

EU-Israel Association Council meeting
Joint statement by CIDSE, ACT Alliance EU and Oxfam

As humanitarian and human rights organizations working in the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), we are deeply concerned about the prospects for the renewed EU-Israel Association Council.

The need for a principled and rights-based EU position towards the situation in Israel/Palestine is critical. In the context of this year marking 55 years of Israeli military occupation, the EU must not forget its responsibility towards the Palestinian people impacted daily by the policies and practices of an expansionist state operating with full impunity.

The Association Council will take place against the backdrop of an ever more deteriorating and hostile situation on the ground. So far, 2022 is the deadliest year for West Bank Palestinians since OCHA started recording fatalities in 2005, when compared to the same period of the previous 14 years. We are seeing alarmingly increasing rates of destruction of Palestinian and EU-funded structures. Closely associated with steady illegal land expropriation, settlement expansion, transfer of Israeli citizens into oPt and dispossession of Palestinians, demolitions effectively entrench Israel's annexation of the West Bank. At the same time, Israeli authorities have rejected 99% of all the construction plans put forward to develop Area C, consisting of 60% West Bank territory. Its fertile agricultural lands are a key component of Palestine's productive sector and geographic integrity.

This year also marks the 15th anniversary of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip; an entire generation is born into a permanent state of siege (800.000 young Palestinians). More than two million people are trapped inside Gaza and deprived of fundamental rights, with little access to basic services like healthcare, clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and education, with unemployment rates amongst the highest in the world. The detrimental impact of the blockade and suffering of the entire population of the Gaza Strip amounts to collective punishment.

Over the past year, the frightening crack-down on and criminalization of Palestinian rights groups by the Israeli authorities escalated to a designation of seven human rights organizations in Palestine as 'terrorist', following a well-known long-standing campaign to restrict ability of Palestinian civil society to carry out their important work.

We urge the EU and its member states to ensure that Israel is held accountable to its obligations under international law. Current track record clearly shows that mere statements and condemnations by the EU have done little to change facts on the ground, including ending an occupation that has lasted for over half a century and a stalled peace process. We call for the EU to revise its approach from simple statements of concern to the adoption of substantive steps to address the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the oPt.

In the context of the upcoming EU-IL Association Council, we call on the EU and the member states to:

- Make clear that all upgrades in EU-Israel relations will take place only in case of upholding of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Hold Israel accountable for the mounting violations of international law through supporting international justice mechanisms, and with tools available under EU-Israel bilateral relations.
Re-iterate its position, from the Foreign Affairs Council conclusion in 2016, that settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace and that Israel should cease all settlement activity and dismantle outposts built since 2001.
- Demand that the designations of the Palestinian civil society organizations be immediately rescinded, stressing that the timeframe for presenting evidence has exceeded any acceptable statute of limitations.
- Call for a lift of the blockade on Gaza and demand the sustained and unconditional opening of Gaza's crossings only subject to legitimate border control needs.