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Javier SOLANA,
EU High Representative for CFSP,
welcomes the extension of EU border assistance mission
at Rafah Crossing Point

Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) welcomes the extension for another year of the EU Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point between Gaza and Egypt (EUBAM Rafah).

HR Solana, who is arriving in Gaza today as part of a visit in the region, expects that all parties will ensure the continuous operation of the Rafah Crossing Point, as they have committed themselves to do in the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and by inviting the EU to extend its presence at the crossing point after 24 May 2007.

The EU has consistently recalled the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and urged that Rafah, as well as all other crossing points, remain open.

In the current dramatic circumstances, which HR Solana has witnessed during his visit in the region, the request by both parties for a continued presence of the EU monitors and the continuation of operations at the Rafah Crossing Point is an important signal.

HR Solana emphasises the EU's commitment to remain engaged on the ground. A key aim of the EU through EUBAM Rafah is to promote cooperation and trust between the parties. The EU also wants to contribute to Palestinian capacity-building. Both of these objectives remain more valid than ever.

The High Representative extends his gratitude to Lt. General Pietro Pistolese, who heads EUBAM Rafah, for his leadership and to his staff for their work accomplished in difficult conditions and assures them of his full support for the continuation of this important mission.

<http://consilium.europa.eu/eubam-rafah>

Attached: background

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

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Background

The EU Council adopted a joint action extending for a year, until 24 May 2008, the mandate of EUBAM Rafah. The extension is renewable for a further 6 months.

EUBAM Rafah will continue to operate in accordance with the 25 November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority and with the relevant arrangements made on the basis of agreements between the parties.

The mission was established by the Council on 25 November 2005, and extended for six months on 13 November 2006. The aim of EUBAM Rafah is to provide a third party presence at the Rafah Crossing Point between Gaza and Egypt in order to contribute, in co-operation with the European Community's institution building efforts, to the implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Movement Access, ensuring the opening of the Rafah Crossing Point, and to build up confidence between the parties.

To this end, EUBAM Rafah:

- actively monitors, verifies and evaluates the PA's performance with regard to the implementation of the Framework, Security and Customs Protocols concluded between the parties on the operation of the Rafah terminal;
- contributes, through monitoring, to building up the Palestinian capacity in all aspects of border management at Rafah;
- contributes to the liaison between the Palestinians, Israeli and Egyptian authorities in all aspects regarding the management of the Rafah Crossing Point.

In its initial phase about 75 Police officers from 17 member States have been deployed. In the first year of operation, a total of 98 monitors from member States have worked with EUBAM.
