

*Permanent Observer Mission
of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations*



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Dr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, before the United Nations Security Council, Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine Question, 23 July 2013, New York:

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Mme. President,

At the outset, I wish to congratulate the United States of America on this month's presidency of the Security Council, recognizing your skilled leadership, including the current efforts being exerted to advance peace and a more stable, secure Middle East. We also express appreciation to the United Kingdom for its efficient leadership of the Council in June.

I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator of the United Nations, for his briefing and tireless efforts on the ground.

Mme. President,

We meet at a critical juncture in the long history of the international community's attempts to peacefully and justly resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite decades of initiatives, processes and legislation - including firm resolutions by the Security Council based on clear tenets of international law, primarily inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by force and right of peoples to self-determination - the Palestinian people continue to be denied freedom and peace remains elusive.

Yet, we are now at a turning point. Thanks to the current international and regional efforts, foremost by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, in coordination with the Arab partners of the Ministerial Committee for the Arab Peace Initiative and with the support of concerned States from every continent of the globe, there is an opportunity before us to make peace a reality. The decisions made at this time will determine whether the solution of two States - the State of Palestine and the State of Israel - living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders will be achieved, or whether that solution will be brought to an end by Israel's illegal policies. The consequences in this regard would be far-reaching, including the onset of alternative efforts, political, legal and popular, to end this injustice and to realize the inalienable human rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian leadership is cognizant of the significance of this moment and is ready to seize this opportunity. Under President Mahmoud Abbas' leadership, it has responsibly cooperated with Secretary Kerry's initiative and the global efforts to relaunch the peace process for achievement of the two-State solution, based on the parameters of the process enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap.

As acknowledged by the international community on numerous occasions, the Palestinian side has fulfilled its obligations and consistently acted in good faith, despite the enormous challenges

faced under the Israeli occupation. Moreover, the Palestinian leadership has never placed conditions on the peace process. It has only rightly called for respect of international law and the United Nations resolutions that constitute the foundation of that process.

The State of Palestine has deep conviction in the rule of law. Respect of the law is an obligation upon all States, including Israel, the occupying Power, and no pretext can justify breaches of the law. Such respect is vital for overcoming the obstacles that have constantly caused the peace process to fail and exacerbated conditions on the ground. Such respect is what will ensure that the negotiations to resolve all final status issues - Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, prisoners and water - ultimately result in conclusion of the just, lasting peace we have sought for decades. Moreover, we stress, as repeatedly affirmed by the international community, the imperative of clear parameters and a set time frame for the conduct and success of the process.

Indeed, the consensus international position in support of the two-State solution - based on the parameters of, *inter alia*, the 1967 borders as the basis of the two States, Jerusalem as the shared capital of the two States, and a just, agreed solution for the Palestine refugee question on the basis of relevant resolutions - is the position the Palestinian people and their leadership have been committed to for decades, in word and deed. In fact, on 15 November this year, the Palestinian people will mark 25 years - a quarter century - since their formal acceptance of the two-State solution with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine in 1988. This significant compromise to establish our State on only 22% of our historic homeland for the sake of restoring our rights and ending the conflict is among the boldest reflections of our commitment to the path of peace and compromise, despite the historic injustice inflicted on our people.

This commitment has been at the core of our pragmatism, from the signing of the Oslo Accords 20 years ago this September, to our engagement in all incarnations of the peace process from the Madrid Conference forward, to our legitimate actions in the international arena to safeguard and advance the rights of our people over the decades. And, remarkably, this commitment has prevailed despite the many setbacks caused by Israel's unlawful policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem - the Territory constituting the State of Palestine. These illegal actions and the international community's failure to hold Israel accountable have continually undermined the peace process and two-State solution and caused grave hardship for our people. And, yet, the Palestinian leadership has patiently adhered to the noble goals of peace and coexistence, reaffirming its commitment at all junctures, including before the Security Council today.

Mme. President,

For a truly meaningful process to be sustained, however, the reality on the ground must be redressed. While commending the initiative underway, we must act responsibly to ensure that the environment is compatible with and supportive of the goals of the process. How can we collectively succeed if Israel persists with the illegal policies of its 46-year military occupation, concretely reaffirming every day to our people its unwillingness to make peace? We cannot, and tensions, mistrust and instability will consequently continue rising, popular belief in the possibility of peace will continue declining, and this final opportunity to realize the two-State solution will be lost.

As emphasized in our letters to the Council in the three months since the last open debate, Israel has regrettably continued its aggression, colonization, collective punishment and oppression, deepening the occupation and the suffering of the Palestinian people, in flagrant violation of the law and disregard for the calls for compliance and attempts to revive the peace process.

