

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



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

Statement by H.E. Dr. Riyad Mansour, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, before the United Nations General Assembly, Agenda Item 38: Question of Palestine, Agenda Item 37: Situation in the Middle East, 23 November 2015, New York:
(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

I am honored to address the General Assembly in this important debate and on this day of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People - the 38th observance of this solemn day since the Assembly proclaimed it in 1977. I reaffirm the gratitude of the Palestinian people and Government for the support to the just cause of Palestine from every corner of the globe and for the moving expressions of solidarity for our people today and through the long decades of their plight.

We renew our appreciation to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which for 40 years has exerted efforts in support of the Palestinian people's rights and national aspirations to live in freedom, peace, and security in their homeland. We thank Ambassador Fode Seck of Senegal for his skilled chairing of the Committee and introducing the draft resolutions on the "Question of Palestine". We also thank the Rapporteur, Ambassador Christopher Grima of Malta, for presenting the annual report, and thank the other Bureau members - Afghanistan, Cuba, Indonesia, Namibia and Nicaragua - along with all of the Committee Members and Observers for their principled, strong support. We also thank the Division for Palestinian Rights and DPI Special Information Programme on Palestine for their efforts and support to the Committee in the past year.

Today, I also reiterate our appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the "*Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine*", and his efforts for peace, and renew our appreciation for the support of the entire UN system, including, *inter alia*, the efforts of Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman and Special Representative and Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov and their teams and the tireless, extensive efforts of the UN agencies providing vital assistance to the Palestinian people, including UNRWA, UNDP, UNICEF, OCHA, WFP, OHCHR, WHO, UN Women, UN-HABITAT and UNFPA, so generously supported by States, organizations and partners from around the world. We are grateful for this political, humanitarian, socio-economic, and moral support, which has helped sustain the Palestinian people, including over 5.5 million Palestine refugees, through decades of conflict and crisis and which remains essential for as long as their inalienable rights are denied and this injustice persists.

Mr. President,

While we fully recognize the importance of this support, we must again urgently appeal for more serious efforts, in line with the UN Charter, the relevant resolutions, and international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, to redress this injustice that our people have endured for far too long and that has traumatized successive generations, depriving them of their rights and of a life of freedom, stability, prosperity, and even hope.

As we mark the UN's 70th anniversary, we recall that the question of Palestine is actually older than the organization itself, inherited from the League of Nations, which entrusted its Mandate for Palestine to the United Kingdom and considered Palestine to be among the "Class A" Mandates, ready for independence. Indeed, the Sub-Committee reporting to the General Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question in 1947 concluded: *"the people of Palestine are ripe for self-government and that it has been agreed on all hands that they should be made independent at the earliest possible date. It also follows, from what has been said above, that the General Assembly is not competent to recommend, still less to enforce, any solution other than the recognition of the independence of Palestine"*.

Tragically that recommendation was not heeded and, 68 years ago on 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), partitioning Palestine, changing the course of history, and creating a wound that remains unhealed as the Palestinian people remain without independence and without their rights, suffering the grave injustice of *Al-Nakba* and brutal oppression under Israel's foreign occupation for nearly a half century, and the Middle East remains without peace.

History has repeatedly proven that it cannot be disregarded and is directly relevant to the present, in this case a present where the international community continues to struggle with the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and its far-reaching impact in the region, across the globe and on the viability of international law and the international system itself; a present where peace remains elusive despite the many efforts to realize it.

While countless resolutions, foremost by the Assembly and Security Council, have been adopted over the decades; while a landmark Advisory Opinion was rendered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2004; and while a global consensus exists on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; the international promise to the Palestinian people remains unfulfilled and is at the heart of the United Nations' responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is justly resolved in all aspects.

What is lacking has not been support or solidarity for Palestine, but rather the political courage and will to implement those resolutions in the face of Israel's total intransigence and disrespect for its legal obligations. Resolution after resolution is ignored as Israel - the same Israel created by General Assembly resolution 181 (II) - arrogantly demeans the General Assembly and Security Council and tramples international law, perpetrating violations and crimes as if it were exempt from the law and as if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the exception to every norm and rule intended to ensure human rights and ensure peace and security.

We all agree that the situation is completely unsustainable. So, one must ask: what is the threshold for action? We believe it is past time for the international community, particularly the Security Council, to overcome its paralysis and to act to confront this reality before all is completely lost: before hopes are diminished beyond salvation, before the two-State solution is destroyed, and before the small prospects remaining for peace perish. The experience of the past two decades and the current wave of volatility and despair remind us that too many lines have been crossed, too many lives have been lost, and that things can indeed get worse.

Mr. President,

In the past year, the situation deteriorated on every front. Israel, the occupying Power, continued its gross, systematic breaches of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva

Convention, with many tantamount to war crimes. This has aggravated already-dire security, humanitarian and socio-economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem - the territory constituting the State of Palestine.

Israel has continued killing and injuring Palestinian civilians in military raids, air strikes and sniper attacks. Children and youth are clearly being targeted by the excessive force and malice of the occupying forces and settlers. The occupying Power has also continued imprisoning, detaining, abusing and torturing thousands of Palestinians in its jails; destroying homes and infrastructure, including as acts of reprisal; forcibly displacing Palestinians, among them entire Bedouin communities; and collectively punishing Palestinian civilians, sparing no child, woman or man, most inhumanely in the form of its blockade on the entire population in the Gaza Strip, where it continues to obstruct movement and reconstruction, forcing our people to live in deprivation and the devastation of last year's brutal war and the ones that preceded it. Such illegal measures are the cause of pervasive insecurity among the defenseless Palestinian people and are inflicting widespread suffering and collective indignity.

