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STATEMENT BY
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CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE
OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
30 November 2009

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to express our appreciation to all of you for attending this special meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Our appreciation and greetings also go to those joining us from all over the world through the United Nations webcast.

In deciding on the observance of this Day, the General Assembly, back in 1977, was mindful of the responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian people and of the need to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Today's gathering is a reaffirmation of the ongoing commitment of the international community to the achievement of this goal.

Sixty-two years ago, on 29 November 1947, the General Assembly, in its resolution 181, provided for the establishment of two States in Mandate Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. To date, only one State came into being. Hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people for their Palestinian home remain unfulfilled. Generations of Palestinians in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and in Gaza have lived under the longest military occupation in modern history. Palestine refugees in camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are still yearning for an end of their plight. Despite these never-ending challenges, the Palestinian people hope against hope that one day the dream of living in a State of their own will be realized.

The reality of the situation on the ground today is rather bleak and gives us little reason to believe that the occupation will be brought to an end any time soon. The peace process is stalled. In the very land where a future Palestinian State is supposed to be established, illegal Israeli settlements continue to multiply. The refusal of the occupying Power to put a halt to the settlement expansion has become a major obstacle to the resumption of peace negotiations.

In East Jerusalem, settlement construction has been accompanied by house demolitions, evictions of Palestinian inhabitants and other discriminatory actions. The situation around the holy sites of the city, in particular at and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif remains tense. Any illegal or provocative actions are prone to escalate into large-scale violence with far reaching implications.

The construction of the separation wall on occupied Palestinian land continues in spite of the ruling of the International Court of Justice. Together with more than 500 checkpoints and movement obstacles throughout the West Bank, the wall stifles the daily life of the Palestinians.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has always been of special concern to our Committee. After being subjected for more than two years to a nearly total economic blockade, the Palestinians in Gaza had to endure a three-week military invasion accompanied by extraordinary violence. Over 1,400 Palestinians were killed during the Israeli offensive, more than 1,100 of whom non-combatants. Of those non-combatants killed, more than 300 were children and more than 100 were women. More than 5,000 Palestinians were injured, many of

whom maimed for life. The Israeli side reported 14 deaths, including four civilians and 182 injured. Although the ceasefire has been by-and large observed since the end of the Israeli invasion, the economic blockade continues allowing only for basic relief to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

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The Palestinian people needs and deserves our solidarity. Due to the compelling imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians, this courageous people needs seriously our active solidarity . The developments on the ground clearly demonstrate how the occupying Power has been consolidating its hold on the Palestinian land and its resources. Since 1967, Israel has gained control of all aspects of the lives of the Palestinians.

The Palestinian people deserves our solidarity because it is still denied its inalienable national rights defined by the General Assembly as the right to self-determination without external interference, to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced and uprooted.

The Palestinian people deserves even more our solidarity because its leadership under President Mahmoud Abbas has vowed to achieve its national goals by peaceful negotiations. And it has demonstrated through concrete steps in the territory under the Palestinian Authority that it is serious in building its institutions in accordance with widely accepted norms of transparency and good governance.

Our Committee is encouraged that the international solidarity with the Palestinian people is as strong as ever. It demonstrates itself in a multitude of actions by Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations, as well as by individuals. Many Governments are actively involved in the search for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Be it through the work of the Quartet, Security Council, General Assembly, or in other format, they seek to find constructive ways in support of a two-State solution.

When in December 2008, the Israeli army invaded Gaza, the international community responded immediately by calling for calm and respect for the lives of innocent civilians. Rocket attacks by Palestinian groups that indiscriminately targeted Israeli civilians were also condemned. The Security Council and the General Assembly, in their respective resolutions, called for a permanent and durable ceasefire. The Secretary-General intervened and visited Gaza immediately after the halt of hostilities.

Let me, at this point, Mr. Secretary-General, express our Committee's sincere appreciation for your personal efforts and commitment to achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We in the Committee would like to urge you to continue to maintain a permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law and legitimacy.

The international community's solidarity with the Palestinian people was reaffirmed at the Sharm el-Sheikh donor conference last March with pledges of about \$4.5 billion for Gaza's reconstruction, albeit the bulk of these funds are yet to reach the Palestinian people in Gaza. We also see a demonstration of solidarity in the work of various investigative missions undertaken by the United Nations and other organizations in the wake of the war in Gaza.

Let me at his point also state unequivocally that our solidarity with the Palestinian people has never been and will never be at the expense of Israel. It is certainly not directed against the Israeli people. When the Committee criticizes certain policies of the Israeli Government, it does so because these policies violate international law, international humanitarian and international human rights law and prevent progress towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Our solidarity with the Palestinian people also manifests itself through the daily work of the United Nations agencies and many other international and civil society organizations carrying out vitally-needed activities that sustain the lives of the Palestinians. Today, we would like to pay a very special tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, on 8 December, will commemorate the 60th anniversary of its establishment. OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP, the World Food Programme and numerous other United Nations entities are doing everything possible to guarantee basic services to the Palestinians, in particular in Gaza.

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Let us turn the spirit of solidarity into collective power to remove the obstacles lying in the way of a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For our part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue to pursue the mandate given to it by the General Assembly, until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are realized, the illegal occupation of the Palestinian land is ended and a two-State solution is achieved, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Thank you.

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