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Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the Second Committee, on agenda item (41): "Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources", 22 October 2007.

Madam Chair,

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation's congratulations to you and to your country Finland upon your election as Chair of the Second Committee. We extend our best wishes to the Bureau as well, and express our confidence that under your able stewardship the Committee will successfully conclude its important work. My delegation wishes also to express its appreciation to Ms. Tiina Intelmann for her commitment and hard work during the previous session.

Madam Chair,

By definition, the issue of sovereignty, whether over a nation's natural or other resources, is one of vital significance to any people as national sovereignty cannot be divided; it is an indivisible whole, albeit with many crucial components.

Sovereignty over natural resources, which is the issue at hand today, is an issue of particular significance to the Palestinian people. This sovereignty, Madam Chair, is an essential component of the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, as stipulated by the "Declaration on permanent sovereignty over natural resources", adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 1803 (XVII) of 1962, which clearly states that permanent sovereignty over natural wealth and resources is a "basic constituent of the right to self-determination".

Madam Chair,

For forty years now, Israel, the occupying Power, has implemented a carefully crafted, systematic, and deliberate policy based on the illegal exploitation, diversion, and degradation of land and other natural resources at the expense of another people, their rights, future, and living standards. A policy that denies Palestinians the right to access their natural wealth and resources, and forces upon them a life of destitution and bitter deprivation, as they watch their drinking

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water diverted to saturate the needs of armed and hostile illegal settlers while they go thirsty and their agricultural produce is parched. Such a dangerous policy gravely violates Israel's obligations as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly the Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the applicability of which was reaffirmed in the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004

In its latest report, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) conveys this grim picture with painful accuracy. Using maps and up-to-date information, OCHA's July 2007 report, entitled "The humanitarian impact on Palestinians of Israeli settlements and other infrastructure in the West Bank" provides us with a shocking depiction of the outcome of Israel's destructive policies and practices, not just on Palestinian natural resources but also on the very potential the Palestinian people hope the future of their children will hold.

According to OCHA's report, 40% of the West Bank is now exploited by the occupation authorities for Israeli-only infrastructure. This exclusive infrastructure is illegally built on occupied Palestinian land confiscated for the benefit of the occupier and the armed settlers it illegally transferred to live on this occupied land. Like an entire network of Israeli-only roads and an extensive system of hundreds of military roadblocks and checkpoints that disconnect Palestinian communities, isolating their populations, and denying them access to proper health and education services. This system of geographic and demographic fragmentation is literally squeezing Palestinians out of their homeland and choking their humble dreams of a dignified existence over what's left for them of their occupied homeland.

Added to the illegal exploitation of almost half of the occupied West Bank, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to construct the illegal Wall in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem, in grave violation of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, and of General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004.

According to the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) contained in document A/62/75 - E/2007/13, this illegal Wall regime will be 703 kilometers long, when completed, almost twice the length of the 1967 border. This illegal Wall snakes through the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and when completed, it will create disconnected and enclosed Palestinian enclaves where 260,000 Palestinians reside— 11% of the Palestinian population. Additionally, ESCWA confirms what Palestinians have always said – Israel's illegal expropriation of Palestinian land targets the occupied West Bank's most fertile land and valuable water resources. In fact, at least 230 square kilometers of the West Bank's most fertile land – constituting some 15 percent of the West Bank's agricultural land - has already been confiscated by the Israeli occupation authorities for the purpose of constructing the illegal Israeli Wall.

The ESCWA report also indicates that 80 percent of the Israeli Wall will lie within the Occupied Palestinian Territory, isolating 575 square kilometers of the West Bank between the Wall and the Green Line, in what is termed the "seam zone". On the basis of this Wall route,

ESCWA also estimates that the access of 60,500 Palestinians to their main sources of livelihoods will be severely affected.

Madam Chair,

Palestine's agricultural sector has not been spared from the ravages of Israeli occupation. In the past seven years alone, the Israeli occupation regime has confiscated approximately more than quarter of a million (254,932.6) dunums, razed 74,755 dunums, and uprooted over one million trees (1,188,132). These actions were undertaken by the occupying Power as part of its illegal policy of land confiscation for the purpose of settlement construction and expansion and the construction of the Wall among others. In fact, it is safe to say that the illegal aggressive Israeli campaign against this sector has markedly changed the topography and nature in Palestine.

The encroachment of Israel, the occupying Power, over the natural resources of the Palestinian people is not confined to illegal confiscation of fertile land and aquifers. It extends to create a menacing reality for the Palestinian population, a reality that results in environmental pollution and degradation. Israeli occupation authorities have used Palestinian land in the West Bank as dumping grounds for the untreated sewage and other waste of the Israeli illegal settlements and the hundreds of chemical factories they have established in flagrant violation of international environmental law, especially the 1989 Basel Convention on Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. As if it were not enough for Palestinians to bear the scourges of occupation, Palestinians are forced to have their land used as sewage dumping grounds while they are denied access to the dumping grounds for their own waste, forcing them to resort to burning the solid waste. In fact, in 2006, smoke from waste burning was the principal air pollutant for almost half of exposed households in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

This puts before this august Committee an important question: How are the Palestinian people expected to work towards a future of freedom and self-determination when they see their land and natural resources exploited and abused by the ruthless occupation? This factual discussion of Israel's systematic and destructive policy has all international organizations in agreement – if these grave violations of the Palestinian people's sovereignty over their natural resources continues at the hands of the Israeli occupation authorities, a viable Palestinian State will become an impossible goal – regardless of the carefully and eloquently worded statements professing a desire for peace and a commitment to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. The essential components of Palestinian sovereignty are being destroyed, illegally confiscated or exploited to the point of irreparable degradation.

In this regard, reference should be made to statements delivered by representatives of the occupying Power before this august Committee as well as the High-level Dialogue on Climate Change, which we believe are misleading. The occupying Power actually professes to seek cooperation on achieving the MDGs, involvement in South-South cooperation, and applying technology for development while its actions on the ground - against the Palestinian and other peoples – are a translation of one nation's advancement at the expense of another nation's resources and future viability. These statements should be accompanied by real actions that

translate these purported goals into a living reality – not only for peoples from afar – but also for peoples close by, next door in fact.

Madam Chair,

We will hear some lone voices that allege this factual outline is politicized – the discussion of which supposedly does not belong in this august Committee and is counterproductive to ongoing bilateral peace efforts. We adamantly disagree with this allegation, which we maintain is of a political nature.

What you have just heard are not abstract numbers. Rather, they are facts on the ground that directly affects hundreds of thousands of ordinary Palestinians, threatening their lives, livelihoods, and living standards – in effect, threatening their future and that of their children. These facts are being created daily to obstruct even the possibility of peace and stability in the near and far future. If not addressing them in this Committee and in accordance with the international covenants and laws we have committed to, how else would these voices suggest we go about defending our right to protect our natural resources from violation and secure our right and that of our children to enjoy them?

Without safeguarding the Palestinian people's right to sovereignty over their natural resources by ending the illegal and destructive practices of their Israeli occupier, peace does not stand a chance. In this regard, allow me to recall that members of this august Committee have a standing legal and moral obligation to protect the rights of all peoples to sovereignty over their natural resources. We are certain that you would not send the dismaying message that the rights of the Palestinian people in this context will be the lone exception.

Thank you, Madam Chair.