

ISRAEL

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Check Against Delivery

Statement by
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Fourth Committee

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on the expeditious and professional manner in which you have conducted these deliberations.

My delegation wishes to inform the Committee that despite our concerns regarding the politicization of UNRWA, Israel supports its humanitarian mission, and will continue to work in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation with the agency under the leadership of its Commissioner-General, Karen Honing AbuZayd.

To this effect, resolutions regarding UNRWA should deal solely with its operations and avoid extraneous political issues that single-out one Member State, prejudice decisions pertaining to permanent status negotiations, and promote the interests of one party in the conflict. Moreover, the consolidation of UNRWA resolutions would benefit and be consistent with the efforts aimed at reforming and revitalizing the work of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

Today's agenda considers the report on UNRWA's activities for 2006, the first year following Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria. **How different this report could have been had the Palestinian leadership utilized this historic opportunity to promote the well-being of its people?** It could have spent this year building institutions, reforming security, and nurturing economic and social development. If this had been the case, it would have found in Israel a reliable and committed partner which would have gone the extra mile to cooperate fully with such efforts.

Instead the Palestinian leadership at the time, led by Hamas, a terrorist group bent on destroying Israel, eagerly and deliberately did all it could to exploit its position of power to further its campaign of terrorism against Israeli citizens. It certainly knew that Israel's legitimate activities in self-defense would inevitably cause a negative impact on the economic and social conditions of Palestinians in the area.

But as an extreme, ideologically driven terrorist organization, Hamas preferred to devote its time, energy and finances to killing and wounding Israelis rather than feeding, educating and caring for its own people – the Palestinians. **It preferred destruction instead of building, hatred instead of cooperation and death instead of life.**

And the international community, led by the Quartet, refused to carry on "business as usual". Rather it laid down principles upon which any assistance to the Palestinian Authority was to be reviewed, namely commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations.

Unfortunately the report of the Commissioner-General, under discussion today, A/62/13, mentions the suspension of international donor funding to the Palestinian Authority, but neglects to inform as to the relevant Quartet principles. Nor does the report refer at all to the terrorist nature of Hamas, referred to by the Palestinian Authority as an "outlawed group", which became even obvious to all following its brutal and violent take-over of the Gaza Strip in June this year.

Another area in which the present report is lacking is regarding the extent of terrorist activities against Israel and its citizens during the reporting period. The report describes with substantial detail the alleged restrictions on Palestinians and UNRWA activities, but it is particularly lacking in detailing the extent of terrorist activities that are the direct cause of any such restrictions.

The duty of all states is to provide security for its citizens. This universally held principle is enshrined in the Comay–Michelmores Exchange of Letters establishing the relations between Israel and UNRWA, through which Israel committed itself to facilitate the activities of UNRWA subject to considerations of security.

Unfortunately, once again, such considerations were necessarily high on our agenda in 2006, a year in which 2,135 terrorist attacks were carried out, including an attack on an IDF position on the Israeli side of the border with the Gaza Strip in which two soldiers were killed and one abducted. It was also a year where two suicide bombing attacks were carried out in Tel Aviv.

In 2006, 32 Israelis were killed in Palestinian attacks, 25 of whom were civilians. Similarly, 332 were wounded, 228 of whom were civilians. Moreover, the year following the disengagement from the Gaza Strip saw a near quadrupling of the number of rockets fired at civilian population centers in southern Israel – from 222 in 2005 to 861 in 2006. None of this, however, is deemed worthy of mention in the report, and thus the reader, namely Member States, is left with a skewed and distorted portrait of reality.

The Advisory Commission, in its letter attached to the report, expresses its concerns that restrictions imposed by Israel will lead to further hardships for Palestinians. My delegation would like to assure this Committee that Israel has no desire to impose hardships on Palestinians, and we fully recognize the importance of enabling the Palestinian economy to develop.

At the same time Israel, like any other state, has the responsibility to do all it can to prevent the killing and maiming of its citizens, and is determined to protect its citizens as well as to make progress in the peace process.

Indeed, in 2006, Israeli security services prevented some 71 suicide bombing attempts, and in 45 of them, explosive devices, ready to be detonated, were already strapped on to the terrorist's bodies when detained. In the vast majority of these cases, success in thwarting the attack was made possible by the very restrictions mentioned in the report.

Thus, my delegation suggests the Committee ponder the day-to-day dilemmas faced in the fight against terrorism, coupled with considerations made that attempt to minimize, as much as possible, the negative impact on non-combatants. And how would the situation between Israel and the Palestinians be today were even only a small percentage of those thwarted suicide bombing attacks to have been carried out in Israel's streets, shopping centers and coffee shops?

Despite the dangers and uncertainties, Israel is determined to explore every avenue to arrive at common understandings with the present Palestinian leadership with a view toward establishing a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel.

In spite of the difficulties posed by the Hamas military takeover of the Gaza Strip, Israel continues to do all it can, in full cooperation with UN agencies particularly UNRWA, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian supplies to Gaza.

To be sure, crossing points are often closed. But this is invariably a result of rocket and mortar attacks by Palestinian terrorist groups, supported by the illegitimate Hamas leadership in Gaza, against the very crossing points that are used to supply the Palestinians of Gaza with the food and other essential supplies they so need. The attacks on the crossing points force closures, and the terrorists use these attacks as a tactic to paint Israel as an aggressor when it is terrorism that makes the closures necessary.

While Israel endangers its military and civilian personnel to ensure the delivery of aid into the Gaza Strip, Palestinian terrorists deliberately do all they can to prevent such humanitarian activity, while cynically referring to such attacks as “legitimate resistance”. They are not legitimate, not for Israel, not for the international community and not for the Palestinians. And it cannot in any way be seen as resistance as such attacks are launched from territory from which Israel fully withdrew more than two years ago.

Similarly, the terrorists deliberately disregard for the distinction between civilians and combatants, not just regarding the targets of their attacks but also regarding their launching points. Just last week, terrorists in the Gaza Strip fired mortars from the yard of an UNRWA elementary school in Beit Hanoun. The Israeli military refrained from responding while the launching cell was in the school, in order to avoid civilian casualties. Regrettably, the abuse of human shields by Palestinian terrorists and the violation of a UN installation for terrorist purposes has not yet been clearly condemned by the UN.

Mr. Chairman,

Israelis and Palestinians expect their leaders to develop political solutions that will allow both peoples to live freely with honour, security, and well-being. But the lessons of past years clearly show that peace cannot be left for solely to the leaders. It must enjoy grassroots support to avoid being derailed.

Israel views UNRWA’s programmes on human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance positively. However, we are concerned that reliance on textbooks supplied by host states, which deny Israel’s right to exist or ignore Israel’s very existence and promote negative stereotypical views of Jews, Judaism, and Israel, undermine the possibility of deepening popular support for peace. Such a situation is unacceptable and Israel calls on UNRWA to do all it can to ensure that its educational programmes promote support for peace rather than deepen hatred and animosity.

Mr. Chairman,

Developments during 2006 did not allow any progress toward arriving at a settlement to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Let us hope, and do all we can to ensure, that with the leadership changes in the Palestinian Authority and based on Israel’s determination to promote a two state solution, we will soon see progress towards real peace between our leaders and between our peoples.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.