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Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the Second Committee, Item 40: Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources, 61st Session, 20 October 2006:

Madam Chair,

Since this is the first time Palestine takes the floor in this Committee, allow me to begin by congratulating you on your election as Chair of the Second Committee and to wish you the best of luck with the work ahead. I would also like to thank your predecessor, H.E. Mr. Aminu Bashir Wali, for an excellent term served during the last session.

Madam Chair,

The extent of devastation that Israel's thirty-nine years of occupation on the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Occupied Syrian Golan is almost unthinkable. Today, we meet to discuss what could be tallied and reported about this devastation in the short and long terms. However, we must keep in mind the cumulative effect and consequences this devastation will have on future generations as well. For adding to the humiliation and oppression of living under a ruthless military occupation, Palestinians watch helplessly as their land, water, and other natural resources are robbed before their eyes while they are left with nothing but God's blue sky above and a shrinking space of land on which to live and thrive. They are also forced to live alongside their occupiers' untreated hazardous waste and garbage, tolerate its stench, and suffer its life-threatening consequences.

Madam Chair,

Israel continues to construct the illegal Wall and expand the illegal settlements in the West Bank, in open defiance of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

To justify these illegal actions, Israel, the Occupying Power, presents the international community with a host of carefully crafted and worded pretexts. Particularly, the Occupying Power has used the ruse of security considerations to justify its unrelenting violations of international Law and disdain for Palestinian

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rights and resources. However, since actions speak louder than words, Israel's actions on the ground expose these false pretexts.

Madam Chair,

Examining Israel's outright theft of Palestinian water resources is perhaps the best way to expose these false pretexts. For example, Israel's illegal Wall, which will stretch for 670 km once completed, will de facto annex approximately 46% of the West Bank's most valuable water resources, including the rich Western Aquifer, and at least 10% of its most fertile land. Another aspect of this illegal exploitation is presented in the Secretary General's report, contained in document A/61/67 – E/2006/13. It reveals that while "Israel uses 73 per cent of the water available from West Bank aquifers, Palestinians in the West Bank use 17 per cent". 41 Israeli settlements in the Jordan valley alone consume what is equivalent to 75% of the water that the entire Palestinian population of the West Bank uses for domestic and urban uses.

Madam Chair,

The effects of this illegal Wall and settlements are not limited to land and water theft. They extend to impeding Palestinians from accessing education, health, and other vital facilities. For example, access to UNRWA-contracted health care facilities in occupied East Jerusalem decreased by 18 percent over the past year and newborn mortality now accounts for three quarters of all infant deaths. Additionally, the economy and living standards of the Palestinian population have felt the brunt of these illegal actions. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates poverty at 62 percent of the Palestinian population. And despite modest growth in GDP over the past three years, the current GDP remains 25 percent lower than it was in 1999.

Madam Chair,

The environment is another victim of Israel's abuses of Palestinian natural resources. In the West Bank, the illegal Israeli settlements drain and dump liquid as well as hazardous and untreated chemical waste onto Palestinian lands. Even worse, Israel, the Occupying Power, has impeded Palestinians from proper solid waste management in the West Bank and has also annulled their plans to establish proper dumping sites.

Also in line with this abusive policy is the Occupying Power's transfer and disposal of tons of garbage across the Green Line to the West Bank, specifically to sites close to four water wells serving Nablus and nearby areas. Needless to remind that this is in flagrant violation of International Environmental Law, especially the 1989 Basel Convention on Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, which Israel has signed and ratified.

Madam Chair,

After over a year of the Israeli exit from the Gaza Strip, the menace of Israeli settlements remains in the form of piling debris, twisted metal, asbestos, and concrete. According to environmental and health experts, this new-old menace poses a grave danger to the residents' health and environment. This health hazard is present because Israel willfully defied its obligations under International Law by not cleaning up this hazardous debris and impeding the clean up activities that were supposed to start immediately following the exit.

Madam Chair,

The violations I have just discussed are not involuntary or unavoidable. They are not exaggerations or allegations. Rather, they are part and parcel of a thoroughly documented systematic policy intent on creating the prosperity of one people at the expense and detriment of another. A policy whose actions manifest a disdain for Palestinian rights as well as International Law.

Madam Chair,

The "Declaration on Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources", adopted by the General Assembly in resolution (XVII) in 1962, specifically states that permanent sovereignty over natural wealth and resources is "a basic constituent of the right to self-determination". Hence, violating the Palestinian People's permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources by Israel, the Occupying Power, must not be tolerated or treated with laxity.

Finally Madam Chair, I recall the wise words of the late martin Luther King, who said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". With that in mind and given the impunity with which the Occupying Power acts in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, especially in relation to Palestinian natural resources, it is incumbent upon Member States to assume their responsibilities according to International Law. They must uphold their permanent responsibility towards the Question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner on the basis of international legality, as reaffirmed most recently in resolution ES-10/15. This is a legal and moral responsibility of utmost urgency, which no amount of time lapse can dilute or outdate. It must be upheld until the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State over the territory occupied in 1967.