



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT BY Mrs. REBECA HERNANDEZ TOLEDANO, FIRST SECRETARY OF THE CUBAN MISSION, DURING THE CONSIDERATION BY THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF ITEM 32: "UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST". New York, 7 November 2007.

Mr. Chairman,

The Cuban delegation would like to commend the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is carried out in the most hostile conditions.

For more than 56 years, the abovementioned Agency has been carrying out an extraordinary relief work to the dire living conditions of the Palestinian refugees. The report under review today, contains telling cases in point and reflects numerous activities undertaken to fulfil such a noble humanitarian mission.

Mr. Chairman,

The Non-Aligned Movement, which Cuba is honoured to Chair, has reiterated that the Palestinian people's continued suffering of the long and brutal Israeli occupation of their land since 1967 is unjustifiable, as well as the fact that they continue to be denied their fundamental human rights, inter alia, the right to self-determination and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their land.

The tragic deterioration of the political, economic, social and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as a consequence of continued illegal policies and practices of the Occupying Power against the Palestinian people, including continued and serious violations of human rights and constant war crimes remains a matter of concern.

In violation of numerous United Nations resolutions, Israel continues to control the air space and land and maritime borders. Crossing points remain closed, particularly the Karni crossing, which has brought about serious consequences for the population of Gaza, due to the impossibility to receive medicines, food and fuel.

Israel's unilateral measures on the Occupied Palestinian Territory are a serious threat to the perspectives to achieve a negotiated settlement in the Two-State solution.

Mr. Chairman,

Due to Israel's countless incursions into the Gaza territory, many families have been forced to leave their homes. According to UNRWA estimates, they have currently more than 4 504 170 Palestinian refugees.

Extrajudicial executions, border blockades, selective assassinations, tortures to detainees, arbitrary arrests, destruction of homes and civilian facilities, indiscriminate use of force, collective punishments and methods of psychological terror remain a constant in the Israeli government's actions in Palestine.

During 2006, Israel continued to severely hinder the circulation Palestinians. There was an 11% increase in closures of crossing points and the imposition of physical barriers on the roads used by Palestinians.

Cuba condemns such aggressive policy, which has turned Gaza into a closed area, in which its inhabitants are prisoners, in disregard of reiterated calls of the international community and successive resolutions adopted by different United Nations organs, in sheer violation of International Law.

The freezing of bank transactions in January of last year by Israel and the main donors has brought about an increasing deterioration of the situation. According to the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in the middle of last year the poverty rate increased a 30%. In the case of the Gaza Strip, 79.8% of its population lived in extreme poverty conditions.

The Palestinian Authority has been unable to pay its employees their salaries. Notwithstanding the creation of the International Transitory Mechanism, through which the essential workers of the Palestinian Authority can receive salaries, most of them have only received small amounts in an intermittent manner.

After the attack on the only power plant in the Gaza Strip in June, its population has only received, during the entire year, between six and eight hours of electric power and between two to three hours of water.

Israel must return the revenue tax it still owes to the Palestinian Authority and stop imposing closures on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which continue to visit serious economic damage on the already suffering Palestinian population.

Mr. Chairman,

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is forced to carry out its work under very harsh conditions.

The Israeli authorities continue to impose unacceptable conditions in sheer violation of the Charter of the United Nations and other International Conventions, the freedom of circulation of the Agency's personnel, goods and vehicles, which have undermined its capacity to exercise its functions and have caused it substantial monetary losses.

Moreover, Israel continues to demand that the Agency pay tolls for their containers passing through the Karni crossing and continues without paying the outstanding port taxes.

In this regard, Cuba endorses the request contained in the report of the UNRWA Commission to study the possibility to include a provision requesting the Israeli authorities to return the amounts of such taxes.

We note with satisfaction the institutional development process undertaken in the UNRWA with a view to strengthening its capacity to provide more efficient services to the Palestinian refugees.

Cuba reiterates the importance that this Agency receives all the necessary support and guarantees to carry out its functions. It is unacceptable that Israel continues to violate the international agreements on the protection to UN premises and the international Conventions and Agreements on the protection and security of the UNRWA personnel.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, reiterating that Cuba will continue to strongly support the Palestinian people's struggle for its inalienable right to self-determination and to establish their independent and sovereign State.

Thank you.