

*José Manuel Barroso*  
*President of the European Commission*

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Dear Mr Evans,

Thank you very much for your letter of 24 November, expressing your concern about the current situation in Gaza.

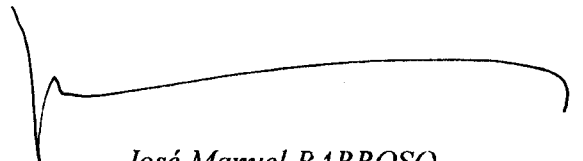
I fully share your assessment of the crisis which is taking a heavy toll on the civilian population in Gaza. There was already a lack of essential services for the people of Gaza before the crisis and the situation has worsened still further following the outbreak of hostilities in late December.

The European Union has been active from day one. EU Foreign Ministers called for an immediate ceasefire in the Paris Declaration at an emergency meeting on 30 December. In early January, the Commission Member responsible for External Relations, Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, visited the region as part of a mission by the EU Troika and insisted on the need to do everything possible to improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population including the opening of the crossings to Gaza. The 26 January General Affairs and External Relations Council decided to develop an EU work plan towards a durable ceasefire. This will focus first and foremost on immediate humanitarian relief for the population of Gaza, and will include support to the prevention of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, the sustained re-opening of crossing points, rehabilitation and reconstruction and the resumption of the peace process.

Concerning our overall relations with Israel in the context of the Association Agreement, it was decided at the last EU-Israel Association Council in June 2008 to respond favourably to Israel's request for a significant upgrading of relations. Nothing has changed in this regard. However it is clear that the recent escalation of the situation in Gaza has not contributed to an atmosphere conducive to concluding the upgrading process with Israel.

From the beginning of the crisis the Commission has concentrated all its energy, contacts and discussions with Israel on the best way to deal with the emergency, and in particular access and provision of humanitarian aid to Gaza. At the present time, the priority in our relations with Israel remains focussed on Gaza and in particular the issue of access and provision of humanitarian aid. For all of these matters, dialogue with Israel is essential.

Yours sincerely,



José Manuel BARROSO

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