



Statement by President von der Leyen with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu

Tel Aviv, 13 October 2023

Prime Minister,

I was today in Kfar Azza. What I saw and what I heard is breaking my heart. The blood of people killed in their sleep. The stories of innocents burned alive or slaughtered in their homes. The parents hiding their newborn babies before confronting the terrorists. Children and elderly people ripped from their families and taken hostage, even Holocaust survivors. Over 1,300 human beings were murdered by barbaric terrorists of Hamas fighting against Israel.

They aim to eradicate Jewish life from the land, and they took action. This is the most heinous assault against Jews since the Holocaust. We thought this could never happen again, yet it did. In the face of this unspeakable tragedy, there is only one possible response: Europe stands with Israel. And Israel has a right to defend itself. In fact, it has the duty to defend its people. And we must call by their name the atrocities committed by Hamas. This is terrorism. This is an act of war. Nothing can justify what Hamas did. This is the time to stand in solidarity with Israel and its people. And this is why I am here.

Let me also be very clear that Hamas alone is responsible for what is happening. Hamas' acts have nothing to do with the legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people. On the contrary, the horror that Hamas has unleashed is only bringing more suffering upon innocent Palestinians. They are threatened, too. Hamas' despicable actions are the hallmark of terrorists. And I know that how Israel responds will show that it is a democracy.

In recent days, I have also been in contact with King Abdullah of Jordan and President El-Sisi of Egypt. Europe will keep working for a peaceful and integrated Middle East. We know that Hamas' actions risk to affect the historic rapprochement between Israel and its Arab neighbours. And we should observe very closely those who stand to gain from a perpetuating conflict in the Middle East, like Iran and Russia. So now is the time to work even more closely with Israel and with countries in the region for stability and against terror.

Finally, Jewish communities across the world are also deeply affected, including in Europe. Antisemitic incidents are again on the rise. And this is unacceptable. We are deeply concerned by the spread of online hate speech and fake news, which are proliferating at worrying speed and are even difficult to keep track of. We are already in contact with social media platforms to remind them of their obligations. There is no place and zero tolerance for hate in Europe, both online and offline, against anyone. Over the past years, the European Union has put the fight against anti-Semitism and the fostering of Jewish life in Europe at the heart of our action like never before. This is the moment for all of us to stand together.

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