



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Declaration

***The Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons
Condemns the Escalation of Violence in the Gaza Strip***

The Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons is deeply concerned that the truce between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza territory, mediated by the Government of Egypt, on June 8, 2008, has been shattered with the outbreak of hostilities. Also the mutual ceasefire announced on the 18th of January, 2009 has been interrupted by new violent raids which have claimed new victims.

The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, which unfortunately is not a new phenomenon, has deteriorated even further with the recent events in the region, strongly condemned by governments in the region as well as by international organizations including the United Nations.

A lasting settlement of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict can only be achieved through peaceful means and agreement between the two parties. The UN Security Council Resolution 1860 (2009) calls on the Parties and the international community to increase efforts to achieve an urgent comprehensive peace based on the vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side with secure and recognized borders.

Any attack against the civilian population is a clear violation of international law including the Geneva Conventions, which among other things safeguard the protection of populations living in occupied areas.

The borders of Gaza have, before as well as during the recent escalation of violence, been too closed when it comes to transport of humanitarian aid and daily needs for the population, and too porous when it comes to trafficking of arms, which significantly increases the fragility of the truce.

***The Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Lights Weapons, meeting in
Berlin on February 15 2009:***

- expresses its concern over the escalating violence in the region and its belief that the use of violence, instead of providing the necessary means for lasting peace, worsens the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;

- urges the parties to increase efforts to sustain a cease-fire which can provide a platform where broader agreements can be reached, which in turn is an inevitable requirement for a lasting solution to the conflict;
- condemns all acts of violence and hostilities directed against civilians and regrets the loss of lives and wounded in the conflict;
- supports the multiple declarations of the international community calling for the protection of Palestinian and Israeli civilians, and all people who have fled and been displaced as result of the violence, in respect of international law and international humanitarian law;
- condemns the recent interruptions of free distribution of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment throughout Gaza, welcoming the efforts to create and open humanitarian corridors and other mechanisms to provide sustainable humanitarian support;
- expresses its strong concern over weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip, a flow which feeds the arms race in the region and creates insecurity for its inhabitants.