



7th June 2012

Open letter to the Government of The Netherlands:
Prime Minister Mark Rutte
cc Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal
cc Minister for Economic Affairs Maxime Verhagen
cc State Secretary Ben Knapen

RE: Postponement of the Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council

The Quaker Council for European Affairs QCEA welcomed the announcement on 29th May that the first Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council, which was due to be signed on 7th June 2012, is to be postponed. We are pleased that the government of the Netherlands has recognised that the time is not right for the intensification of bilateral Dutch-Israeli relations.

However we are mindful that Foreign Minister Rosenthal and Minister for Economic Affairs Verhagen will still travel to Israel on 7th June and that the intention to establish the Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council will be jointly reconfirmed during the visit. We also understand that Parliament has voted the Foreign Minister's letter of 29th May 2012 on the Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council as non-controversial, which gives the caretaker government the option of returning to this issue again before the elections.

QCEA are concerned by the government's stated intention that it will establish the Council in the future. We would like to remind the Netherlands, as mentioned in our open letter of 16th May 2012, that the international community, including the European Union, has recognised that Israel persistently flouts international law in its blockade of the Gaza Strip, continued settlement expansion in the West Bank, and in other policies.

The Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council will endanger the reputation of the Netherlands as a protector of international law and may also conflict with Article 90 of the Dutch constitution. It will conflict with the position of the EU that relations with Israel should not be upgraded until Israel demonstrates a sincere commitment to respecting international law and human rights.

QCEA has a number of concerns regarding the proposed form of the Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council based on the information provided by Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal to the Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs on the strengthening of relations between the two countries.

Concerns

1. The agreement lacks an affirmation that the territorial applicability corresponds to the EU and internationally recognised 1967 borders of Israel.
2. The agreement lacks clear safeguards for monitoring and preventing Dutch companies becoming involved in territories occupied by Israel in violation of international law.

3. The agreement lacks a clear human rights component which states that the agreement is conditional upon respect for human rights. The EU-Israel Association Agreement is no substitute for this in a bilateral agreement.
4. With regard to bilateral research and development, the agreement lacks clear safeguards against Dutch companies becoming involved in military research and technologies which might later be used in the conflict.
5. The agreement lacks a political dialogue component, despite the assertion of the Foreign Minister that this intensification of bilateral relations will offer opportunities for conducting an open and constructive dialogue with Israel in relation to the Middle East Peace Process.
6. To initiate a Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council at this time or in the near future would undermine the EU policy of positive conditionality or “more for more” in its relations with European neighbourhood countries, which is designed to encourage improvements in respect for international law and human rights.

QCEA calls for the complete cancellation of the Dutch-Israeli Cooperation Council until such time as Israel can demonstrate a sincere commitment to international law and human rights in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories.

Yours sincerely,

The Quaker Council for European Affairs

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