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Welcome for EU guidelines on Israel settlements in Palestine

Press release from EFA MEP Alyn Smith (SNP)

Alyn Smith MEP, Scottish member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, welcomed today (Wednesday) the release of the EU guidelines on the import of produce from illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but said they should be improved and extended to cover all commercial dealings with illegal settlements, not just agricultural produce.

*SNP MEP Alyn Smith*

Alyn Smith said:

"I welcome the EU guidelines on settlement produce as a step forward to ensure the EU enforces international law and does not fall complicit to Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territories. The EU was quick enough to act when Russia illegally annexed Crimea, yet the fact we welcome these guidelines today on labeling of illegal produce shows just how slow the EU's actions have been when it comes to Israel.

"It is clear European consumers want more clarity, more transparency on the produce they buy from illegal Israeli settlements. It is equally clear that while these guidelines will have limited economic impact, they will underline to the Israelis that the EU is finally starting to get serious.

"To be clear, the EU guidelines are a reminder that we recognize Israel's right to exist and has a right to expect security within its own borders. But as I said in Strasbourg before, this does not give Israel a right to illegally occupy Palestinian land or allow settlers to illegally occupy Palestinian land and exploit it for their profit.

"Most importantly, I note that both Israeli and Palestinian figures supporting peace have welcomed the EU efforts today, with a public endorsement from over 550 Israeli figures such as former Speaker of the Knesset

and Chairman of the Jewish Agency Avraham Burg, Israeli Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman or former Israeli Ambassadors Elie Barnavi.

"But we can and should do much more. Yesterday in the Foreign Affairs Committee I told the EU Special Envoy to the Middle East Peace Process, Fernando Gentilini, that EU guidelines needed to be improved to prevent EU-based companies from issuing bank loans and mortgages to Israeli settlements, also we should not recognise qualifications earned in settlement-based institutions and we should end the tax-exempt status of European charities that deal with Israeli settlements.

"We have seen a small step forward today but we still have a long way to go."

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Notes to Editors:

Link to today's petition by prominent Israeli public figures welcoming the EU guidelines on correct labelling of settlement products: http://www.scribd.com/doc/289329095/Israeli-Petition-in-Favour-of-EU-Labeling-of-Settlement-Products

Link to the video of Alyn's speech, exchange of view with EU Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W33MsDHbffs

The European Commission adopted the guidelines this Wednesday morning called “Interpretative Notice on indication of origin of goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967.”, text of the EU decision:
http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/israel/documents/news/20151111_interpretative_notice_indication_of_origin_of_goods_en.pdf

EU factsheet on the guidelines:
http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/israel/documents/news/20151111_indication_of_origin_fact_sheet_final_en.pdf

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