

*Permanent Observer Mission
of Palestine
to the United Nations*



البعثة الراقبة الدائمة
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Statement by

***H.E. Mr. Yasir Abedrabou
Secretary-General of the Executive Committee
of the Palestine Liberation Organization***

***before the
United Nations General Assembly
62nd Session***

Agenda item 18: Question of Palestine

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New York***

Mr. President,

At the outset, I wish to express our gratitude for your wise leadership and excellent stewardship of the Presidency of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. I also wish to express our thanks and appreciation to the President of the 61st session of the General Assembly, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa.

At the same time, it is my pleasure to extend our thanks and appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to the Committee's Chairman, H.E. Ambassador Paul Badji, and to the esteemed members of the Committee and Bureau. Along with the Committee, I wish to also thank the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat for their tireless efforts and serious work to promote the attainment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights and to mobilize international support for their cause. I would also like to convey our gratitude to H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his support for our cause and his efforts to serve the cause of peace.

Mr. President,

Sixty years have passed since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) in 1947, which partitioned historic Palestine into two States. One of those States came into being – Israel, while the other State has until yet not been established – Palestine. Sixty long years have passed and the question of Palestine remains without a solution and the Palestinian people remain a stateless and dispossessed people, deprived of their legitimate and inalienable rights of self-determination, independence and sovereignty and the right of more than 4 million Palestine refugees to return to their homes and properties.

For more than forty years, the Palestinian people have continued to suffer from the aggressive and oppressive Israeli military occupation of their land, which now constitutes the longest military occupation in modern history, and they still suffer from the extensive, flagrant violation of their human rights, the confiscation of their land, humiliation and constant attacks on their dignity as a people.

Mr. President,

Israel, the occupying Power, in grave violation of international law, continues its military aggression against the Palestinian people, including its incursions and raids into Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps, excessive use of force and extrajudicial executions, which over the years has caused the loss of thousands of Palestinian lives, including children and women, and tens of thousands of injuries. Israel continues to destroy Palestinian homes, properties, infrastructure and agricultural lands. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, since 1967 at least 18,000 Palestinian homes have been destroyed by Israel, leaving thousands of Palestinian families homeless and displaced.

Israel also continues to entrench its occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, via its incessant construction and expansion of illegal colonial settlements. There are currently more than 450,000 Israeli settlers living in the more than 150 settlements constructed on Palestinian lands confiscated by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Early last month, Israel issued orders for the confiscation of at least another 110 hectares of

Palestinian land belonging to four Palestinian villages in an area outside Occupied East Jerusalem. The confiscation of this large tract of Palestinian land will facilitate the creation of a continuous settlement bloc in that area, while simultaneously preventing Palestinian territorial continuity between the area of occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley.

Israel also continues to construct the enormous apartheid, annexation Wall in the West Bank, including in particular in and around East Jerusalem, which has walled-in and transformed Palestinian cities, towns and villages into massive prisons and ghettos. On its official website, the Israeli Government has posted a new map of the Wall that shows the vast length of this Wall and actual annexation of huge areas of Palestinian land. The new route of the Wall affirms previous reports that Prime Minister Olmert ordered changes to the route of the Wall in order to encompass more illegal Israeli settlements and more Palestinian land in the northern, central and southern West Bank in flagrant and deliberate violation of international law and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and in continuation of the unilateral de facto policy pursued by successive Israeli governments. The new route of the Wall will actually increase the area of land Israel is attempting to annex from 9% to 12%, half of this area of which is in and around Occupied East Jerusalem.

The illegal Israeli settlement campaign and the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, not only constitute an obstacle to the achievement of a just and lasting peace between the two peoples, but also a hard blow to the prospects for the actual establishment of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State.

As a result of all these measures, the City of Jerusalem suffers from the imposition of a suffocating siege and the attempts to surround it with the Wall, which isolate the city from the surrounding areas, including the city of Bethlehem, in addition to restricting the access of civilians, both Muslims and Christians, to the city and obstructing their right to visit and worship at the holy places. In addition, the occupying Power continues to carry out numerous measures intended to judaize the Holy City, and change its legal status, historical and cultural character and demographic composition.

Israel also continues to unlawfully detain and imprison approximately 11,000 Palestinians, including children and women, and several officials and parliamentarians. Most of these prisoners and detainees are being held in inhumane conditions and are subject to harsh physical and mental ill-treatment, including acts constituting torture.

Moreover, Israel continues to impose all kinds of measures of collective punishment on the Palestinian people, including severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to and from the Territory and the outside world through prolonged closures and the establishment of more than 550 checkpoints and roadblocks, which are causing the further fragmentation of the contiguity and unity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and transforming it into scattered and isolated Bantustans. At the same time, after declaring the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity" in September, Israel continues to close all of the border crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip and to intensify its siege of this part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Such illegal collective punishment measures have caused the catastrophic deterioration of the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian civilian population.

