

Press Release

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PACE Bureau calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza

Strasbourg, 09.01.2009 - The Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) meeting in Barcelona, today adopted the following statement:

"The Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe fully supports the resolution adopted by the United Nations Security Council on 8 January 2009. It calls for an immediate ceasefire to be respected by all sides.

Both sides must understand that violence, destruction and death will only lead to more violence and death. Our Assembly, which has always stood for peace and human rights, cannot accept the deadly escalation of the last days. The only solution is a political one: establishing a durable ceasefire, dialogue and negotiation. The immediate objective should be to create conditions in which the blockade of Gaza can be lifted.

Humanitarian aid must have full and unimpeded access into the Gaza strip. The immense suffering and deprivation of the civilian population must end. It is vital to get food and medical supplies to alleviate the desperate humanitarian situation of the civilian population and to ensure hospitals are able to function properly.

Israel's refusal to allow international journalists into Gaza is not in conformity with the democratic values it shares with the Council of Europe. Freedom of information in the media is an essential requirement of democracy. Where this is lacking, the democratic deficit is severe.

The Bureau recalls the presence of Israeli parliamentary observers and Palestinian parliamentarians at Assembly Part-Sessions and their participation in the Assembly Tripartite Forum on issues of common concern for the region. Our Assembly stands ready to co-operate with both sides to provide conditions that will facilitate a peaceful solution if they have the political will to do so".

Moreover, the Bureau decides to propose to the Assembly to hold a debate on the issue at the next plenary part session (Strasbourg, 26-30 January 2009) and to invite Israeli and Palestinian representatives to take part.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) ; Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democratic Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).