

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

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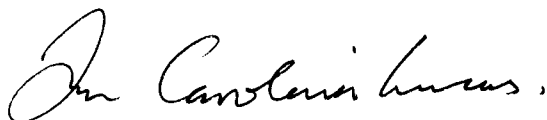
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Thank you for your letter dated 23 June 2004 concerning the possibility of suspending the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

The European Commission shares your concern about the appalling situation that prevails in the Middle East. It might be useful to restate the European Union's basic policy which has been reiterated several times by Foreign Ministers and Heads of Government. The European Union recognises Israel's irrevocable right to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders; at the same time, it calls for the establishment of democratic, viable and peaceful sovereign Palestinian State. We have repeatedly urged the parties to resume negotiations, and believe that political and security issues have to be addressed simultaneously. The European Union has on many occasions expressed the view that impartial third party monitoring would help to reduce tension and prepare the ground for a resumption of negotiations.

On the question of sanctions against Israel, I recognise the frustration of those who feel that things have gone from bad to worse over the last three years. Indeed I have spoken in the European Parliament and elsewhere about a number of particular concerns – the continuing terrorism and violence, the route of the Separation Barrier which is causing very severe problems in some areas, the expansion of settlements and the destruction of houses, the number of deaths of innocent civilians. On balance, however, it is the Commission's judgement (which reflects the views of the EU Foreign Ministers meeting in the External Relations Council) that measures such as suspension of our Association Agreement would make the Israeli authorities less rather than more responsive to the efforts of the international community to promote a lasting settlement.

Meanwhile, the European Union is continuing its efforts to alleviate suffering through humanitarian assistance, as well as offering longer-term help for building the institutions a future Palestinian State.



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