This has included: construction of settlements and the wall, particularly in and around Occupied East Jerusalem and Bethlehem and in the Jordan Valley; declarations about plans for construction of thousands of settlement units; confiscation of hundreds of dunums of land; forced displacement and transfer of civilians, particularly Bedouin families; demolition of homes; violent military raids by the occupying forces into Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps; excessive force against civilian protesters; daily arrests and detention of civilians, including a child as young as 5 years old; continued imprisonment of nearly 5,000 Palestinians, who are enduring horrific conditions and abuse, including several prisoners on hunger strike who are in grave health; obstruction of freedom of movement, foremost the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has entered its seventh year and is the cause of vast humanitarian suffering; and aggravation of religious sensitivities, with provocations against holy sites, especially at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the detention of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and assaults and harassment of worshippers, including during the Christian Easter observances and this Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

At the same time, extremist Israeli settlers continue their criminal rampages throughout our country, terrorizing civilians, attacking homes, destroying farmlands and thousands of trees, vandalizing churches and mosques with vulgar displays of hatred and racism, and threatening the sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The settlers act with sufficient support and incitement from government officials, who continue to encourage settler colonization and *de facto* annexation of Palestinian land. Recent statements by the Israeli Deputy Foreign, Housing and Economy Ministers and Knesset members expose the extremist positions of parts of the Israeli Government coalition, revealing rejection of the two-State solution and the rights of the Palestinian people, and are cause for real concern as we seek to overcome the dangerous political impasse.

Here, we are compelled to reiterate: the two-State solution and the Israeli settlement campaign are completely irreconcilable. Settlement activities are illegal and constitute the major obstacle to peace. Speaking of peace, while engaging in its destruction, makes a mockery of the international community's support for the two-State solution and sabotages all efforts in this regard, as does claiming "readiness to negotiate without conditions", while simultaneously imposing conditions on the ground in the form of illegal measures that entrench the occupation, diminish the viability of two States, and obstruct a peace agreement. Until now, this has regrettably been Israeli policy, whereby settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, increased by 355% in the first quarter of this year alone.

We reiterate further: seizure of another people's land, forced displacement of that people and colonization of their land are war crimes under the 4th Geneva Convention, Additional Protocol 1, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We also recall that the consensus on the illegality of Israeli settlement activities dates back decades, from the first Security Council resolution on settlements, resolution 252 (1968), and first General Assembly resolutions in this regard [resolutions 2252 (ES-V), 2254 (ES-V) of 4 and 14 July 1967], to the present.

The international community must not waver and must continue to demand an end to these illegal actions. There can be no excuse for continued settlement activities, regardless of the manifestation. This message must be made clear to Israel, as recently reaffirmed by the important guidelines adopted by the European Union, which are in line with international law and the global position regarding Israeli settlement activities in the lands occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem. This step is to be highly commended, for it can tangibly contribute to promoting compliance with the law and thus advancing a peaceful solution.

Mme. President,

The facts are sobering and, yet, we are hopeful. As stated earlier, we recognize that we are at a crossroads and we are ready to seriously engage in direct negotiations in good faith. If the opportunity for peace before us is lost, it will not be for lack of commitment by the Palestinian side or lack of effort by the international community, including the Arab States, whose Peace Initiative stands.

For a genuine process and real progress, it is imperative that Israel affirm its claimed commitment to peace and the two-State solution, not just in words, but in deeds. Settlements must be stopped, prisoners must be released, all collective punishment and military operations must be halted, and it must come to the negotiating table in good faith. Israel must choose peace, security and coexistence over the continued occupation and domination of another people.

If Israel persists with its violations, the international community must hold it accountable, acting responsibly to uphold the law, avert further destabilization, and preserve the chance for peace. The Security Council must fulfill its duties; remaining on the sidelines while peace, security and the two-State solution enshrined in its own resolutions are endangered is unacceptable. The Palestinian people thus continue to appeal to the international community to take the steps necessary to support the peace process towards fulfillment of the decades-long promise to assist them to finally realize their rights, justice and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, the foundation of peace in the Middle East.

Mme. President,

Before concluding, I must again convey to the Council our grave concerns about the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria. As the conflict rages, Palestine refugees, like other civilians in the country, continue to suffer loss of life and injury, destruction of their homes and property, and massive displacement. These developments reconfirm the need for a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees in the context of a final peace agreement and in the context of regional peace. While recognizing the extraordinary efforts of UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations to assist the Palestine refugees in this time of crisis, including those who have fled to Lebanon and Jordan, we appeal for the redoubling of international efforts to ensure the protection of all civilians in accordance with international law and to find a political solution to this tragic conflict.

I thank you, Mme. President.