At the same time, Israel has persisted with its unlawful colonization of the Palestinian land, rabidly constructing and expanding settlements, especially in Occupied East Jerusalem; constructing its annexation Wall; transferring thousands of settlers; confiscating Palestinian land; demolishing homes and property; imposing hundreds of checkpoints impairing movement and socio-economic life; and exploiting natural resources and obstructing access to water and agricultural lands. All of this has aimed at illegally and forcibly altering the character, status and demography of the Territory and has severely fragmented it, undermining its contiguity and isolating Palestinian civilians in disconnected, walled Bantustans, further entrenching the Israeli occupation and destroying the viability of the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

Moreover, Israeli government and religious leaders, occupying forces and extremist settlers have persisted with incursions, provocations and incitement in Occupied East Jerusalem, particularly against Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, disrespecting the historic status quo and sanctity of the Holy Sites and inflaming religious sensitivities. Such actions risk disastrous consequences, including ignition of a religious conflict, which we have repeatedly warned about.

Israel has also continued to inhumanely deny the rights of the Palestine refugees, foremost their right to return. Absent a just solution, their plight has endured for nearly seven decades and their distress under occupation and in exile has been immense. Successive crises, especially in Gaza and in Syria, have deepened their vulnerability, inflicting displacement and dispossession, death and injury, rising poverty and unemployment, and the fragmentation of their communities, creating an existential crisis and prompting many to take the perilous journey across the Mediterranean in search of a safer, better life.

All of this has been accompanied by a systematic Israeli campaign denying the history, rights and national aspirations of the Palestinian people and racist, discriminatory policies against them. There has been blatant dehumanization of the Palestinian people, who have been characterized as "terrorists" and "animals", including by Israel's highest officials, and whose legitimate resistance to the occupation has been criminalized as "terrorism".

In a cruel irony, this is being done in an attempt to legitimize Israel's illegal occupation, negate the Palestinian national identity, and justify continued control of the Palestinian people and land. But this goal has never been achieved in an international environment where thankfully rule of

law and human rights continue to prevail. It has, however, succeeded in derailing all peace efforts, destabilizing the situation and intensifying human misery. It has also exacerbated Israeli prejudices against the Palestinian people, fueling paranoia, aggression, and extremism among Israelis, especially settlers, and supplying ample pretexts and incitement for their crimes and terror.

Faced with this reality, we continue to call for international protection for the defenseless, unarmed Palestinian people. The call for protection must not be viewed as unreasonable or unimaginable by anyone that respects international law, insists on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and seeks peace. Protection is essential and the international community, particularly the Security Council and the High Contracting Parties to the 4th Geneva Convention, has clear responsibilities in this regard. Here, we stress: the right to security is not exclusive to Israel; it is a right for all, including Palestinians, and neither a de-escalation of the situation, nor resumption of a peace process and negotiations, will be possible absent such security.

Mr. President,

Continued appeasement and inaction by the international community cannot be justified under any pretext. If Israel is never held accountable, it will only be emboldened to continue its violations and crimes, causing more suffering for the Palestinian people and making peace more impossible. Israel must be demanded to cease its violations and comply with the law - military aggressions must end, settlement activities must end, settler terror must end, the Gaza blockade must end, collective punishment must end, imprisonment and detention of Palestinians must end, destruction must end, provocations and incitement must end, including at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the humiliation and isolation of the Palestinian people must end. This illegal occupation must end.

The Security Council must respond to this situation, which threatens international peace and security. Current efforts to mobilize the Council must be supported and engagement must be serious to address the immediate crisis situation, address the root causes of the conflict, and chart a path for a credible political process, including by reaffirming the parameters of a just solution, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, and setting a clear timeframe for negotiations and an end to the occupation.

Moreover, in an era in which collective international efforts are being exerted to resolve conflicts and overcome major challenges, isn't it high time to apply such efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after all these decades? Shouldn't the calls for an international support group and international conference for Israeli-Palestinian peace be heeded? We believe they must and call again for collective action to realize the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and a just solution for the Palestine refugee question, the pillars of a lasting and comprehensive peace, whereby the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the State of Israel can live side by side within secure and recognized borders, an imperative for a peaceful Middle East.

Mr. President,

Despite the grim realities and despair at this moment, the will of the Palestinian people and their leadership has not been broken and they remain steadfast in their conviction in the justness of their cause, in international law and in the international community's pledges to achieve a just peace. On 30 September, when the Palestinian flag was raised at the UN, another resounding, hopeful message was sent to the Palestinian people, reaffirming their legitimate national aspirations, their existence among the nations of the world and their right to self-determination, to be a free people in

control of their lives and destiny in their own independent State. From this Assembly's rostrum, we appeal once more to the international community to act to bring this tragic conflict to an end to help the Palestinian people fulfill their rights, achieve justice, achieve a sustainable peace, and secure Palestine's rightful place among the community of nations.