

*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, 12 July 2016:
(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

At the outset, we congratulate Japan on its skilled leadership as President of the Security Council and express appreciation for the convening of this important open debate. I also thank the United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, for his valuable briefing to the Council.

Mr. President,

The Security Council is meeting against the backdrop of an extremely volatile and tense situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and ongoing deadlock in the efforts to create a viable political horizon to resolve for once and for all this deadly, destructive and tragic conflict. It is also meeting against the backdrop of ongoing regional and international initiatives aimed at salvaging the two-State solution and the prospects for peace and charting a way forward for their realization. Regrettably, however, for various reasons, none of those initiatives have come to fruition and the political will to act responsibly and boldly – in line with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, in the interest of justice and human rights, and for the sake of peace and security – remains perilously absent.

The Arab States continue to stretch their hand in peace, supporting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence, while also striving to open a new era of peace, stability and security in our region. For over 14 years, the Arab Peace Initiative has offered a bold path forward and yet Israel, the occupying Power, remains intransigent, belittling this most significant initiative and failing to reciprocate time and time again and obstructing the revival of a political horizon on its basis.

Israel has also stood in rejection of the important multilateral effort for peace undertaken in the context of the French initiative to establish an international support group for Palestinian-Israeli peace and set the foundations for an international peace conference aimed at bringing the parties together to finally resolve the conflict. In this regard, while underscoring its limitations and the need for further bold steps commensurate with professed intentions and commitments and the real urgency of the matter, we recognize the Joint Communiqué issued by the participants in the Middle East Peace Initiative meeting held on 3 June in Paris. We reaffirm our continued cooperation in this regard and appeal for ongoing coordination and efforts to advance this initiative and the prospects for peace.

And lastly, the most recent international initiative is that undertaken by the Middle East Quartet, which on 1 July released a long-awaited report. Unfortunately, that report did not meet expectations, failing to rise to the urgent needs of this critical juncture and regrettably failing to acknowledge the gravity of the nearly-half century Israeli foreign occupation of our land and its

existence as the primary source of the instability, violence and violations we are witnessing, its impact on every single aspect of Palestinian life – scarring and depriving one generation after another for decades, forcing them to live in a perpetual state of oppression and misery in which they are being denied every human right, and its total incompatibility with any peace effort predicated on international law and justice and the two-State solution, as per the longstanding global consensus.

After nearly fifty years of occupation, after more than twenty years of negotiations, and after nearly seventy years of the question of Palestine remaining unresolved on the UN agenda and constituting an open, painful bleeding wound in the international body and threat to international peace and security, we expected and were promised more from the Quartet. The patience exhibited not just by Palestine, but also by other regional and international partners, was clearly based on a belief that this time the Quartet would rise to the responsibilities it has assumed and make bold recommendations to address the main challenges, including the final status issues, aimed at finally and definitively ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory that began in June 1967, including of East Jerusalem, and achieving the two-State solution of an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders; and a just solution for the Palestine refugees based on resolution 194 (III).

Regrettably, this was not the case. The Palestinian leadership has clearly expressed its deep disappointment and dismay regarding the report and the manner in which it deals with critical and sensitive issues, or fails to do so. This includes the report's glaring failure to appropriately deal with the ongoing criminal actions, illegal measures and constant provocations being perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against our people and land. It also includes the repeated inappropriate attempts to draw symmetry between the occupying Power and the occupied people and to equate individual acts of violence with the official, deliberate policies and actions of the occupying Power, which are the source of this conflict and all of its ills. Moreover, the report represents yet another attempt to manage the conflict, rather than reaffirming the principles and parameters for a final and just solution and defining the means for reaching that objective within a set timeframe and with the necessary international support and guarantees.

The report's characterization of nearly every Israeli action as simply "a response" to Palestinian actions, rather than as part of systematic, deliberate and decades-long policies and practices, is unacceptable and offensive. This is the case whether referring to the use of administrative detention against Palestinians, punitive home demolitions, the severe closures, the provocations and incursions at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, or the killing of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli occupying forces in military raids or demonstrations. Equally offensive is the implication that security is only a need and a right for Israel, while this right for the Palestinian people, along with their need and right to protection as occupied people, is ignored.

