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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**

*29 November 2006*

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have gathered here today, following the tradition going back to 1977, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We are greatly honoured by the presence at this special meeting of many distinguished guests. . When back in 1977 the General Assembly decided to observe this Day, it was mindful of the responsibility the United Nations had towards the Palestinian people and of the need to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Today's observance is a reaffirmation of the ongoing commitment of the international community to the achievement of this goal.

The Palestinian people have known almost four decades of foreign occupation. Their daily suffering and humiliation stems from the failure to establish a State of their own. For far too long they have been denied an opportunity to exercise their inalienable rights defined by the General Assembly as the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced and uprooted. Above all, they have been denied the right to live a normal life in peaceful coexistence with their Israeli neighbours.

Over the years, the occupation s has been accompanied by an intensified and disproportionate use of military force against largely defenseless residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, relentless settlement drive, acts of collective punishment and grave violations of international law.

It is a tragic reality that the question of Palestine and the plight of the Palestinian people have preoccupied the United Nations and indeed the entire international community for several decades. However, in spite of so many reasons to feel frustrated, there are reasons for hope too. One of these reasons is the fact that the need to establish a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous State of Palestine living side by side in peace with a secure Israel has by now become almost universally acknowledged and accepted. The Road Map has charted the way to a final peaceful settlement. What has been sorely missing is a determined and robust political action to see the political process through.

The year since the previous observance of this occasion has seen many significant events and developments. Israeli military operations continued unabated, with the use of heavy weaponry in the densely populated areas resulting in numerous civilian casualties. Particularly hard hit has been the Gaza Strip, destroying hopes generated by Israeli disengagement and underscoring the failure of unilateral measures. Settlement activities and construction of the wall seem not only to continue, but to intensify, in particular in and around East Jerusalem. The restrictions on Palestinian movement continue to stifle an already depressed Palestinian economy.

Yet, on the positive side, the Palestinian parliamentary elections, conducted under very difficult conditions of occupation, were a major success. For the first time, all major political forces took part, laying groundwork for a future democratic State of Palestine. While some political rivalries inevitably surfaced, this process provided the best proof of the social and

political maturity of Palestinian society. The ongoing negotiations on the national unity government are an important step in dealing with the current political and socio-economic crisis and, hopefully, in facilitating the resumption of the long-stalled peace process.

As blood continues to be spilled in the Middle East, international efforts aimed at encouraging dialogue and negotiations do not cease. The recent peace initiative by **France, Spain and Italy** may be a promising undertaking. There is also growing consensus on the need for convening an international conference on the Middle East, with the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference of 1991 as its main inspiration.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's observance provides an opportunity for all of us to reiterate our resolve to advance the cause of just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This resolve manifests itself in the continuing efforts of the Quartet and the international community as a whole, including Governments, the United Nations family, intergovernmental and civil society organizations. On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, allow me to reiterate our Committee's long-standing determination to work towards this goal together with all Member States and all sectors of civil society.

I should like to take the opportunity afforded by this solemn meeting to express our Committee's profound gratitude and pay a very special tribute to **His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan**. Throughout his entire tenure as our Secretary-General, Mr. Annan has demonstrated his outstanding and wise leadership in relentlessly promoting a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the area long dominated by a passionate and often heated discourse, his was the voice of reason and balance, urging the parties to renounce violence and embark on the road of dialogue and peace.

I should also like to welcome here today **Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa**, the President of the General Assembly, and **His Excellency Mr. Jorge Voto-Bernales**, the President of the Security Council. On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank them for their presence here today and for leadership they show on the complex and one of the most long-standing issues on the United Nations agenda – the question of Palestine.

Special thanks go to my fellow ambassadors gathered here, and their Heads of State or Government for their messages of support of and solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is also a great pleasure for me to welcome here the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the League of Arab States. I would like to thank them for their consistent support for and active participation in the work of our Committee, including this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

In stressing the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine, I would like to note, with heartfelt gratitude, the dedication and perseverance that characterize the personnel of agencies, bodies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system working on the ground together with their colleagues from civil society organizations in

difficult and often dangerous conditions. The lives of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territory would be much more difficult and hopeless without their support.

In conclusion, I would like, once again, to call on all the representatives of Member States and of intergovernmental and civil society organizations, gathered here today for this solemn occasion, to redouble their efforts to promote and achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the question of Palestine.

Thank you.

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