

## **Former German Ambassadors call for a more Assertive Policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict - November 2009**

### **Five Statements:**

**1) The conflict affects major European and hence German interests. These interests cannot be reconciled with the present stagnation of efforts toward peace in the Middle East.**

As a breeding ground for extremism, the conflict presents a grave threat to public safety, not only in the region itself, but also in Europe and in other parts of the world. The radicalization in Israel and in the Palestinian territories weakens moderating forces in the region, which are of utmost importance for long-term peace efforts in the Middle East.

The conflict is a focal point which repeatedly incites resentment and hatred toward the West. The perception of European and American Middle East policy is predominantly negative in the Arab world and can only be improved if a fair compromise between legitimate Israeli and Palestinian interests is accomplished.

As a historical legacy, Germany has committed itself to protect the security of Israel. A stable and lasting security, however, can only be achieved through political means, not through occupation and colonization or by relying on military superiority. Instead, it should be achieved by a withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territories and the subsequent establishment of a viable Palestinian state. Israel cannot hope to attain permanent peace while retaining its hold on Palestinian territories.

Finally, strengthening international law and justice as well as fortifying the United Nations rank among the chief objectives of German foreign policy. The observance of the Geneva Convention is particularly important in the Middle East conflict. The violations of the Convention on both sides, as well as a disregard for the UN, must be counteracted.

**2) Within the framework of European Middle East policy and in close consultation with the US, it will be necessary for Europe to contemplate measures that will provide sufficient pressure on the conflicting parties to end hostilities.**

German and European statements regarding the Middle East conflict have largely been ignored by both sides. A major reason for this disregard is the refusal by Europeans and Americans to take a tougher stance against Israel and the Palestinian Authority that would demand the implementation of a two-state solution. The continuation of certain benefits and financial support allocated to either side, as well as the conditions for a closer alliance with the European Union, could be made dependent on the

progress achieved in conflict resolution. Such incentives should also lead to the inevitable inclusion of Hamas into the political process as well as the permanent opening of the check points along the Gaza Strip. While Germany may not be able to initiate these measures, it should also not oppose them. We believe that a Middle East policy without an emphasis on implementation restricts the ability to negotiate solutions that remove obstacles for peace – most importantly, the settlement policy.

### **3) A detailed draft for a comprehensive peace agreement already exists.**

In 2003, the so-called «Geneva Initiative» was negotiated by notable Israelis and Palestinians. The draft proposes realistic compromises regarding the major contentious issues: the founding of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders (this would take into account a mutually agreed land exchange which integrates large settlement blocks near the border into Israeli territory in exchange for concessions of other land for Palestine); Jerusalem as a shared capital of both states with divided territorial sovereignty; a solution for the refugee question that takes into account Israeli security needs as well as the mandatory compensation for refugees; Palestine as a demilitarized state; stationing of a multinational peacekeeping force on Palestinian territory to monitor the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces; establishment of an international monitoring and verification agency to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

In addition to an offer by all 22 member states of the Arab League to normalize relations with Israel on the condition of a withdrawal from the occupied territories (the «Arab Peace Initiative» of 2002), the Geneva Initiative provides a point of departure for negotiations on a secure future for Israelis and Palestinians based on a balance of legitimate interests. The EU should integrate both initiatives into its future Middle East policy.

### **4) A tougher stance in favor of the two-state solution will not ignore the fact that a withdrawal from the occupied territories constitutes a heavy political and social challenge for Israel.**

The main concerns are fear of domestic conflict and national security risks. Given Israel's nuclear military power, security guarantees from the USA, European solidarity with Israel, and the willingness of the Arab states to conclude a peace treaty, it is hard to conceive of the founding of a Palestinian state as a threat to Israel's existence. On the contrary: the continuation of the conflict jeopardizes any stabilization in the region and carries unforeseeable risks.

### **5) A German Middle East policy that is oriented toward the urgent demands of the future, while not forgetting the German-Jewish past,**

**will find understanding and support not only among its own public, but also within parts of the Israeli public.**

1. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians affects many Germans on an emotional level. With this initiative we wish to contribute to the public debate, especially given the fact that the newly elected German government will again face the challenge of adding its voice to the efforts of the European Union for a renewed attempt to bring this sixty year old conflict to an end.

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The letters to the German Chancellor and to the German Foreign Minister were signed by

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