call on Israel to transfer Palestinian tax and customs revenues especially since its refusal to do so resulted in thousands of teachers and other public employees going unpaid. The increasing restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods are the main cause of the deterioration of the social and economic situation of the Palestinians. This crisis have escalated considerably since the decision last year to suspend direct payments to the Palestinian Authority despite the launching of the Temporary International Mechanism and significantly increased project-aid. Delegation Chairman, Mr Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, warned that unless the government was given support by the international community, the situation in Palestine might deteriorate rapidly, leading to violent confrontations with consequences to the entire Middle East.

Discussions focused also on the issue of the 11 000 Palestinian prisoners, notably the necessity to immediately release speaker Dweik, ministers and MPs, the efforts to obtain the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier Shalit, the need for urgent release of BBC journalist Alan Johnston, and, in the case of resumption of direct aid, the readiness of the government to reestablish and strengthen the infrastructures necessary for a sound administration of the finances of the Palestinian Authority so that transparency and efficiency are ensured.

STOP THE EXECUTIONS AND THE IMPUNITY OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNEMENT

By Luisa Morgantini, 24TH April 2007

"Stop Israeli executions, stop extrajudicial killings: Israel has no right to kill with impunity on the Palestinian Territories," declared **Luisa Morgantini**, GUE/NGL Vice President of the European Parliament, following an escalation of violence in the Occupied Territories and the Gaza Strip where, in last 24 hours, 9 people have died including a twelve-year-old child.

"With the constitution of the National Unity Government and its programme that sets the scene for the achievement of a sovereign Palestinian State within the established borders of 1967, the Palestinians have demonstrated their willingness to find a solution to the conflict," she said.

"The Israeli Government instead continues to violate international law not only with targeted executions, but also with the seizure of land and the construction of the wall. These attacks form part of the Israeli army's threats to seriously jeopardise the Hamas ceasefire and to deal a fatal blow to the peace process started by the Arab League."

Morgantini said the International Community was responsible for the continued Israeli military occupation and the deaths of Palestinians and Israelis and called on the EU to firmly demand that Israel cease its incessant violations, recognise the Palestinian National Unity Government and resume negotiations so as not to waste the historic opportunity represented by the Riyadh agreement.

"How many other abuses must be committed? How many other deaths must there be before the European Union takes a strong and pragmatic position regarding Israel on the respect of international law and human rights, in the name of a peaceful and long-lasting solution to the conflict based on the two peoples two states principle?"

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZE THE NEW PALESTINIAN GOVERNEMENT

By Luisa Morgantini, 16th March 2007

Saturday , the new Government of National Unity will be presented in front of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

"This is an extraordinary event, since it demonstrates the accountability of the Palestinian leadership, who, face to the danger of a civil war, has chosen to join and put the interest of Palestinian people before the interests of the different political groups. Surely, this result has been possible thanks also to the invaluable contribution of the Palestinian political prisoners, including members of Hamas, Fatah and other political parties *in primis* Marwan Barghouti but also to the Palestinian people who refuse to be squeezed between Hamas and Fatah", comments Luisa Morgantini, Vice-President of the European Parliament.

"The unity and the principles agreed for the programme of the new government are very important. Hamas, who since long has been respecting a cease-fire, has recognized the Oslo Agreements, which foreseen the existence of the State of Palestine based on 1967's borders and this implies an implicit recognition of the state of Israel as well.

The above-mentioned elements should be sufficient for the European Union to immediately recognize the new Palestinian Government, putting and end to the isolation of the government freely elected by the Palestinian people", explains Ms. Morgantini.

"There is no time to lose. Europe should express its independence from USA's influence and it should start to build alliances with the actors interested in restore not only dialogue but also negotiations. This should mean stating a path aimed at reaching a resolving agreement about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which realise the *two states two peoples* solution and Jerusalem as a shared capital town".

"I believe that the Italian Government should immediately express, even unilaterally, its commitment recognizing the Palestinian Government.

An international conference has to be convened as soon as possible, taking into account the proposals of 2002's Arab initiative in Beirut, during which the Arab world offered the full political recognition of the State of Israel ".

"It's now Israel's turn to give a signal of its desire of peace and respect of international legality. It is necessary that Israel stops military actions and arrests in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is also important to put through negotiations for the liberation of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and of the Palestinian political prisoners, to remove check-points and to guarantee freedom of movement to the Palestinian people in Gaza and in the West Bank,"Ms. Morgantini concludes.