

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



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

Statement by Ambassador Feda Abdelhady Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, before the United Nations Security Council, Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine Question, 21 April 2015: (Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

Allow me, on behalf of the delegation of the State of Palestine, to thank H.E. Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for chairing this important meeting of the Security Council. We congratulate Jordan on its Presidency, with full appreciation for the Jordanian delegation's efforts to address the many critical issues on the Security Council's agenda, including its principled, unwavering support for the just cause of Palestine.

At this time, we also express our appreciation to the delegation of France for its skilled leadership of the Security Council in the month of March.

We thank H.E. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing and his unrelenting calls and efforts for peace, humanity and justice. We congratulate his new Special Representative and Special Coordinator, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, on his appointment, wishing him success and affirming our readiness to cooperate with his efforts. We also reaffirm deep appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry for his years of service. We recognize his efforts in support of the Palestinian people and Government through many critical periods during his tenure, including three brutal Israeli wars against Gaza, and his constant efforts to advance solutions to emergent problems and promote peace, including his impassioned entreaties to the Council to act to bring an end to this devastating conflict, which remains a threat to international peace and security.

Mr. President,

Regrettably, our collective appeals to the Security Council have been unanswered, with all initiatives for serious action thwarted, the latest on 30 December 2014. The failure to act has greatly fostered Israel's impunity and compounded the conflict, with the heaviest price paid in human suffering and in the credibility of the international system.

As we mark next month 67 years since *Al-Nakba* of 1948, and mark in June 48 years since the 1967 Israeli occupation, the tragic irony of these dates should not go unnoticed. The Palestinian people are enduring the longest occupation in modern history, and over 5 million Palestine refugees have been enduring nearly seven decades of exile. They are a people struggling to preserve their national identity and existence in the face of vast challenges in their ongoing quest for liberation, and their crisis has become untenable; it has become existential.

When Palestinians in Gaza are mercilessly slaughtered and maimed by the Israeli occupying forces in their homes, UN schools, playgrounds and hospitals; when mothers and fathers are killed and 1500 children are orphaned in the course of 51 days; when destruction and humanitarian disaster is wantonly inflicted on them; when they are subjugated to a dehumanizing, suffocating blockade,

crippling their society, forcing them to live in poverty in the ruins of their communities, and isolating them from the entire world... the crisis is existential.

When they are killed and injured by Israeli occupying forces in peaceful protests for simply demanding freedom and an end to occupation; when their land is stolen and colonized; when their homes are demolished and they are dispossessed, impoverished and forcibly displaced; when they are terrorized by extremist settlers; when their religions are insulted and religious sites, including mosques and churches in their Holy City of Jerusalem, are desecrated; when thousands of civilians, including children, are detained and imprisoned, their minds and bodies tortured, their families broken... the crisis is existential.

When the State of Israel legislates more than 50 discriminatory and racist laws against its Palestinian Arab citizens and constantly attempts to negate their identity and history; when that State's political, religious and military leaders voice threatening diatribes against them, including calls to "chop off heads with axes" of those who oppose their extremist policies and calls for the "transfer" of Palestinian Arabs... the crisis is existential.

When a refugee camp in Syria, where Palestine refugees have peaceably resided for more than 60 years awaiting a solution to their plight, is ravaged by war and siege, comes under barbaric assault of ISIL terrorists, and is described by the Secretary-General as "*the deepest circle of hell*", with children, women and men forced to flee for their lives, dispersed and traumatized once again; when Palestinians are drowning in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea along with others attempting to escape war and poverty... the crisis is existential.

Mr. President,

How many indignities, injustices and tragedies must one people endure? How far must the situation deteriorate before the Security Council upholds its Charter duties and own resolutions to contribute to a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and to peace and security in our region? How long will Israel, the occupying Power, be permitted to deny the Palestinian people their rights and freedom without consequence? How long will Israel ignore the bold Arab Peace Initiative, insisting instead to impose endless conflict on our region?

When we have reached this point, the depths of crisis so grave, the Security Council's deliberations on the Question of Palestine should be anything but routine; the sense of urgency should be great. There is unanimity that the situation is unsustainable and a solution must be achieved without delay. The exception is Israel, which remains intransigent, continuing to believe it is a State above the law and can perpetrate crimes and obstruct peace with zero accountability and falsely believing that the conflict can be "managed" and the occupation can continue indefinitely. This was starkly reaffirmed last month when the two-State solution, enshrined in Council resolutions from 242 (1967) onward, was openly ridiculed and tossed aside by the Israeli Prime Minister during the elections, further proving Israel's deceit through years of negotiations.

Faced with this situation, will the Council work to salvage that solution, or allow it to disintegrate, triggering a frantic drive for alternative solutions - foremost the one-State - and guaranteeing many more years of violent conflict and suffering?

We believe it is time for leadership by the Council. The fundamental parameters of the two-State solution have long been clear and globally-endorsed: it must be based on the relevant Security

Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative; it must be based on the 4 June 1967 borders; Israel must fully withdraw from the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and end its occupation in all manifestations, including the illegal settlement enterprise; a just solution must be found for the status of Jerusalem as the capital of two States; and a just solution must be achieved to the Palestine refugee question based on resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

There is also broad agreement that creating a credible political horizon requires setting a timeframe to end the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people need to believe – and be given hope – that this occupation will end. And, admitting the failure of more than 20 years of negotiations, it is widely agreed that the political process should not be reincarnated and that an international conference and framework of support for negotiations would be a more rational, viable path towards a solution. Moreover, there is agreement that the critical situation in Gaza cannot be ignored in any attempts to move a political process forward.

