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EU can pass credibility test by suspending the upgrade of bilateral relations with Israel

Brussels – CIDSE, an international alliance of Catholic development agencies, says that the EU should formally suspend the upgrade of its relations with Israel until the country improves its performance in terms of respect for international humanitarian law, human rights and peace process commitments.

In a new policy note issued ahead of the annual EU-Israel Association Council on 15 June, CIDSE argues that strengthening the relationship with Israel now would violate the EU's legal obligation to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and also send a wrong political signal. A continuation of the upgrade would mean that, ultimately, the EU is not taking its concerns about the blockade of Gaza and increased settlement activity in the West Bank seriously.

“The EU's response to the deepening crisis in Gaza has so far been disappointing,” CIDSE Policy Officer Koen De Groof commented. “We expect the EU to be more coherent and effective in promoting respect for international law and peace process commitments. Rewarding Israel for unlawful policies which undermine the two-state solution - which an upgrade of relations would constitute - is counterproductive and unacceptable’.

Two years of closure and three weeks of war in Gaza have left 1.5 million Palestinians in urgent need of external aid. Nevertheless, until today Israel refuses to lift its blockade, which has been widely condemned as a collective punishment of the civilian population. This means that much of the EU's aid is simply unable to reach its beneficiaries. As a network of development agencies with partners in Palestine and Israel, CIDSE is directly affected by this situation. It believes it is inconceivable for the EU to strengthen its relations with a country that systematically and unlawfully obstructs its aid efforts to Palestinians in need.

Until now, the EU has failed to actively support an international investigation into alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the war in Gaza. It has furthermore failed to demand any compensation for the more than 11 million euros damage which was inflicted on EU-funded projects during that period.

CIDSE therefore urges the EU to send out a strong signal which reflects its basic values and foreign policy objectives. On the occasion of the upcoming Association Council, it asks the EU to:

- Formally suspend the EU-Israel upgrading process pending tangible progress in Israel's respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and its peace process commitments.
- Consider full access to Gaza as an EU foreign policy priority and exhaust all available means to end the Israeli blockade.

- Ensure accountability for violations of international law and demand compensation for damages unlawfully inflicted on EU-funded infrastructure or projects.

Read the report on www.cidse.org:

The EU's Aid to the Palestinian territory (II) – the deepening crisis in Gaza

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Notes to the editors:

- **CIDSE** is an international alliance of Catholic development agencies. Its members share a common strategy in their efforts to eradicate poverty and establish global justice. CIDSE's advocacy work covers global governance, resources for development, climate change, trade & food security, EU development policy and business & human rights. (www.cidse.org).
- The members of the **CIDSE Working Group on Palestine/Israel** – Broederlijk Delen, CAFOD, CCFD, Cordaid, Misereor and Trócaire – are actively involved in the region through partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Together with their local partners they work to reduce poverty and build peace through development and humanitarian programmes.
- **Political background:** At the previous EU-Israel Association Council (June 2008) the EU responded favourably to Israel's request to strengthen and upgrade bilateral relations. This position was confirmed at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) of 8 December 2008, which also endorsed a guideline on the political dimension of the upgrade. The upgrade would allow Israel to participate in more EU programmes (education, environment, research, energy, culture, home affairs...) and to take part more frequently in meetings of various EU bodies, such as Council working groups, alongside EU member states. Following the Israeli military offensive in Gaza in January 2009, there has been an informal pause in the upgrade but no formal suspension.