

*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, New York, 18 April 2016:
(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

At the outset, I express the State of Palestine's congratulations to China on its skilled leadership as the presidency of the Security Council this month and express appreciation for the convening of this important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing on the current situation and for his continuous efforts to address this longstanding issue on the UN agenda in the interest of peace and justice.

Mr. President,

Since our last debate in January, we have addressed the Security Council on a near weekly basis regarding the critical situation in Occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, as a result of Israel's illegal and destructive policies and measures. In each communication to this august Council, we have tried to draw urgent attention to the grave breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights violations being systematically committed by the occupying Power, including its occupying forces and terrorist settlers. We have equally appealed for urgent action, in line with international law, to compel Israel to halt its crimes and violations, which are inflicting widespread suffering on the Palestinian civilian population, further inflaming tensions and destabilizing the situation, destroying the two-State solution and sabotaging the chances for a peaceful solution.

Regrettably, this has all been to no avail. The Security Council remains paralyzed, failing to uphold its obligations, in accordance with its Charter duties, international law and its own resolutions. It continues – debate after debate, consultation after consultation, and letter after letter – to disregard the global calls to act seriously to redress this open, bleeding wound in the international body by upholding international law and fulfilling its duties to advance a solution for the conflict to assist the Palestinian people to finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have been unjustly denied and to achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace, security and coexistence.

Indeed, those are the principal objectives at the core of every appeal we have made to this Council – week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. And our appeals have all been made in full accord with international law and not on some baseless claim or desire. Nothing that we come to this chamber to ask for is beyond the realm of legality, beyond the parameters of justice, or beyond the imperatives of peace.

And yet, every time we approach the Security Council, we are chided by a Council member and told that it's either “not the right time”, or not the “appropriate venue” to address the matter, or, ironically, that “the peace process will be undermined” somehow by seeking rights and peace, or that the doors of the Council are totally closed, period. When will it ever be the right time to approach the Council? At what point of crisis will this Council be galvanized to finally act?

After years of restraint – years of dramatic decline of the situation to dangerous levels; years of unquantifiable loss and suffering for the Palestinian people; years of destruction of the two-State solution and obstruction of the prospects for peace; and years of immense damage to the Security Council’s credibility and the rule of international law – we can no longer wait and can no longer accept excuses and pretexts, domestic or otherwise, that permit the violation of the law and our people’s rights by the occupying Power with total impunity.

Mr. President,

On the ground, the corrosive attrition of the two-State solution by Israel’s illegal settlement activities has been unrelenting. Confiscation and *de facto* annexation of land, settlement construction, wall construction, demolition of Palestinian homes and property, and forced transfer of Palestinian civilians continue unabated, all in utter contempt and grave breach of international law, including the 4th Geneva Convention and the Security Council’s resolutions, and in blatant mockery of the international community’s demands for an end to all Israeli settlement activities.

While in the 26 January open debate, we heard loud and clear the reaffirmations of the illegality of Israel’s settlement activities and the unanimous calls for a halt to all such policies and measures, what we have witnessed instead is the intensification of this illegal behavior, further fragmenting the contiguity of our State’s territory and gravely undermining the viability of the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders.

Thousands more dunums of Palestinian land have been confiscated by Israel in the West Bank, with over 2,300 dunums slated for expropriation south of Jericho and over 1,200 dunums south of Nablus in the span of one week alone. Home demolitions by the occupying Power have also alarmingly spiked, as reported by OCHA and UNRWA, with more than 586 homes or structures demolished and more than 700 Palestinians forcibly displaced and rendered homeless since the start of this year. Bedouin Palestine refugees have been especially affected by the demolitions and entire communities are threatened with forced transfer. Of course, the recent period has also witnessed advancement of plans for the construction of hundreds more settlement units, including in the past week when the occupying Power decided to proceed with construction of at least 250 settlement units, which will end up housing thousands more Israeli settlers, adding to the over 650,000 settlers already illegally transferred to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

