

European Community, “Venice Declaration” on the Middle East Concerning the Inclusion of the PLO in Negotiations (June 1980)

European Economic Community. "Resolution of the heads of government and ministers of foreign affairs of the European Council (Venice Declaration)." June 1980. Declaration Resolution of the heads of government and ministers of foreign affairs of the European Council (Venice Declaration), 13 June 1980 and the Cabinet statement, 15 June 1980. 100. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem.



President Jimmy Carter Standing with French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, Italian Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. June 23, 1980. Photo Public Domain

Issued in June 1980, by the nine member states of the European Community, the Venice Declaration presented a framework for a comprehensive solution to the Israel-Arab conflict. Fifteen months earlier, Egypt and Israel signed their bi-lateral peace treaty. The EC promoted a broader agreement between parties to the conflict and specifically elevated Palestinian rights, above what they were defined in the 1978 Camp David Accords. The EC called for “recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, a just solution to the Palestinian problem, their right to self-determination and for the PLO to be associated with the negotiations.” The EC

opposed Israel’s unilateral initiatives to change the status of Jerusalem, which Israel had done since taking the entire eastern part of the city in the June 1967 War. The Declaration supported unequivocally “the right to exist of all States in the region, including Israel,” but the Declaration made no mention of withdrawal from any lands Israel held since 1967, nor did it call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. While the EC wanted a comprehensive Arab-Israeli agreement, it did not mention Jordan or Syria by name.

The Declaration was a definitive EC effort to take an independent public stand on Arab-Israeli conflict mediation, a process that had been dominated by the US, with Europe intentionally excluded since the end of the 1973 War. That process ended in bi-lateral Egyptian-Israeli negotiations and a focus on limited Palestinian self-rule. This was the first time that the EC specifically stated that the PLO should be associated with the negotiations. The US publically differed from the EC when in September 1982, President Reagan issued his statement for the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and said those territories should be eventually “associated with Jordan.” Arab states were particularly pleased by the Venice Declaration. Israeli Prime Minister Begin was deeply perturbed by the Declaration’s call for Palestinian self-determination and the PLO which he considered a terrorist organization. By calling for Palestinian self-determination under the auspices of the PLO, the Declaration was implicitly calling for a PLO state to be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. With those contents, Israeli government roundly dismissed the EC as possible co-mediator with the US in any upcoming Arab-Israeli negotiations.

1. The Heads of State or Government and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs held a comprehensive exchange of views on all aspects of the present situation in the Middle East, including the state of negotiations resulting from the Agreements signed between Egypt and Israel in March 1979. They agreed that growing tensions affecting this region constitute a serious danger and render a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict more necessary and preserving than ever;
2. The nine Member States of the European Community consider that the traditional ties and common interests which link Europe to the Middle East oblige them to play a special role and now require them to work in a more concrete way towards peace;
3. In this regard, the nine countries of the community base themselves on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the positions which they have expressed on several occasions, notably in their Declarations of 29 June 1977, 19 September 1978, 26 March, and 18 June 1979, as well as in the speech made on their behalf on 25 September 1979 by Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs at the thirty-fourth United Nations General Assembly;
4. On the bases thus set out, the time has come to promote the recognition and implementation of the two principles universally accepted by the international community: the right to existence and to security of all the States in the States in the region, including Israel, and justice for all peoples, which implies the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestine people;
5. All of the countries in the area are entitled to live in peace within secure, recognized, and guaranteed borders. The necessary guarantees for a peace settlement should be provided by the UN by a decision of the Security Council and, if necessary, on the basis of other mutually agreed procedures. The Nine declare that they are prepared to participate within the framework of a comprehensive settlement in a system of concrete and binding international guarantees, including (guarantees) on the ground;
6. A just solution must finally be found to the Palestinian problem, which is not simply one of refugees. The Palestinian people, which is conscious of existing as such, must be placed in a position, by an appropriate process defined within the framework of the comprehensive peace settlement, to exercise fully their right to self-determination;
7. The achievement of these objectives requires the involvement and support of all the parties concerned in the peace settlement which the Nine are endeavoring to promote in keeping with the principles formulated in the Declaration referred to above. These principles apply to all the parties concerned, and thus the Palestinian people, and to the PLO, which will have to be associated with the negotiations;
8. The Nine recognize the special importance of the role played by the question of Jerusalem for all the parties concerned. The Nine stress that they will not accept any unilateral initiative

designed to change the status of Jerusalem and that any agreement on the city's status should guarantee freedom of access for everyone to the Holy Places;

9. The Nine stress the need for Israel to put an end to the territorial occupation which it has maintained since the conflict of 1967, as it has done for part of the Sinai. They are deeply convinced that the Israeli settlements constitute a serious obstacle to the peace process in the Middle East. The Nine consider that these settlements, as well as modifications in population and property in the occupied Arab territories, are illegal under international law;
10. Concerned as they are to put an end to violence, the Nine consider that only the renunciation of force or the threatened use of force by all the parties can create a climate of confidence in the area, and constitute a basic element for comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East;

The Nine have decided to make the necessary contacts with all the parties concerned. The objective of these contacts would be to ascertain the position of the various parties with respect to the principles set out in this Declaration and in the light of the results of this consultation process to determine the form which such an initiative on their part could take.