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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: EU asks Israel, Palestinians to meet soon (Reuters)

BRUSSELS, Oct 9 (Reuters) - The European Union said on Sunday it plans to invite Israeli and Palestinian representatives to meet "in the coming days" to discuss resuming peace negotiations.

The announcement by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, was made after a meeting of the Middle East Quartet - the EU, the United States, Russia and the United Nations.

The Quartet discussed what to do next to encourage the two sides to resume "substantive" negotiations as soon as possible.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has demanded that Israel halt all settlement building in the occupied West Bank before Palestinians will restart talks. But Israel has made clear it is not ready to do that.

Last month, Abbas formally asked the United Nations to recognise a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a move opposed by Israel and the United States. They say only a negotiated peace can end the Middle East conflict and create a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

In Jerusalem, an Israeli official contacted by Reuters would not comment on the planned invitation, but suggested Israel would be ready to attend.

Israel has "repeatedly expressed its willingness to start direct peace talks with the Palestinians face to face without any preconditions whatsoever," the official said. He added: "We hope the Palestinians will be ready, too."

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