65th General Assembly

Statement by Pakistani Representative

Situation in the Middle East/Question of Palestine

November 30, 2010

PAKISTAN: Mr. President, thank you for arranging this important session. It's the annual reaffirmation by this august house of its commitment to legitimate struggle and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The session coincides with the international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people observed yesterday. The day reminds us that peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine has remained one of the major challenges for the international community for the last six decades.

As we are now into the seventh decade of our collective failure to meet this challenge, prospects of a final settlement are still elusive. The collective voice of peace and compassion emanating from various chambers of the United Nations continues to be ignored. Such open defiance of international community diminishes the prospects of peace and prolongs the suffering of Palestinians living under occupation

One institution in the UN that has aloft the cause of peace in the Middle East is the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Yesterday, we were briefed on its annual report. We greatly value the work of the committee under the able leadership of the permanent representative of Senegal, Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo. We also thank its rapporteur, Ambassador Saviour Borg of Malta for invaluable contributions.

Mr. President, the resumption of Israeli/Palestine direct negotiations in September of this year had rekindled hopes for all of us for sustainable peace in the Middle East and permanent political settlement of the Israeli/Palestinian question. But I fear our hopes and optimism appear to be short lived as the windows of opportunity for a meaningful and sustained negotiation is once again closing.

The major hurdle for a long-term, sustainable political process is the settlement activity by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. Settlement activity is a major provocation. It violates international law, vitiates the atmosphere conducive for negotiations and mutes the voice of peace and compassion. For us, the most disquieting aspect of this settlement activity is the ongoing efforts to remove traces of Palestinian heritage by altering status of centuries-old mosques, cemeteries and churches. This activity is endemic in East Jerusalem, Hebron and Bethlehem. It's being done in the name of creating new housing spaces or commissioning other types of buildings.

East Jerusalem is witnessing renewed settlement activity in the neighborhood of Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev. Regrettably, violence by the settlers against their Palestinian neighbor is a regrettable corollary of this activity. Israel must stop this illegality. It must also end a calculated ambiguity on settlements in the West Bank with a categorical renunciation of any new project.

Until Israel renounces construction of new housing and commercial projects funded by territory, the settlement activity will continue to derail the negotiations and casts an ugly shadow on the peace process.

Any meaningful and viable negotiation process must run in parallel with the improvement in the lives of the Palestinian peoples. For now, millions of Palestinians in occupied territories live under a shadow of checkpoints, roadblocks, military siege and separation walls. Recent measures taken by the Israeli authorities to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank and improve Gaza access offers some hope. Such measures must be sustained by a deeper political commitment to improved livelihoods in Palestine through respect of human rights, freedom of movement and unrestricted flow of commerce.

Mr. President, Pakistan delegation would take this opportunity to call upon the international community to increase its assistance to Palestinian authorities, especially regarding plans for building state institutions. Many independent studies, including economic monitoring report of the World Bank, have praised Palestinian authorities for institution-building and delivery of public services. The World Bank and the IUF have projected 8% growth rate in the West Bank and Gaza.

The economic boom and entrepreneurship, which indicates the resilience of the people of Palestine, can also be a solid edifice for Palestinian statehood. It holds immense promise for lasting peace in the region and must be complemented by generous development assistance. We would also urge the member states to address the financial challenges faced by UNRWA. Pakistan, despite its financial constraints by unprecedented floods this year, will continue with all possible support to UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority.

The international community must act to rekindle the hopes of peace through a meaningful negotiation process. As stated by the distinguished permanent representative of Egypt on behalf of NAM, we must remain united in our demand that Israel respects its legal obligation as an occupying power. We believe that lasting settlement of Arab/Israeli conflict cannot be achieved without addressing the root cause of Israeli occupation of the Arab territories. The solution, therefore, requires Israel's complete withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and all other occupied Arab territories, including Syrian Golan and South Lebanon.

We also look forward to substantive and objective investigations by the Secretary General's panel of inquiry on freedom flotilla incident on 31 May 2010. The panel must diligently pursue the matter. Justice must prevail and those affected be duly compensated.

Mr. President, Pakistan shares the collective objective of the international community for an independent, sovereign and viable state of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital living side by side in peace with all its neighbors. We are supportive of lasting peace for all the inhabitants of the Middle East, irrespective of religion, ethnicity and nationality.

Peace has alluded the region for far too long. Peace cannot allude the region forever. Thank you.