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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION TO PALESTINE

As a member of an official cross-party delegation from the European Parliament, I have just returned from the Occupied Palestinian Territories. While I was there, I had the opportunity to meet with Ismail Haniyeh, Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority's National Unity Government, together with a number of his Ministers, as well as with President Abbas.

Since the EU continues to follow the Quartet position of refusing to recognise fully this new Government, because of its association with Hamas, the delegation's principal objective was to seek clarification of the Government's programme insofar as it relates to the Quartet's three essential criteria – renunciation of violence, respect for past political agreements, and recognition of Israel.

In our meeting with Mr. Haniyeh, as in our meetings with his Ministers - some Hamas nominees, others affiliated to Fatah or independent - the message was the same. The National Unity Government is committed to a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, to be achieved by peaceful means. Any potential collapse of the ceasefire is to be condemned, and absolute support is given for past agreements, including letters of mutual recognition, signed by the PLO.

I would therefore urge you to use every influence with your European counterparts to normalise relations with the Palestinian Authority as a matter of urgency. By continuing to withhold direct aid from the Authority, EU member states are exacerbating the growing poverty and misery of the Palestinian people. In the last year alone, the number living in poverty has increased by 30%, essential services have been devastated, and there is growing violence on the streets.

The Commissioner-General of UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency) based in Gaza has spoken in stark terms about the scale of the crisis: "This last year has seen an unprecedented social, political and economic decline in the OPT. 'Decline' is not even the word; to me a 'terrifying free fall' is a more accurate description."

Although the EU established a "temporary international mechanism" to provide support to some of the poorest people, it has been unable to prevent the growing humanitarian and political crisis. Moreover, in bypassing official government structures, it is both undermining the authority and apparatus of the state, and lending justification to Israel's refusal to release Palestinian tax revenues, amounting to two thirds of total government finances.

The political and economic blockade is putting the survival of this government in jeopardy. If it collapses, the consequences are likely to be widespread violence across the region, destroying any hopes of peace. The EU must act now to prevent it.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Lucas MEP