The inability of the Quartet report to refer to the incessant violence, destruction, intimidation and barbarism of some extremist Israeli settlers as terrorism, including the burning to death of a young family as they slept in their home, while repeatedly and liberally characterizing Palestinian actions as such, is telling of the narrative adopted. In this regard, as the report actually did in one instance, we would point you to the reflections and statements of senior Israeli officials – both military and political – referring to such actions as terror and cautioning about the extreme dangers posed by such individuals and groups to the Palestinian civilian population under Israel's occupation and to Israeli society itself.

Not the least of this is the incitement to violence, the vicious hatred and racist extremism routinely fomented by Israeli settlers and Jewish extremists against the Palestinian people and often declared as well by numerous Israeli officials and religious leaders, who are on the Israeli Government's payroll and continue their malicious incitement against the Palestinian people and their leadership. The Palestinian people are suffering immensely from such inflammatory and racist rhetoric and incitement, which continues to fuel terror and hate crimes against innocent Palestinian civilians. Yet, rather than go into further detail in the context of this debate about the extent and impact of such Israeli extremism, we will refer you to the many recent statements in this regard by several Israeli leaders themselves, who are directly addressing this dangerous phenomenon and illness as we speak.

Mr. President,

We do note the Quartet's recognition of the destructive nature of Israel's settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that its designation of occupied Palestinian land for exclusive Israeli use, whether for military or settler purposes, its confiscation of Palestinian property and demolition of Palestinian homes, and denial of Palestinian development are part and parcel of this illegal settlement campaign. Moreover, the persistence of such illegal policies and practices certainly do raise serious questions about Israel's long-term intentions, as noted by the report; intentions that are reconfirmed by the statements of some Israeli Ministers, including the Prime Minister himself, that "*there should never be a Palestinian State*", as opposed to the deceptive statements that we hear in this chamber from the representative of the occupying Power.

It is an understatement to say that, through this illegal network of colonies and infrastructure Israel, is entrenching its occupation daily, hammering one nail after another into the coffin of the two-State solution. While the report rightly concludes that all of this is eroding the viability of the two-State solution, it fails to affirm that Israel stands in grave violation of international law, including humanitarian and criminal law in its implementation of its settlement schemes and constant attempts to *de facto* annex the Palestinian land.

In this regard, we note the report's finding that at least 70% of so-called "Area C", which actually comprises 60% of the West Bank, has been expropriated for exclusive Israeli use. Nearly all of the 30% that remains, much of it private Palestinian property, "*is effectively off limits for Palestinian development because it requires permits from the Israeli military authorities that are almost never granted*". This fact alone is telling of Israel's true intentions in Occupied Palestine, where the Israeli settler population has exceeded a half-million and construction of settlements and related infrastructure continue every single day. Actually, in immediate response to the Quartet report, the Israeli Government provocatively approved the construction of another 800 housing units in illegal settlements in and around Occupied East Jerusalem. This is further proof that the failure to hold Israel accountable for its violations and to take bold measures for peace, as opposed to recommending piecemeal confidence-building measures, is a mistaken and futile approach that will only be met with further Israeli contempt and arrogance.

As for the situation in the Gaza Strip, where Israel's inhumane and illegal blockade continues to be imposed and the man-made humanitarian catastrophe continues to deepen, the report neglects to address the underlying issues and the flagrant violations being perpetrated by the occupying Power as it collectively punishes the entire Palestinian civilian population there. In this regard, despite the regrettable political divide and the ongoing efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation and unity as a

matter of national urgency, the failure to bridge that divide cannot be used as an excuse to continue imprisoning nearly 2 million people and forcing them to live in the ruins of war and mass deprivation.

