

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



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

Statement by 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, 21 October 2014: (Check against delivery)

Mme. President,

I congratulate the friendly country of Argentina on its presidency of the Security Council this month and express our appreciation for your able leadership of the Council's efforts to address the many critical issues on its agenda at this time.

I also express our appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his important briefing and deep gratitude for his dedicated peace efforts. We are grateful for your leadership of the United Nations delegation to the "Cairo International Conference on Palestine – Reconstructing Gaza" and for your recent visit to the State of Palestine, including to the Gaza Strip, where you witnessed firsthand the massive destruction and devastation wrought by the Israeli military aggression in July and August and the suffering that continues in the absence of real recovery, reconstruction and sustainable solutions to core issues of this conflict.

We have long appealed for the Security Council members to visit Palestine to see unfiltered these realities and the grave injustice being endured by the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. We are certain this would better inform the Council's deliberations and compel greater resolve to contribute to a viable solution through implementation of the Council's resolutions and in line with its Charter duty for international peace and security. As noted by the Secretary-General during his visit to Gaza, "No amount of Security Council sessions, reports or briefings could have prepared me for what I witnessed today". At this critical time, we again appeal for such a visit by the Council, stressing the imperative of salvaging the prospects for Palestinian-Israeli peace.

The centrality of the UN in pursuit of a peaceful solution is indisputable. Mr. Secretary-General, your expressions of solidarity and support resonated deeply with our people, who recognize the historic role of the UN in advocating for justice and for the rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, and who continue to look to the UN to ease their hardships and lead the way to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. We join you today in commending the extraordinary work of the UN agencies on the ground, which exerted valiant efforts during the recent crisis in Gaza, including, *inter alia*, UNRWA, OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, WFP and UNMAS, as well as UNSCO, led by Special Coordinator Robert Serry, to whom we express appreciation for his role in facilitating the recent agreement regarding access to and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

Today, we also pay tribute to the eleven Palestinian national staff of UNRWA who lost their lives during the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. We honor their selfless humanitarian service to their people and convey sincerest condolences to their families and colleagues. We also memorialize the many others of our humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as journalists, who were killed while aiding others or trying to give voice to the anguish of our people during this criminal war.

Mme. President,

Nearly two months since the Israeli aggression against Gaza ended, following the ceasefire reached on 26 August under the auspices of Egypt, the magnitude of the carnage, terror and destruction inflicted continue to weigh heavily, impacting every aspect of life and fueling despair and hopelessness. The Secretary-General has described the toll as “*beyond words*”, a sentiment repeatedly conveyed in the universal expressions of disbelief and shame that such devastation and trauma could again be inflicted on the Palestinian people and so cruelly, deliberately and systematically. While all may know by now the figures, they merit repeating in this Council – to place on official record, but also to impel a greater sense of urgency for expediting recovery, including by the complete lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade, which continues to suffocate Gaza and impede efforts to alleviate this humanitarian disaster, as well as for expediting the long-overdue solution to this conflict.

As of 26 August 2014, among the breaches of international law, amounting to war crimes, committed by Israel, the occupying Power, in its 50-day aggression against Gaza, were the following:

