Violence in the Gaza Strip: reaction of Prime Minister Charles Michel and of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Didier Reynders. "We call on the United Nations to conduct an international investigation"

Yesterday’s violence in the Gaza Strip is unacceptable. This is clearly a case of using excessive violence against civilians. Firing on demonstrators with the intent to kill is reprehensible. Israel must ensure the security of its citizens, but there are other means to achieve this than firing deadly bullets to stop the masses. Encouraging the people of Gaza to illegally cross the border into Israel and cause damage cannot be condoned either, however. Belgium urges both parties to make every effort to avoid escalation and further bloodshed. We call on the United Nations to conduct an international investigation.

Yesterday's violence was a dramatic reminder that only a two-state solution, where both countries co-exist peacefully can bring lasting peace and security to Israel, Palestine and their neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, this solution seems to be increasingly less likely, due to the increase in actions on the ground, such as Israel building settlements in the occupied territories.

President Trump's unilateral decisions to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to transfer the US embassy to Jerusalem are making it even harder to achieve peace. In December of this year, Prime Minister Charles Michel strongly condemned this decision in the Belgian Parliament. At that time, he asked for this point to be discussed with the European Heads of State and Government.

Relaunching the peace process in the Middle East is becoming a matter of increasing urgency. Any decision on the status of Jerusalem, which should ideally become the shared capital of two sovereign states, must be the result of negotiations between the two parties involved. Belgium, together with its European partners, will continue to condemn all unilateral actions that run counter to a negotiated two-state solution that allows both countries to coexist in peace, security and mutual recognition. Our country will not recognise any change to the borders of 1967, including with regard to Jerusalem, unless these changes are agreed on by both parties.

Peace can only come about by resuming dialogue, and not by unilateral actions. This dialogue must take place within the appropriate setting, particularly within the United Nations. No peace agreement can be achieved without the involvement of all partners, including the European Union as Israel's first trading partner and as the main donor of the Palestinian Authority. The United States must be involved in this process and again take up its neutral position which it has abandoned. Time is running out if we want to avoid the situation in the region becoming increasingly dangerous.