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**Statement to the Security Council by H.E. Mr. Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez,
Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian
People, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

(United Nations Headquarters, New York, 26 January 2016)

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As the last year drew to a close, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, remains deeply troubling. Acts of violence, to which the prevailing despair is driving Palestinian youth, continue. Israel, the occupying power, responds with overwhelming and excessive force. Although a host of challenges are facing the region and also affect many Member States outside it, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains at the top of the agenda, and must not be overshadowed by seemingly more urgent crises.

What many who talk with good cause of the dangers of violent extremism are missing is the fact that the unsolved Question of Palestine is one of the primary tools for extremist recruitment, that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and their ill-treatment of the Palestinian people is one of the main reasons why idealist and impressionable youth are drawn towards those extreme, and unpardonable forms of rebellion. If we, the nations of the world, are fully committed to prevent violent extremism within our own borders and fight it where it exists then we must do all we can to find a comprehensive, just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Question of Palestine, which will allow the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights within a sovereign country of their own, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side-by-side and in peace with Israel.

The path towards this solution is clear, and has been for a long time. The terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the League of Arab States in 2002, and the Quartet road map to a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict endorsed by the Security Council in 2003 are the basis for it. They are accepted by the international community as the best, and as the only way towards a peaceful solution.

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Yes, today the situation on the ground remains bleak and the temptation to give up, or at least press "pause" on this issue, and for the coming period deal with others, is surely great. Gaza is still under near-total blockade and its reconstruction is making progress at much too slow a pace. Israeli settlement construction has not stopped, Israeli settlers continue their extremist actions, and the Israeli government continues to apply double standards when dealing with violence committed by Israelis against Palestinians as opposed to Palestinian struggles against the Israeli occupation. Jerusalem remains the proverbial tinder box, one spark away from igniting a religious war that would embroil the Israel-Palestine conflict in the regional conflagrations.

Yes, the situation seems indeed bleak. But it is in this moment, in such a situation where the Palestinian people cannot see a viable future, where the Israeli public has given up any hope for a peace process, where after over 20 years of on-and-off negotiations no mutual trust is left ... it is precisely in such a moment that we, the people of the world that have come together in these United Nations, must step up and provide the blueprint for a path forward, rekindle the candle of hope and make sure that it never goes out. This is our responsibility and we must not fall short. And within this organisation of ours it is this body, the Security Council, which by our Charter is charged with maintaining international peace and security, that has to shoulder its responsibility and act to move forward the cause of peace for Palestine and Israel. Over the past 12 months there have been efforts and discussions behind the scenes, but it is high time to bring them into the spotlight and put them on the table of this Council. A resolution with clear parameters and a time frame for the end of the conflict would be the right step. The Palestinian people cannot wait any longer, and every delay raises the risk that the damage on the ground becomes truly irreparable. If we let that happen, we will have failed not only the Palestinian people, and their neighbours, but we will have failed the nations of the world who have entrusted us with their peace and security.

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People welcomes all efforts by the Council and its members, by the Middle East Quartet, by any and all actors aiming to find ways out of the current situation, and towards a solution to the Question of Palestine, in the formula of "two States, living in peace and security along each other". The Committee will do its best to support these exertions through its own work and reaffirms its commitment to the principle of a peaceful resolution of the conflict, based on these premises.

Since the last Council debate on the situation in the Middle East took place in October 2015, the Committee has organised the events around the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in November, and held, together with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, a conference on the Question of Jerusalem as well as a Civil Society Forum on the Question of Palestine, both in Jakarta, Indonesia. One aspect of those two events was to highlight the fact that the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a religious one, and that anyone trying to use it to mobilize for a religious confrontation, is misrepresenting the values of their own religion – which echo our shared, universal values of a peaceful coexistence of all people on earth.

In March of this year we will organise a Legal Round Table in Amman, Jordan, to enhance the capacity of the State of Palestine to fulfil its obligations in light of its recent accession to a host of international treaties and conventions. And throughout the year we will continue with our activities to promote the realisation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to support efforts for the achievement of the two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders and the just resolution of all final status issues, and to mobilise assistance to the Palestinian people, as mandated by the General Assembly. The Committee continues to offer its open arms to everyone – governments, academics, civil society – to join in this noble task.
