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Human rights and development groups welcome Palestine's move to join ICC; urge Europe's support

Palestine's accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a welcome move that will help deter war crimes and end impunity in the region, and should be supported by European countries said Amnesty International, Broederlijk Delen, Christian Aid, the Coalition for the ICC, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and Pax Christi Flanders today.

Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International, said: "Ongoing impunity for serious crimes committed during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has undermined prospects for a durable, just peace. This move by the Palestinians could help to address violations of international law by giving both sides access to justice for war crimes and crimes against humanity."

Willem Staes, Middle East Policy Officer at Broederlijk Delen and Pax Christi Flanders said: "The ICC should not be seen as an obstacle to peace negotiations, but rather as a crucial instrument to break the decade-old culture of impunity in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The prospect of accountability for serious crimes by both sides can act as a deterrent for future atrocities and settlement expansion."

Karim Lahidji, President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said: "Accountability is a vital ingredient to resolving any conflict, especially one as long-running as this. By accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC, Palestine is upholding international norms and indicating its willingness to abide by them."

The groups urge the EU and its Members States to welcome Palestine's ratification of the Rome Statute, as they have past ratifications, and regret that the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini missed the opportunity to do so in her statement this week. The EU has committed to promote the universal adherence to the Rome Statute, as confirmed in the 2011 Council Decision and Action Plan on the ICC and the 2009 Guidelines on Promoting Compliance with International Humanitarian Law. It should stand by this commitment.

William Bell, Policy and Advocacy Officer for Israel and the Palestinians at Christian Aid said: "The EU and its EU Member States are strong advocates of the ICC's role; it would be hypocritical and short-sighted to make an exception in this case. Advocating the impartial use of international justice mechanisms is not about taking sides, but rather about ensuring all parties are held to account for serious international crimes and protected by international criminal law."

The groups urge all actors, including Israel and the US to halt or rescind any retaliation measures against Palestine and instead recognise the benefit of introducing an element of accountability. Rather than sanctioning Palestine Israel and the U.S. should also sign up to the Rome Statute.

William R. Pace, convenor of the Coalition for the ICC said: "The Coalition fully supports Palestine's accession to the Rome Statute. Enforcing international humanitarian law strengthens the peace process, while also giving victims recourse to legal remedy."

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