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CONCLUSIONS

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*ANNEX III***Declaration on the Middle East Peace Process**

The European Union strongly welcomes the launch of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, announced in Washington on 2nd September 2010, and commends the Israelis, the Palestinians and the United States as well as the Quartet and Arab partners for their efforts. The decision by the parties to engage in substantive talks represents a major step on the road towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Recalling the Council conclusions of December 2009 on the Middle East Peace Process, the European Union stresses that these negotiations on all final status issues should lead to a two-state solution with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

In this context, the European Union deems it indispensable that both parties observe calm and restraint and refrain from actions that could affect negatively the progress of the negotiations. It calls on both parties to uphold previous commitments and to strive to create an environment conducive to a successful outcome. The European Union recalls that settlements are illegal under international law and calls for an extension of the moratorium decided by Israel. It continues to call for a complete stop to all violence, in particular rocket fire and terrorist attacks.

The European Union will spare no effort, along with its partners in the Quartet as well as Arab partners, to support the US-led efforts for successful negotiations that lead to a framework agreement within one year, which is in the interest of Israelis and Palestinians, the peoples of the region and the international community. The European Union is the first donor to the Palestinians and a crucial political and economic partner of both parties as well as their neighbours. In this regard, it stresses that the European Union will remain actively engaged and involved, including through the Quartet, to support and ensure the success of the negotiations and invites the High Representative to continue to fully associate the European Union to the ongoing efforts. The European Union stresses the need for the Quartet to continue to play an essential role in the peace process. It also stresses the crucial importance of the continuation of the Palestinian State building process which the European Union will continue to actively support, including the implementation of the Fayyad Plan.

Recalling the Council conclusions of June 2010 on Gaza, the European Union also stresses that for peace to be sustainable, a durable solution needs to be found for Gaza. It welcomes the recent measures announced by the Israeli government as an important step forward. It calls for full implementation and complementary measures in order to achieve a fundamental change of policy that allows for the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza. The EU has offered its assistance for achieving this objective. The European Union calls for a solution addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The European Union recalls that peace in the Middle East should be comprehensive and reiterates the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syria and Israeli-Lebanon tracks.