The stark reality is that, as reported by the Israeli organization Peace Now, plans for construction in Israeli settlements increased by 250% in the first quarter of 2016, as compared to the same period last year. We are thus compelled to ask the Council: does this not seriously call into question, once again, the credibility of Israel’s professed commitment to the two-State solution or of ever ending its occupation of our land? How can these facts in any way be reconciled with the Council’s clear demands for an end to Israel’s settlement activities and to all attempts to alter the demography, character and status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, as per its own resolutions, *inter alia*, 298 (1971), 446 (1979), 452 (1979), 465 (1980), 476 (1980) and 478 (1980)? When will the Council hold Israel accountable for these violations and insist on compliance, the minimum, most essential requirement for upholding the law, overcoming this major obstacle to peace, and preserving the possibility of the two-State solution?

Mr. President,

In tandem with Israel's colonization of our land, it continues its aggression against our people, with Palestinian casualties mounting as a result of daily military raids by Israeli occupying forces and violence and terror attacks by extremist Israeli settlers, in no small part fueled by the incitement and inflammatory rhetoric of Israeli government officials, including by the Israeli Prime Minister and members of his cabinet, and by extremist religious figures.

Since the current unrest began in October 2015, more than 200 Palestinian men, women and children have been killed, with the bodies of many of those killed withheld by the occupying Power, even denying them dignity in death. As they did in the war on Gaza in 2014, the occupying forces have also continued to use excessive force, injuring more than 16,000 people, including thousands of children and women, in the past six months. This same period has also witnessed the detention of more than 4,000 Palestinians, adding to the ranks of over 7,000 Palestinians, among them 450 children, now imprisoned or detained by Israel.

Our children and youth are being especially targeted and traumatized by this cruel occupation as Israeli occupying forces operate on a blatant "shoot to kill" policy, with children as young as 13 years of age shot and killed without consequence. The stories of Palestinian children and youth killed in broad daylight, including those extra-judicially murdered by the occupying forces have become too numerous to recount. Yet we have tried, in our weekly letters to the Council, to draw attention to these brutal murders and to share the names of the innocent human lives so violently taken and so tragically lost.

Faced with such relentless aggression by the occupation, Palestinian children, one generation after another, are being permanently scarred and the present and future fabric of our society is being destroyed. And yet, the Security Council remains silent and the Palestinian people continue to be denied the protection they are in dire need of and entitled to in accordance with international humanitarian law. The reality is that a defenseless civilian population is being left to the merciless brutality of this nearly-half century military occupation, armed to the teeth with the most lethal and sophisticated military weaponry.

Our appeals for protection have been met with sympathy at best and indifference at worst, and we have been repeatedly told to be "reasonable" about what the Council can or can't do, in spite of the Council's own legislation, including resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), clearly calling for protection of the Palestinian people and in spite of the study of precedents shared by the Secretary-General with the Council in October 2015, on which there has not even been one serious discussion. The failure to protect, as in all other cases in history, will only foster greater Israeli impunity and disregard for Palestinian life, endangering even more innocent civilians.

Mr. President,

At a time when the situation is boiling, the passivity and silence of the Security Council is truly shocking. Stopping the deterioration of the situation and salvaging the prospects for peace requires responsible action without delay. While we have heard repeatedly how unsustainable the status quo is, in fact there is no status quo and the situation, far from being static, is worsening every single day, inching towards an implosion.

The Council cannot stand idly by waiting for the next full-blown crisis. It is illogical and unacceptable to continue appeasing Israel's intransigence and arrogant, reckless flouting of the law. Israel must be held accountable for its crimes and violations of an entire people's rights, including to

self-determination and freedom, for once and for all. We have said it before in this chamber and must say it again: the crisis is existential and we can no longer wait.

We will thus act responsibly to uphold our duties to the Palestinian people and will continue to do whatever we can in the international arena, foremost here at the UN and fully based on international law using all diplomatic, political, legal and non-violent means, to redress the plight of our people, alleviate their suffering and advance the realization of their rights, justice and peace.