- 2,180 Palestinians were killed, the majority civilians, among them 516 children and 283 women.
- 142 families lost three or more members in the same incident, with a total of 739 people from these families perishing, including in Israeli bombings that flattened homes atop entire families. This fact confirms in stark terms the excessive, indiscriminate nature of Israel’s offensive and the abject failure to protect civilians. The numbers also belie Israel’s claims to the contrary, including false claims about “human shields”. Here, I recall a statement by Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Kyung-Wha Kang at the height of the conflict: “*Families are taking the heart-wrenching decision to split to different locations – mother and son to one; father and daughter to another – hoping to maximize the chance one part of the family survives*”. Our people were trying desperately to save themselves from the Israeli war machine.
- 1,500 girls and boys have been orphaned. More than 373,000 traumatized children require psychosocial support.
- More than 11,000 Palestinians were injured, including 3,000 children, of them 1,000 disabled for life. Until now victims of Israeli assaults are dying die due to the severity of wounds or lack of life-saving medical treatment in Gaza.
- More than half a million people were displaced at the height of the aggression, the largest displacement of Palestinian civilians since 1967.
- More than 80,000 homes were damaged by the occupying forces, with 20,000 homes either entirely destroyed or damaged beyond habitation. 108,000 people have been rendered homeless, with more than 40,000 people continuing to shelter at 18 UNRWA schools.
- More than 100 UN facilities were damaged, including UNRWA schools, where civilians believed they were safe under the UN flag, yet where many lost their lives in abhorrent Israeli attacks.
- 75 hospitals and clinics were damaged and 23 health personnel were killed and 83 injured.
- More than 33,000 meters of water and waste networks were damaged.
- The attack on the Gaza Power Plant caused up to 22 hours a day of power outages, with 18-hour outages continuing due to lack of fuel, with the many consequences for civilian life.
- At least 500 economic and industrial facilities, constituting 60% of Gaza’s production capacity, were destroyed, directly and indirectly impacting more than 35,000 jobs.
- 8,000 unexploded ordnance - 10% of the munitions launched by Israel at Gaza - remains scattered in civilian areas, obstructing rubble removal and reconstruction and endangering lives.

- The same period witnessed the killing of at least 32 Palestinian civilians in violent and destructive raids throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the arrest and detention of more than 800 civilians, including children.

Mme. President,

This list is not exhaustive and these facts alone cannot convey the depth of our people's misery following this horrific war and our collective grief at the immense loss of life and tragedy endured. As we seek to move forward, we cannot ignore the pain of the families who have lost and buried their loved ones and must do all we can to heal the injured bodies, wounded souls and broken spirits of those who remain. Serious efforts are required to allay their suffering, but also to ensure accountability for these crimes and give them hope for the future. And, here, I must clarify: tending to the wounds of our people and seeking justice is neither incitement nor provocation; rather it is responsible, moral behavior and an absolute imperative to promote genuine healing, without which peace and reconciliation between the two peoples can ever be realized.

Thus, while we are grateful for the outpouring of support and the generosity and principled commitments by donor countries in Cairo and reaffirm our gratitude to the Governments of Egypt and Norway for their sponsorship of the Conference, we reiterate that stressed by UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl: "*Nowhere in the world does humanitarian assistance alone make up for the denial of dignity and rights.*" Palestine is not the exception. Hence, while we seek to immediately address, in coordination with the UN, urgent humanitarian and reconstruction needs, to restore dignity to the lives of our people in Gaza, including by lifting the blockade, and to consolidate the ceasefire, we will also act resolutely, with the support of all concerned and friendly countries, to ensure a broader political horizon and mobilize the global will for political action to justly, finally and peacefully resolve the conflict's core issues and to realize the legitimate national aspirations and rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and freedom.

Mme. President,

The time is past due to acknowledge that Israel, the occupying Power, rejects peace and is deliberately destroying the two-State solution and undermining every effort to realize it. This is not the Palestinian narrative; this is the reality confirmed over and over by the actions of the Israeli Government and the words of its representatives at the highest levels.

On the ground, Israel's illegitimate and destructive colonial project continues apace. As throughout the 9-months of US Secretary of State John Kerry's sponsored negotiations, Israel persists with its settlement construction, construction of its apartheid, annexation wall, land confiscations, home demolitions and forced displacement of civilians, including threats to displace more than 12,000 Bedouins. Occupied East Jerusalem and its Palestinian inhabitants remain a primary target of these illegal practices as the occupying Power continues its attempts to illegally alter the demography, character, identity and spirit of the Holy City, with repeated provocations at Al-Aqsa Mosque, threatening to deepen polarizations and instigate a religious conflict with grave consequences, paying no heed to the clear sensitivities and the volatility in the region. And, armed settlers persist with their terror rampages against Palestinian civilians – just days ago killing a 5-year old Palestinian girl, Inas Khalil – in addition to incessant attacks on our land, mosques and churches.

