



**CHAIR OF
THE COORDINATING BUREAU
OF THE
NON- ALIGNED MOVEMENT**



STATEMENT BY MR. RODOLFO BENITEZ VERNON, CHARGE D' AFFAIRES A.I OF CUBA IN ITS CAPACITY AS ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THE COORDINATING BUREAU OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, AT THE SPECIAL MEETING TO MARK SIXTY YEARS OF DISPOSSESSION OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. NEW YORK, JUNE 20, 2008.

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak in this important occasion on behalf of the 118 members countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Non-Aligned Movement's position of solidarity and support to the cause of the Palestinian people is widely known. The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the question of the refugees has been, and shall continue to be priority issues for the Movement.

Last year, the Palestinian people solemnly commemorated the 60th anniversary of the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 181 (II) in 1947, which partitioned historic Palestine and led to the historic injustice and tragedy imposed upon the Palestinian people in 1948 - Al-Nakba - during which the Palestinian people were forcibly expelled or fled in fear from their homes, dispossessed and dispersed as refugees throughout the region, and became a stateless people.

Today we are solemnly observing the sixty 60 years of dispossession of Palestinian people, Al Nakba. More than three quarters of historic Palestine was forcibly seized at that time. Moreover, 531 Palestinian towns and villages were destroyed and 85% of the Palestinian population were banished and displaced. Today some 4.6 million of Palestinian refugees are scattered all over the Middle East.

We, as members of the international community, must stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people on this occasion to reflect upon the tragedy and injustice that has befallen them and to reaffirm our determination and double our efforts to peacefully and justly resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the just resolution of the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The international community should not delay in acting to comprehensively address this issue because the Palestinian people have suffered and waited for too long for justice and freedom and the passage of so many years has only further and seriously compounded the problem, which has impacted the region and beyond.

The Non-Aligned Movement deeply regrets that the Palestinian people continue to suffer the prolonged and brutal Israeli military occupation of their land for more than 40 years. It is unacceptable that the Palestinian people continue to be denied their fundamental human rights,

among which are the right to self-determination and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their lands.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is especially critical and NAM reiterates its call for an end to the unlawful siege of Gaza and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population there. In this regard, NAM takes note of the achievement of a truce and hopes it will bring an end to cycle of violence, including by been extended to the West Bank, and the speedy opening of Gaza's border crossings for the movement of persons and goods and the alleviation of the dire humanitarian crisis.

Our Movement stresses the need and urgency to put an end to the prolonged and illegal Israeli occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967, and to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Chairman,

The Movement reiterates its concern at the increasing deterioration of the political, economic, social and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as a result of the continued illegal policies and practices by Israel, including serious violations of human rights and constant war crimes, which have resulted in increasing suffering and deprivations for the Palestinian people.

In several multilateral forums, including the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, the non-aligned countries have expressed their strong condemnation of the illegal and deliberate policies and practices by Israel, which are deliberately aimed at altering the demographic composition and the character and nature of the Palestinian lands in order to facilitate Israel's illegal attempts to *de facto* annex more land.

Mr. Chairman,

Over all of the years of suffering and throughout the many crises and upheavals that the Palestine refugees have faced, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has been a vital source of support and humanitarian assistance, providing them with education, healthcare, relief and social services, and emergency assistance, including distribution of food and monetary aid for needy refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza Strip of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

UNRWA has played a central role in the lives of the Palestine refugees, in this regard has also been important in acting as a protecting presence for them in areas of crisis and conflict, in promoting stability, and in preserving the rights of the refugees. The Movement also recognizes the important role played over the decades by the host governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as the countries in the Diaspora, including in particular other Arab Countries, hosting Palestine refugees, and the donor community in helping to care for the Palestine refugees.

The international community's long-standing and principled support for UNRWA has been essential in helping to maintain the Agency's operations throughout the years. In this connection, NAM reaffirms the importance of the mandate entrusted to UNRWA, which has been so nobly and devotedly carried out over the years by the Commissioner-Generals that have led UNRWA and its entire staff. This mandate must continue to be extended until a just solution is achieved for the

Palestine refugee question in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 and international law.

In the context of the dire current situation, NAM reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects on the basis of international law, including a just resolution to the plight of the Palestine refugee.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to conclude by reiterating that the Non-Aligned Movement will continue to support and to contribute as much as possible to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant UN resolutions and restating that our collective efforts constitute a contribution to the international community's efforts to redress the historic injustice imposed upon the Palestinian people and to provide them, particularly the Palestine refugees, with basic needs and human dignity until the day that a just resolution to their plight is achieved.

Thank you very much.