We have thus begun our efforts, and continue our appeals, for the Council to act through the adoption of a clear and firm resolution to address the immediate issues before us, including, *inter alia*, the illegality of the Israeli settlement campaign and its destructive impact on the two-State solution; the rising extremism and violence of Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and the need for their protection; and the urgency of international and regional efforts, particularly within the context of the Arab Peace Initiative, to create a credible political horizon and support the parties to de-escalate the volatile situation, rebuild trust, and uphold their legal obligations and commitments towards resolving all final status issues and achieving a just, lasting, comprehensive peace.

Consultations are underway with Egypt, as the Arab representative in the Security Council, along with our other partners in the Arab Ministerial Committee for a decision on when to formally proceed. We welcome the support of all concerned parties for this effort and the calls for the Council to uphold its duties towards the question of Palestine before the situation further unravels, more innocent lives are lost, and the two-State solution is relegated to the archives of history.

In this regard, we also commend the efforts being undertaken by the Quartet as well as by the Government of France. We note that the French initiative in particular emphasizes the urgency of the matter – a matter that cannot be shelved or placed on a backburner until all other crises in the Middle East are resolved and one that, if left unattended, will only cultivate greater Israeli impunity and more fertile ground for radicalization on both sides – and also significantly emphasizes the need for a collective process, with the serious engagement and support of international and regional partners, including a role for the Security Council, to help the parties resolve all final status issues and finally bring an end to the occupation and the conflict as whole.

Indeed, it is time to stop “management” of the conflict; this conflict is not intractable, its solution has been long known and firmly rooted in UN resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community must move beyond slogans and professing its commitment to human rights, justice and the two-State solution in theory and actually mobilize the political will to resolve the conflict. And, alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine can never replace a just solution as the ultimate objective.

It is surreal to witness the collective hand-wringing of the international community at the deplorable humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip as if it were caused by an uncontrollable natural disaster, rather than the man-made disaster that it really is, wantonly inflicted by the Israeli war machine and the illegal Israeli blockade – by air, land and sea – that has isolated, impoverished, traumatized and dehumanized the entire Palestinian civilian population of Gaza. And despite the deeply regrettable political divide in Palestine and the prolonged efforts to achieve reconciliation and unity as a matter of national urgency, the failure to bridge this divide cannot be used as an excuse to continue imprisoning 1.8 million people and forcing them to live in the ruins of war and in mass deprivation.

Faced with this reality and Israel's relentless onslaught against the Palestinian civilian population and colonization in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, how can it be expected that our people, especially our youth, maintain any belief in international law and the international community's promises to uphold it? How can they maintain any hope that this injustice will end? And, in the absence of hope and belief, how is it possible to stave off despair and push back against the tide of radicalism and extremism plaguing our world?

Mr. President,

The time is long overdue for ending the suffering of the Palestinian people under this illegal foreign occupation and ensuring the realization of their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the Palestine refugee plight, the most protracted refugee crisis in the world.

If reason, responsibility and legal obligations fail to move this Council, perhaps reflecting on the immense human suffering caused by this inhumane occupation might create compassion and invoke moral responsibility to act. There are too many compelling human stories to tell, but I wish to conclude with one today:

On a recent visit to the Aida refugee camp in the West Bank, an Australian Premier, Michael Baird, met with a group of young Palestinian children and asked one of the boys what he dreamed of becoming when he was older. The boy's response was: *"It's hard to have dreams when you know they can't come true"*.

When children feel they cannot even dream, we must acknowledge the depths of despair and hopelessness and human devastation that this occupation and conflict have wrought. We must also acknowledge the depths of our failure and can no longer ignore or postpone the urgency to act. Reviving their hope, rectifying this historic injustice, making peace a reality and saving the future generations of both Palestinian and Israeli children depend on it.

I thank you, Mr. President.