While the international community appeals for calm and restraint, Israeli officials are outbidding each other with provocative declarations and incitement against the Palestinian people and their government. Just weeks ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu stood before the General Assembly extolling the status quo and denying there is an occupation, and the Israeli War Minister Ya'alon has declared openly that they will never allow the two-State solution and blatantly exposed their intentions to force the Palestinian people into isolated, disconnected Bantustans, with no sovereignty and under Israel's perpetual subjugation.

These declarations and actions are predicated on the erroneous notion that such an immoral, unjust outcome would ever be accepted. We reiterate in response: the Palestinian people will never forgo their inalienable human rights, including to freedom, independence and sovereignty, and they will never forgo justice and the goal of peace. We believe that the international community too will never accept such an injustice. Our conviction is firm that the international community will more precisely continue to demand respect for international law and for the consensus solution rooted in UN resolutions and will continue to advocate for realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, to defend the vulnerable and to seek peace and justice.

Here, we also reaffirm before this Council that the Palestinian people and the Palestinian national consensus government, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, remain fully committed to peace and will continue to exert every effort, in partnership and with the support of all concerned countries, to achieve as soon as possible a just, comprehensive and viable solution that brings a complete end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and achieves the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security and within recognized borders, and a just solution for the Palestine refugee question in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). In this regard, we reiterate the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and recognize the role of our Arab brethren in supporting peace efforts.

Mme. President,

If we are ever to attain these urgent objectives, we cannot return to the same cycle of failed negotiations, which are only used by Israel as a means to alleviate international pressure and as a cover for its illegal schemes to entrench, rather than end, its occupation. How many times have our protestations at Israel's settlement activities and collective punishment of our people, including the cruel blockade of Gaza, been met with demands that we restrain ourselves to avoid "*undermining the peace process*"? The credibility of that process has been nullified by Israel, and it is high-time to move beyond speaking of the two-State solution in theory and time to act forthwith to actualize it, before the small opportunity that remains vanishes – an impending reality widely acknowledged.

It is thus that we have approached the Security Council with the initiative of a draft resolution reaffirming the parameters of the two-State solution and delineating a time frame for an end to the 47-year Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem, and for attainment of the independence and rights of the Palestinian people. As affirmed by President Abbas before the Assembly, we are committed to this peaceful, political, non-violent, legal path to achieve our rights and to establish peace and security.

The elements of the draft resolution are thus based fully on the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions comprising the foundation of a lasting peace settlement. Moreover, the draft calls for a cessation of Israel's illegal policies and practices, its compliance with international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and for the

protection of the Palestinian people, which are imperative for reducing tensions, promoting calm and creating the appropriate environment and level of trust required for conduct of genuine, accelerated negotiations to end the occupation and resolve the core issues.

We reiterate our call to the members of the Security Council and the international community to support this initiative and support the approach to reaffirm the fundamental parameters for a just solution and to inject new momentum into the efforts to achieve lasting peace and security between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. We urge all States to uphold their responsibilities - collectively here at the United Nations and as High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions, as well as individually – to back these efforts towards making peace a reality. In this regard, we express gratitude to Sweden for its principled announcement regarding recognition of the State of Palestine as well as the motions on recognition by the parliaments of the United Kingdom and Spain, and we encourage those who have not recognized the existence of our State to do so as a legitimate and necessary contribution to peace.

In closing, to our people – in the Occupied Palestine, in the refugee camps of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and in the Diaspora – we reiterate our resolve to ending their plight and to ensuring their rights, national aspirations and well-being. We recall that asked by President Abbas at the Cairo Conference: *“Has the time not come for righteousness and justice to prevail in Palestine? Has the time not come for this historic injustice against our people to end?”* We believe that time has come and we appeal to the international community for all support possible to our efforts to realize these noble, long-overdue objectives.

I thank you, Mme. President.