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**STATEMENT BY
H.E. MR. PAUL BADJI
CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
AT THE
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY
WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

Monday, 24 November 2008

Your Excellency, Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Your Excellency, Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Your Excellency, Mr. President of the Security Council,
Your Excellency, Mr. Foreign Minister of the Palestinian Authority
Excellencies and Ambassadors,

Honourable Delegates, Distinguished Invitees,
Mesdames and Messieurs,

Today, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a special meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977. The tradition of organizing special meetings, such as the one we are holding today, goes back thirty years. Each year, members of the international community come together on this day to voice their unrelenting support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people for its inalienable rights.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as defined by the General Assembly, are the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the return of Palestine refugees to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted. The realization of these rights represents an important element of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This year's observance takes on particular meaning in view of its convergence with the sixtieth anniversary of the dispossession of the Palestine refugees. Six decades later, Palestine refugees have not been able to reach their own homes in the same number of years although they may be only a short distance away. Sixty long years have elapsed since hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees had been compelled to leave their homes. Subsequent generations have swelled the number of 1948 refugees to today's over 4.6 million who are registered with and in the care of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(UNRWA). The situation of some one million refugees, currently living in the Gaza Strip, is of particular concern.

Over the years, the principal organs of the United Nations have adopted innumerable resolutions relating to the question of Palestine, most of which have yet to be implemented. It is now also forty-one years since the Palestinian people have lived and continue to live under occupation and have remained dispersed, internally displaced, stateless, exiled and otherwise in limbo as regards their present and future. As has been aptly noted by the President of the General Assembly, the greatest case of failure of the United Nations is the lack of a Palestinian State.

In Gaza, we are on the brink of a major man-made humanitarian disaster where even the United Nations is prevented from delivering emergency humanitarian aid. The imposed shortage of fuel, of which Israel is the sole supplier, has sunk Gaza into darkness as well as cold with the onset of winter. Chronic malnutrition is on the rise and there has been a progressive deterioration in the food security for up to 70 per cent of the population. According to UNRWA, "The ongoing closure of crossings in and out of Gaza – which has a population of some 1.4 million people – is "both a physical as well as a mental punishment of the population." Allow me, at this juncture, to acknowledge the dedicated work of the United Nations agencies and programmes tirelessly working on the ground to provide the Palestinian people with vital and much-needed assistance. These problems are only likely to be compounded by the current world financial crisis. The situation in the Gaza Strip places peace in ever-greater danger.

In the West Bank, some 630 checkpoints and the separation wall impede the free movement of Palestinians and erode the Palestinian Authority institutions. Palestinians in the West Bank are also subjected to daily raids and arrests by Israeli troops. By some accounts, the number of Palestinians in Israeli prison facilities is well in excess of 10,000. Palestinian prisoners are held in Israeli territory in contravention of international law. Also, despite Israel's obligations under the Road Map, settlement construction continues, undermining the political process. Particularly disquieting of late has been the unprecedented level of violent acts perpetrated against Palestinians and their property by settlers.

The Committee has repeatedly condemned acts of violence, in particular against civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli. It calls for a cessation of rocket attacks against Israel, as well as incursions and air strikes and other disproportionate measures of collective punishment by Israel against the population of Gaza which is explicitly prohibited under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee urges the immediate opening of the crossings between the Gaza Strip and Israel, in particular for medical patients requiring urgent treatment unavailable in Gaza and for humanitarian aid and other needs of the population there. The Committee also urges the international community to support the Palestinian and Israeli sides in their quest for peace.

The question of Palestine should be topmost on the peacemaking agenda of the world community. The Committee and the international community placed great hopes in the revival of the peace process to which the Annapolis meeting held a year ago was expected to give significant impetus. However, instead of approaching the creation of a Palestinian State, we have watched the completion of 57 per cent of the separation wall; recently authorized additional increases in settlement activity particularly in and around East Jerusalem; a 25-per-cent increase in the destruction of Palestinian homes; excavation work adjacent to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound; a 12-per-cent increase in checkpoints and other obstacles to movement in the West Bank; routine arrest campaigns throughout the West Bank and an unprecedented increase in settler violence.

Recently, both Israeli and Palestinian leaders have said that time for the two-State solution was fast running out. The Committee urges the international community to maintain the momentum begun at the Annapolis meeting and to support and facilitate regular contacts which began in its context between the two sides. We have high hopes that significant progress with renewed impetus can be made in the permanent status negotiations. Any advances in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process will be difficult without Palestinian unity. The international community and the principal regional players should do all they can to bring the Palestinian people together.

A prerequisite to progress in negotiations should be appreciable change in the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Only tangible changes will bring about a climate conducive to the advancement of permanent status negotiations and the reaching of a comprehensive, just, lasting and permanent agreement on all outstanding issues. At a minimum, all crossings into the Gaza Strip should be opened immediately and all settlement activity and demolition of Palestinian homes should stop. The international community should take more determined steps to protect the Palestinian people, ensure respect for international law in the whole region and uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular 242, 338, 1397 and 1515.

The road to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace settlement should also take into account the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 which should be revived and built on. Months of continuous negotiations are yet to bridge the gap between lofty rhetoric and stark reality in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Thank you.

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