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To all MEPs signatories of the letters on the imminent demolition plans in the West Bank

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your letters and for conveying your concerns on the situation of Bedouin communities in the West Bank, particularly the Khan al-Ahmar and Susiya communities.

Indeed, 130 structures are under threat of demolition in Khan al Ahmar, including a school which is funded by the EU and EU Member States, and which provides education to 170 children. In addition, the community is located in a sensitive area of critical importance for the contiguity of a future Palestinian state.

I share your deep concern about the fate of these communities and also the general escalation of demolitions of Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including those funded by the EU and its Member States. These actions have a significant impact on the nature of Area C, the fate of which is intrinsically linked to the fate of the two-state solution.

There must be no doubt about the position of the EU. The Foreign Affairs Council has systematically drawn attention to the plight of Bedouin communities, including the risk of forced transfer in particular from the wider E1 area. The Susiya and Abu Nwar communities have been specifically mentioned in Council Conclusions. We are firm in the view that compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including accountability, is a corner stone for peace and security in the region.

I have engaged with all EU institutions to ensure that the whole EU family can act in unison, by streamlining policy approaches to humanitarian and development assistance in the occupied Palestinian territory, while protecting the viability of the two state solution.

The EU remains committed to protecting the rights of the Palestinians and to providing assistance to vulnerable populations in their current place of living in Area C. The EU therefore supports activities that respond to humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations. Addressing basic development needs is equally necessary to ensure the socio-economic viability of Area C, which comprises over 60% of the West Bank.

As the rate of demolitions has escalated, the EU and its Member States have in the past year intensified diplomatic engagement and public diplomacy to pass consistent messages based on the above policy rationale.

In addition, the EU is a partner within the Middle East Quartet, which has urged Israel to cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion, the designation of land for exclusive Israeli use and the denial of Palestinian development, all of which makes the prospect of the two-state solution increasingly remote. The Palestinians face severe difficulty in securing building permits for infrastructure.

While the EU has called on Israel to enable Palestinian construction, the Quartet has also recommended that Israel implements policy shifts, including transferring powers and responsibilities in Area C, in order to increase Palestinian civil authority.

In order to counter threats against specific communities, high-level diplomatic visits and media outreach have been deployed. The EU Representative and EU Member States in Jerusalem react in a systematic manner when demolitions take place in areas of crucial importance for the viability of the two-state solution, when they could have a grave humanitarian impact, and when EU funds are at stake.

In the case of Khan al-Ahmar, they issued a statement on 22 February, following the stop-work order issued by the Israeli Civil Administration on 19 February. The EU Representative also contributed to an article in *The Wall Street Journal* on Khan al-Ahmar, which was published on 1 March.

The EU Representative and EU Heads of Mission visited Khan al-Ahmar on 28 February and on 2 March, on the latter occasion upon the invitation of Prime Minister Hamdallah. Members of the European Parliament, as you may know, visited another community in the E1 area of the occupied West Bank on 22 February. Delegates of the Maghreb/Mashreq Working Party of the Council of the European Union, which comprises the EU Member States, as well as the EU Institutions, visited Susiya in late September 2016.

Despite the challenging context, the EU continues to seek direct engagement with Israel to put an end to demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian assets, including EU-funded projects.

In particular, the EU Delegation to Israel has raised the threat against Khan al-Ahmar and Susiya with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office and the Minister of Education. The European External Action Service has also coordinated work on a demarche supported by all 28 EU Member States to be delivered by the Head of the EU Delegation to Israel and interested EU Member States to the highest level of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to protest the demolition threat against Khan al-Ahmar.

Simultaneously, we must all continue to impress upon Israel the general need for a new principled approach, to allow more transfer of powers and scope for development for Palestinians in Area C, in order for Israel to remain consistent with its stated commitment to the two-state solution.

I am personally committed to continue to insist on passing these messages, also as a means to defend the two-state solution, which is the only viable way of achieving a just and lasting peace to the benefit of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

I wish to use this opportunity to thank the European Parliament for its support and for giving voice and visibility to vulnerable communities.

Yours sincerely



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