

[INTRODUCTION FROM Ms. MARKS]

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, Ms Marks, for your kind words. Your work on complex security issues, your deep analysis of the peace processes and your ideas on how to make conflict prevention work as a successful instrument of international diplomacy have given us inspiration and guidance in our daily search for peace.

I am pleased and honoured to have been asked to present these awards to three very distinguished writers on the Middle East. I have been asked to say a few words before presenting the awards. Let me give you a brief outline of our Middle East policy against the increasingly dramatic situation in the region.

The reason why the EU is involved in the Middle East is quite simple: we want to see peace, stability and prosperity in our immediate neighbourhood. Now, how can that be achieved in a region that is close to us not only in geographical terms but also in culture, traditions and emotions?

We all know the answer to that. It doesn't take a rocket-scientist to come up with the outlines of the solution, because they have been evident for some time. There are two main ingredients in the recipe for peace that are alas missing in the Middle East today: first, we need to enable Israel to

live securely within internationally recognised borders; and we need a viable, democratic and peaceful Palestinian State with well-functioning institutions on the other side of the border, a border that follows more or less the 1967-line, a border that allows both States to share Jerusalem as their capital, and a border that allows for a just and agreed solution to the question of Palestinian refugees.

I believe from the bottom of my heart that if the parties agree on this there can be peace. I know that someone will say now that this or that person on either side is not capable of making peace; that hate and mistrust have reached such levels that negotiations would be unfeasible; that there are Arabs who will never accept Israel's right to exist, and Jews who will never accept a Palestinian State; that agreeing to the 1967-borders today will not mean that either party will give up their claim to the rest of that small piece of land... Well, these are risks that both sides have to take. It was Yitzhak Rabin who said *'I make peace with my enemy not with my friend'*. A leap of faith is required in the Holy Land. A leap of faith towards a more promising future – and I believe such future can be a bright one for everybody in the Middle East.

In the European Union we have worked for years and without dismay to help to create the basis for a lasting settlement. We have tried to help the parties in their negotiations – not least through the endeavours of Javier Solana and Miguel Moratinos; we have integrated the parties into the Barcelona Process which we hope will provide the framework for a sustainable long term approach to peace in the Middle East; and we have worked for years on Palestinian Authority reform, institution-building,

and the basis for a more democratic, transparent and accountable authority.

We will continue working towards these objectives. In particular, we will continue working with the Palestinians on their reform agenda, on the preparation for elections and the rehabilitation of their administrative structure. And we will do so because it is crucial for the peace process and for the international community's blessing of Palestinian statehood in due course. But more importantly, because this is what the Palestinians want for themselves - they want a genuinely democratic state based on the rule of law. And they want a modern market economy.

There will always be some who want to sabotage such aspirations - because they do not share the same democratic ideals; because they do not want a secular state; or because they do not agree with the goals of the peace process, namely the creation of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and secure final borders for Israel.

We have to tell these people that their efforts will not succeed. Peace is unstoppable.

The articles of the Common Ground News Service/Middle East give hope that there are people out there who work on solutions inspired by the need to co-exist in tolerance and by the hope for a better future. You may say this is naïve given the circumstances. I ask you 'what else is there?' Resignation? desperation? More bloodshed? That can't be; that must not be!

**Common Ground Award for
Journalism,
Brussels, 26 June 2002**

Conflict prevention has failed in the Middle East – indeed the conflict is much older than this young concept of international diplomacy. What is required, rather, is conflict resolution. This is what the European Centre for Common Ground (ECCG) is trying to achieve. Common Ground pursues peaceful methods of dialogue and negotiation – facilitation, mediation, TV and radio programmes – in order to curb present or potential conflicts. And they do so in close co-operation with European Institutions, EU member states, the UN, and the NGO community. They recognise that in the last resort, successful conflict prevention must be driven from *within* the country or region which is in turmoil.

We have co-operated in the past with the European Centre for Common Ground on human rights issues in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as on issues of faith in cross-cultural conflict resolution. Our most recent co-operation which is directly linked to this evening's awards ceremony is a project titled 'Promoting Peace through the Media in the Middle East'. This project aims at bringing together media professionals from the whole region. And it also tries to explore the fragile relationship between civil society and the media in the Middle East. With the support of the Commission and UNESCO this project has led to the creation of the Common Ground News Service that offers news, op-eds, cartoons, features and analysis on a broad range of Middle East issues. And these features are distributed to more than 3500 people and 100 media outlets every week.

The Common Ground Awards for Journalism in the Middle East honour journalists who contribute to a better understanding between people in the Middle East. The winning articles go beyond the daily headlines: they

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break down myths and stereotypes, provide insight into regional debates, and expose readers to new perspectives and promote peaceful coexistence. Above all they break through the barriers so well described recently by Tony Judt, when he commented that "*In the Middle East today each side dwells within hermetically sealed memories and national narratives in which the other side's pain is invisible and inaudible.*"

I am deeply honoured to be able to grant these awards to three persons who are working so bravely and with so much determination for peace in the Middle East:

I am very happy to present the award in the Western press category to Dominique Moïsi, who we all know not only from his perceptive commentaries on the French elections but as also as a prominent scholar on European issues with a strong passion for the Middle East. His winning article calls for a "bolder and less divided" European role in the Middle East; support for Israeli and Palestinian moderates and "distraction of both sides from the temptations of extremism." Amen to that.

It is also my pleasure to award in the Israeli category to Jerusalem Post columnist Helen Schary Motro, a distinguished lawyer who uses her skills not only for writs and other documents of that sort but also for writing fiction, poetry and essays on a variety of subjects. She tells a very moving story in her winning article - full of sorrow but also full of hope; in the belief that the deepest emotions can be overcome and a better future can be built for Palestinian and Israeli children alike.

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And it is with great admiration that I hand over the Arab press award to Sari Nusseibeh, a courageous man who not only advocates peace, tolerance and co-existence - but who does not shy away from speaking his mind on the most difficult issues of the Middle East conflict: the Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem and borders. We all know that without a solution to the refugee issue which is just and acceptable to the parties and to the refugees themselves there will be no end to the conflict. Sari Nusseibeh is trying to break down a wall of myths built on both sides.

[FOLLOWED BY :

WORDS BY MS MARKS

HAND OVER AWARDS

SHORT SPEECHES BY EACH AWARDEE]