



Luxembourg, le 26 octobre 2020

International Peace Institute (IPI)  
**15<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Discussion on the Middle East**  
*VTC, 27 October 2020*

Dear Anwar, dear Terje,  
Your excellencies, dear friends,

I am glad to see so many of you today, even if it is only via videoconference. As you know, we were supposed to have this discussion on 30 September, but we decided to postpone it out of respect for His Highness Sheikh Sabah al-Sabah, the late Emir of Kuwait, who passed away on 29 September at the age of 92. His Highness was a tireless advocate for peace, dialogue and humanitarianism. He will be dearly missed by the people of Kuwait and by all of us. His legacy will live on thanks to his successor, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf al-Sabah, who will certainly be another beacon for peace and stability in the Middle East.

Over the past few months, we have seen significant changes in the region, especially with regard to the Middle East Peace Process. It seems that the normalization agreements signed between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, respectively, have led to a suspension of the threat of annexation by Israel of parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Just last week, it was announced that Sudan has also decided to normalize its relations with Israel. I welcome every achievement that brings Israel and the Arab countries in the region closer together, and I wish to congratulate my friend Anwar, as well as Foreign Minister Al Zayani of Bahrain, for these agreements. With regards to the

normalization of relations between Israel and Sudan, I hope that this will contribute to stability in the Horn of Africa.

Some people say that these agreements represent a “paradigm shift”, and that we are starting to see a new Middle East, one of free trade and free movement of people. There is now a direct flight between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi. This is not a small achievement. But at the same time, it has no impact on those millions of Palestinians living under siege in Gaza, or living under occupation in the West Bank, or living in refugee camps all across the region. It does not protect their houses or schools from demolition. For them, there was no paradigm shift.

As long as Israel continues to build thousands and thousands of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, while demolishing Palestinian homes and schools, there can be no possibility for a meaningful peace process. I therefore ask the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain: please use your newly established relations with Israel and exert pressure on the Israeli government to put an end to this illegal and harmful policy. We know that the suspension of annexation is not peace, and that a just and lasting peace can only be achieved through a negotiated two-State solution, based on international law. This is what we have to continue to fight for.

When we speak about international law, of course we must also address Iran. I fully share the concerns that many of you have when it comes to Iran’s ballistic missile program, its regional behavior – particularly in Syria and in Yemen – or the planning of terrorist attacks on European soil. I continue to advocate for a comprehensive European policy towards Iran, which also addresses the very worrying situation of human rights and freedom of religion in Iran.

While I share those concerns, Luxembourg remains committed with our EU partners to support the JCPOA, which we consider one of the great

achievements of multilateral diplomacy and a cornerstone for non-proliferation in the region. In this context, I regret the decision of the United States government to leave the JCPOA and impose sanctions on Iran. I know that some of you are deeply skeptical of the JCPOA, and believe that only a maximum pressure campaign can bring the Iranian government to change its harmful behavior. But in my experience, maximum pressure only leads to one thing: maximum resistance.

As our societies continue to suffer from the devastating effects of Covid-19, and as we try to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, I believe in maximum dialogue and maximum cooperation. The economic consequences of the pandemic may take years for us to overcome, and will especially affect the younger generation, both in the Middle East, as well as in Europe. The Luxembourg economy and society also feel the impact. However, in every crisis, there is always a chance to build back better.

Dear friends,

In the spirit of peace and dialogue, allow me to finish my remarks by honoring Mr. Samuel Paty, who was brutally murdered near Paris on 16 October. As a history teacher, Mr. Paty promoted dialogue and understanding between cultures and religions. Education is the most important tool at our disposal in the fight against radicalization and violent extremism. As governments, we must lead by example and continue to resist those who try to divide our societies through hate and violence.

I wish us all a fruitful debate.

Thank you.