All of these Israeli measures and practices, in addition to constituting serious violations and grave breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, are totally contradictory to the measures of confidence building needed to continue, to support and to advance the peace process. When we speak of the illegal Israeli policies and practices that I have just mentioned we are speaking about the reality of what is actually happening on the ground. As depressing, negative and frustrating as these facts may be - and as repetitive as it may sound - this is the tragic reality of the Palestinian people living under Israel's occupation and it is incumbent upon us to continuously draw the attention of the international community to this unjust situation until an end is put to all of these Israeli violations and Israel complies with its legal obligations in accordance with international law and U.N. resolutions.

Mr. President,

Over the past few years, the peace process remained stagnant because Israel decided to obstruct any progress in the peace process and to abort all efforts exerted to resume talks and negotiations between the two sides aimed at achieving a final, just and comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on international law, U.N. resolutions and the two-State solution and the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in its entirety.

The international conference that was just held at Annapolis was successful due to the great efforts exerted by the international community reflected in the large number of countries that participated in this conference and the special efforts of the sponsor of the conference, the United States, and the Quartet as well as the exceptional efforts of the Arab nations, which again was reflected by the attendance of sixteen Arab States at the conference. Moreover, we are hopeful that this conference will serve as an important push for the donor conference to be convened next month in Paris.

Mr. President,

Following the Annapolis conference, negotiations between the two sides officially began yesterday on all final status issues to reach a just solution that will guarantee the rights of our people under occupation striving for freedom and independence, and the rights of our refugees seeking to return to their homes. Here, we once again reaffirm the necessity for Israel to comply with all of its obligations. All illegal Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, must be immediately ceased. Settlement outposts should begin to be immediately dismantled and the construction of the apartheid annexation Wall must immediately cease and it too should be dismantled as called for in the ICJ Advisory Opinion. Checkpoints and roadblocks must be removed and the crossings must be opened. The Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem that have been shut down should be allowed to reopen. Prisoners and detainees must be allowed to return to their homes and families.

There must be respect for the Annapolis joint statement in order to advance the attainment of a peace agreement within a timeframe not to exceed the end of 2008, based on the known terms of reference, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, when we focus on the necessity of solving the Palestine question in all its aspects, we affirm that the endeavors to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region must also

address the question of the Occupied Syrian Golan and the Lebanese lands that remain occupied.

At this critical stage we must confront any attempts to undermine this exceptional opportunity before us or any attempts to obstruct it by adhering to narrow agendas or desires to maintain the status quo, which will have a deeply negative, detrimental and long-term impact on situations throughout the entire region.

Mr. President,

A long time has passed; the time has come to go beyond statements and speeches. We need more than good intentions to achieve peace. What we need is for the international community to take strong and effective positions and decisive measures and to redouble efforts to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, and to Israel's repeated, flagrant violations. The Palestinian people must enjoy their freedom and exercise their right to self-determination in their independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and the realization of all the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of the Palestine refugees to return in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. International law and justice must be upheld in order for peace to truly prevail.

There is a historic opportunity before us. All those who want peace must seize this opportunity. There has to be respect for international law. There has to be the political will and determination to push this process forward and overcome all of the obstacles we currently face to lead us towards peace through long-awaited and serious negotiations between the two sides on final status issues: borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security. These are the core issues to which solutions must be reached to enable the establishment of the Palestinian State and the achievement of the peace that we are all striving to achieve in the Middle East.

Sadly, we must refer to the regrettable events that occurred in the Gaza Strip this past June. In this regard, we affirm the necessity for the situation in the Gaza Strip to be restituted to that which existed prior to the events of June 2007 and the restoration of the legitimacy of the Palestinian National Authority institutions under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas to allow for a dialogue between all Palestinian factions to restore our national unity and to preserve the unity, contiguity and integrity of the Palestinian Territory, which all of the Palestinian people strongly desire. The Palestinian land is one land and the Palestinian people are one people and will never be divided.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the immense gratitude and appreciation of the Palestinian people for all of the support and solidarity extended to them by the international community over the many years, including by the United Nations. The Palestinian people are hopeful for the continued support and assistance of the international community, which they need more than ever at this time. In this connection, we express our hope that all countries will vote in favor of all of the draft resolutions submitted under the agenda items of the question of

Palestine and the situation in the Middle East and all other draft resolutions relevant to Palestine that will come before this august Assembly.

We are firm in our conviction that all free and peace loving nations of the world stand for justice and fairness and support the question of Palestine because it is a just and noble cause and because they too wish to see the suffering and pain of our people end with the realization of their rights and freedom in their independent State of Palestine and to see an end to the decades of occupation, conflict and cycles of violence in the Middle East region. Instead, they too, like ourselves, wish to witness and celebrate the flourishing of peace, security, stability, justice and prosperity for all the peoples of the region.

Let us work together without delay to make this vision and goal of peace and justice a reality.

I thank you, Mr. President.