

**President Metsola's remarks at the extraordinary European Council**  
***Tuesday 17th October 2023***

Let me start by offering my condolences to Ulf and expressing my thanks to Alexander. The terror attack in Belgium last night was terrible and I want to remember the victims and pay tribute to the Belgian first-responders, who have done an excellent job.

Similarly, we expressed our condolences in the European Parliament to the family and relatives of Dominique Bernard who was killed in France last week.

The situation in Israel, Gaza and the wider Middle East is at the top of all our concerns. The reality on the ground is horrific, it is tragic and it is desperate.

War is always hell and as always innocent lives are at stake. Innocent lives have been lost and many decisions are a choice between bad and worse.

On October 7th, the world awoke to the worst terrorist attack on families in Israel in generations. Hamas committed mass murder, kidnappings, rapes, torture, mutilations and the desecration of the dead. There can be no excuses for that.

In the Parliament we have shown our solidarity with the victims and we have underlined that Hamas is a terrorist group that does not represent the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and importantly, it does not represent the hopes of Muslims around the world - it hinders them. That is a distinction that we have always made and one that we must keep underlining.

As a Union, it is important that we express our solidarity, that we reiterate our rejection of terrorism, that we help in securing the release of nearly 200 hostages and that we underline that how Israel responds to the attack matters to all of us. We must emphasise that we need to keep looking for solutions that mitigate the humanitarian consequences in Gaza in line with our obligations and international law.

Even in the most difficult times, the European Parliament has always and will always push for a fair two-state solution that is equitable and that is just. We cannot lose sight of that. We will always push for a sustainable and lasting peace. Sadly, the reality is that the vile actions of Hamas terrorists have pushed this prospect further away.

Today, the situation in Gaza remains impossible for so many. Europe's humanitarian obligations must remain a priority and we have to keep engaging with the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people and regional actors to de-escalate tensions in the region and neighbouring areas.

As a Union our focus would be to remain coherent and united in ensuring that hostages are released unconditionally, that terrorism is not excused, that humanitarian aid reaches those in need, that civilians are not targeted, that safe routes within Gaza are maintained and humanitarian corridors are created. To do that we need to keep contact with neighbouring countries to help in the inevitable flow of people and aid that must get through. In this regard Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon in particular have a critical role to play.

This is something I made very clear when I was invited to visit Israel last week in my conversations and in our public statements both with the Speaker of the Knesset and also with the President of the country.

It is along these lines that our Parliament will debate this issue tomorrow and agree on a resolution. The basic tenets of the resolution are the mandate that I was granted by all the political groups before I went to Israel last week.

You can rely on us to do everything we can and I am sure we will keep this discussion going forward next week at the Summit and I hope the points we make are reflected in the conclusions of that too. It is important people see our unity and coherence.

Thank you.