Mr. President,

As we consider this consensus, we recall that in 1947 there was actually no consensus, and yet the international community somehow found the political will to act, adopting resolution 181 (II), partitioning Mandate Palestine and creating the State of Israel. In 2015, however, there is an international consensus on the two-State solution. Based on that consensus, and when 135 countries recognize the State of Palestine and when European parliaments are calling on their governments to accord official recognition, as an investment towards saving and actualizing the two-State solution, it is high time for the international community to exert the political will to make the two-State solution a reality: to achieve the State of Palestine's independence, to rectify the historic injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people, and to establish genuine Palestinian-Israeli peace and coexistence.

We thus appeal to the Security Council to seriously respond to this crisis and to assist the parties to overcome the dangerous impasse. A meaningful resolution must be adopted and, more importantly, the determination must be found to implement the international will for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution, whereby the State of Palestine and State of Israel can live in peace and security within internationally-recognized borders.

We commend France's initiative in this regard, in close coordination with the Arab Ministerial Follow-up Committee, and the widespread calls by Member States for the Council to uphold its duties and their clear expressions of support and readiness to contribute to creating a credible political horizon.

Palestine stands ready to cooperate with these efforts, reaffirming our commitment to pursuing a peaceful, political, diplomatic and legal path for realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and a just, comprehensive peace that fulfills their legitimate national aspirations, including to live in freedom and dignity in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for the Palestine refugees.

But beyond a political process, the situation on the ground must change. Immediate efforts are needed to stem the deterioration, before the situation completely destabilizes and the solution slips beyond our reach. The international community must urgently act to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its illegal policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, where 2014 witnessed the highest civilian death toll since the occupation

began in 1967 (OCHA annual overview). Hollow words and promises will not suffice. The new Israeli Government must be demanded to demonstrate its intentions and commitment for peace and respect for international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israel must cease its settlement activities. We cannot have a two-State solution while Israel is actively and illegally altering the demographic and physical situation on the ground and entrenching the occupation. It must cease confiscation of Palestinian land, construction of settlements and the wall, demolition of homes and forced displacement of Palestinian civilians. It must bring a halt to the terror, violence, provocations and incitement by its settlers, including in Occupied East Jerusalem and towards Al-Aqsa Mosque, a toxic situation that could erupt at any moment, including in a religious conflict. It must end the arrest and detention of civilians, including children, and stop its abuse of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and act forthwith to release them. It must cease its constant attempts to undermine and the Palestinian Government and institutions.

In the Gaza Strip, the scars of war - in the landscape and in the minds, hearts and bodies of traumatized Palestinian children, women and men - must be healed. Emergency efforts are needed to alleviate the humanitarian disaster wrought by the Israeli war against Gaza. Recent reports, including by OCHA, UNRWA, UNICEF and AIDA, attest to the dangers of this festering crisis and need for action, and we must heed the warnings. The illegal Israeli blockade must end and Gaza's crossings must be opened for unimpeded humanitarian access and sustained, regular movement of persons and goods into and out of Gaza and a link with the West Bank. Reconstruction is imperative, as more than 110,000 remain internally displaced, and the fuel and water crises must be addressed.

We appeal to donors to honor reconstruction pledges and recognize the generosity of donors who have done so. We also appeal for continued support to the Palestinian National Consensus Government, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, to empower it to assume full responsibility in Gaza and play its role in addressing the many challenges. All of this is essential for rebuilding Gaza, reviving its destroyed economy and giving hope to our people. The alternative is allowing desperation, anger and radicalization to rise, especially among our large youth population, making inevitable another implosion, which must be averted at all costs.

Here, we also reiterate our call for protection for the Palestinian people. They are a defenseless civilian population entitled to protection under international humanitarian law and to avail themselves of all the protections of international law. That is the primary reason for our accession to the Geneva Conventions, core human rights instruments and other international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We will not cease calling, and working, for the protection of our people, accountability for all the Israeli war crimes perpetrated against them, and justice for the victims.

Mr. President,

Before concluding, I wish to add a few words about the crisis of Palestine refugees in Syria, particularly in the Yarmouk refugee camp. The conflict in Syria has rendered their situation precarious and their needs for assistance and protection are immense.

We welcome the press statement issued yesterday by the Council and the press elements of 6 April specifically on Yarmouk, and recall Security Council resolutions 2139 (2013), 2165 (2014) and

2191 (2014), and urge full compliance with their provisions. The obligation to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict must be respected by all parties. We reiterate the calls for unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access and assistance to the camp's residents and those displaced from Yarmouk and for the safe temporary relocation of any civilians seeking refuge from the violence. We recognize the efforts of UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl during this crisis, including his important Council briefings and visits to Yarmouk, and are grateful for the valiant efforts of UNRWA, along with partners in the field, in providing support to the Palestine refugees in Syria and in the neighboring countries despite the extremely difficult, unstable circumstances. We urge donors to respond to UNRWA emergency appeals as swiftly and generously as possible, fully recognizing the longstanding support of the international community and of the Host Governments over the decades.

At this time, we also reaffirm the official position of the Palestine Liberation Organization to maintain the neutrality of the Palestine refugee camps in Syria and the refusal to be drawn into the conflict. The Palestinian leadership also fully shares the international community's hopes for a political solution to end the horrific conflict in Syria.

In closing, we reiterate that this tragic crisis reconfirms the real vulnerability of the Palestine refugees and the need for a just solution for their plight in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli peace that we continue to seek. Although hopes for peace have diminished, our conviction in the justness of our cause and our commitment to peace remain resolute and we respectfully implore all of Members of the Security Council seated at this table to demonstrate the responsibility and leadership needed to open the doors for peace, to revive hope, and to advance these goals as matter of both urgency and necessity for our region and world.

I thank you, Mr. President.