Mr. President,

In that context, I wish to conclude my statement by conveying to the Council members the depths of the despair, hopelessness and human devastation that the Israeli occupation and this ongoing aggression have inflicted on our people for decades. These are dimensions that we believe the Quartet report did not properly, sensitively or respectfully address. But, I hope that today these matters will be heard and felt and responsibly acted upon as I read to you excerpts from a letter to the international community from a Palestinian, Rafat Badran, the father of a young Palestinian boy, Mahmoud Badran, who was brutally murdered by the Israeli occupying forces on 21 June. These are his words:

“Last Friday, my wife Amal and I lived our greatest nightmare when we buried our precious son Mahmoud. He was 15 years old.

A few days earlier, he was enjoying an evening of relative normalcy, an occurrence all too rare in the life of a Palestinian child. It was the Holy Month of Ramadan, and after spending time celebrating with our family, Mahmoud, along with his friends and cousins, ventured out to a local village pool. After swimming for several hours, the group piled into the car to return home, smiling and fatigued, relishing some relief from the pervasive and cruel conditions of Israeli military occupation. And then suddenly, Israeli soldiers riddled the car Mahmoud was riding in with bullets, hitting several of the children. Four of them are still recovering from their wounds. Mahmoud was killed.

Mahmoud was a gentle child who focused on his studies. He had two great ambitions: to become a doctor and help others, and also to play for his favorite soccer club, Real Madrid. He cleverly planned to attend medical school in Spain so that he could chase both of these dreams at once.

Now he is gone, and the sudden void left in our lives can never be filled. It is still impossible to comprehend. We are left only to ask, “Why?”

The Israeli forces claim they were responding to stone throwers; Israel considers it reasonable to respond to children throwing stones with machine gun fire which is itself an inhumane, extreme policy. But Mahmoud and the other boys were not throwing stones. They were sitting in a car, driving home, wrapped in towels and swimsuits and posing no threat to anyone, when they were ambushed by occupying forces.

For Palestinians, this sort of tragedy is nothing new. I’ve lived under decades of Israeli military occupation, and my children were born into this brutal reality and have known no other life. As a parent, I have struggled each and every day with how much freedom to allow my children, and how to carve out some semblance of a “normal” life for them under wildly abnormal circumstances... My wife and I took the former path and hoped for the best, but now, the worst pain imaginable has arrived on our doorstep...

Time and again, Palestinian civilians -- children, women and men -- have been killed by Israeli fire in situations where lethal force is utterly unjustified. Recently, the world watched as an Israeli

soldier executed a Palestinian by shooting him in the head as he lay wounded on the ground and totally surrounded. Although this cold-blooded murder was caught on video and created controversy in Israel, many rallied to support the murderous soldier, including Israeli politician Avigdor Lieberman, who was shortly thereafter named Defense Minister and is now responsible for overseeing the military occupation.

An extremist climate prevails in today's Israel, and never before has the value of Palestinian life been so cheap. Our bodies, our minds, our passions, our very lives and by extension our deaths are all considered lesser, and nothing makes this clearer to us than our repeated slaying at the hands of the Israeli military and the subsequent refusal to bring us justice. It is important to recall that as the occupying power, Israel is obligated under international law to ensure the well-being of the civilian population – we the Palestinians. Instead, we have witnessed the ongoing and intensifying brutalization of Palestinian bodies, to the point where our lives are treated as entirely expendable...

We Palestinians want a life of peace, freedom, justice and equality. We want the basic human dignity of not having our lives arbitrarily ended. We want to be able to know that if our children leave the house – to do the things children do, like go to school, play soccer, and go swimming – that their lives are not at risk.

So many Palestinian parents have lost their children to Israeli bullets fired in order to preserve an unjust system of military occupation denying an entire nation of people their human rights. Mahmoud is but the most recent innocent victim. I write to you today as a grieving father because you, the international community, who is allowing Israel to sustain its brutal occupation into its 50th year, can help make sure that Mahmoud is among the last of the lives taken. I ask that you demand accountability from both the Israeli government and your own, and stand with the calls for freedom, justice, and peace.”

I thank you, Mr. President.