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Check Against Delivery

Statement by

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Madame Chair,

Allow me to congratulate you for the professional manner in which you have conducted these proceedings thus far. I also wish to thank Commissioner General Filippo Grandi for his briefing, although I must admit that my delegation was surprised by some of the gaping omissions in his comments. In particular, there was not a single mention of the rocket fire emanating from Gaza, which continues even as we speak.

First and foremost, I would like to reaffirm Israel's support for UNRWA's humanitarian mission. Over the course of its sixty years of operation, UNRWA has displayed a commitment to providing important humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees.

While taking all measures necessary to uphold its own security, Israel continues to do its utmost to facilitate UNRWA's operations. On behalf of my delegation, I wish to reiterate my country's commitment to the understandings expressed in the 1967 Comay-Michelmores Exchange of letters between Israel and UNRWA.

Commissioner General Grandi and other UNRWA officials have described the close relationship and cooperation that they enjoy with the Israeli authorities in their public statements at numerous international fora. This is the day-to-day reality on the ground – a clear contrast with the text of the resolution that this committee will soon vote upon. Sadly, it reflects the same pattern we have seen year after year. Time and again, this committee churns out anti-Israeli politicized resolutions that bear no basis in the facts on the ground.

Madame Chair,

Some used their statements today to make a wide range of accusations about Israel. Let me take a moment to remind this committee about the facts.

The only goods that Israel prevents from entering Gaza are arms, weapons and material with dual-use applications – in other words, material that is used to produce bombs or other weapons. Israel's blockade of Gaza is solely intended to prevent the smuggling of arms to Hamas and the other terrorist organizations that operate with impunity in the area. Let me repeat that: Israel's blockade of Gaza is solely intended

to prevent the smuggling of arms to Hamas and the other terrorist organizations. It's that simple. There is no other reason for the blockade.

For anyone who needs a reminder about why it might be important to prevent weapons from reaching the hands of these terrorist organizations, I suggest that you consider the state of major cities throughout southern Israel today. Over the past week, they have been bombarded with rocket after rocket and mortar after mortar. One man was killed. Four others were injured. Dozens were treated for shock.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that if your schools, cities and citizens are under attack, your government has a right to defend itself.

As we sit hear today, thousands of children are home from school so that they can be in the immediate vicinity of bomb shelters. Nearly one million Israeli civilians are home from work today for the same reason.

Terrorist rockets in Gaza are traveling further, their warheads are getting larger and their method of delivery is becoming more sophisticated. This is a direct result of the continuous smuggling of advanced weapons into the area. Israel has a fundamental duty to its citizens to try and stop this dangerous flow of weapons.

Madame Chair,

Despite the constant rain of rockets, mortars and missiles on Israeli civilians from Gaza, the Israeli Government has continued to take bold steps to help grow the economy in the area.

In June 2010, the Israeli government significantly liberalized the system through which civilian goods enter Gaza. Additional changes were made in February 2011 to implement the understandings reached between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Quartet Representative Tony Blair. These changes have expanded the inflow of materials and goods to Gaza dramatically, which has resulted in considerable economic growth.

According to Palestinian statistics, Gaza's real GDP growth amounted to 28% in the first half of 2011. GDP per capita rose accordingly by more than 20%. The unemployment rate has declined dramatically as a result.

Israel has also taken measures to substantially improve the West Bank economy, including the removal of hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints. Other measures have been taken to improve access and movement. This has yielded remarkable results. The West Bank's GDP grew by 8% in 2010 and 4% during the first half of 2011.

Madame Chair,

During the first nine months of this year, hundreds of thousands of tons of construction materials for international projects were shipped into Gaza. More than 150,000 tons were transferred for UNRWA projects alone. The quantity of commercial goods entering Gaza has also increased, growing by more than 87 percent.

In light of some of the statements we heard here today, I would like remind this Committee that the current capacity of the Kerem Shalom crossing exceeds all international and private sector requests by 30%. In other words, the international community is only using 70% of existing capacity to transfer goods. There is not a single civilian good that cannot enter Gaza today through Israeli crossings.

Israel has approved 163 projects overseen by the international community in Gaza. There are still incoming requests for additional projects and more approvals on the way. Yet, it remains the case that 40% of the approved projects have not yet been implemented.

Since June 2010, Israel has approved 62 UNRWA education projects, including the construction of 42 new UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA claims that there is an urgent need for more than 100 new schools in Gaza. Yet, the agency has not filed requests to have anywhere near this number of schools built – and remains far from completing the projects that have already been approved. Today UNRWA has not even begun construction on more than half of all its schools that have been approved.

Madame Chair,

Notwithstanding the successful cooperation between Israel and UNRWA, there have been unfortunate instances in which UNRWA officials have acted contrary to the humanitarian mission of the agency by making controversial political statements. These ventures into political terrain are not legitimate advocacy. They undermine the Agency's neutrality and harm its mission. UNRWA should focus its energies and financial resources on its humanitarian role and leave the realm of politics to others.

Madame Chair,

Many of those states that have used this debate to make inflammatory statements directed at my country have done little to support UNRWA or Palestinian refugees in any way.

According to UNRWA's statistics, no Arab country was among the Agency's top ten major donors over the past ten years. In fact, more than 90% of UNRWA's funding comes from western countries.

People in Washington, London, and Paris are struggling with an economic downturn, but still providing the bulk of support for UNRWA, while Arab states saturated in petrol dollars don't even give this institution crumbs off the table.

Israel sincerely hopes that our Arab neighbors will offer tangible support to the Palestinian people, through meaningful contributions to organizations such as UNRWA. Instead of simply adding to the chorus of state-bashing, the Palestinians true supporters will help advance state-building.

Madame Chair,

As I have mentioned, Israel recognizes the importance of UNRWA's work and will continue to support it. However, the resolutions before this committee are politicized and biased. They ignore basic facts, such as the destructive role played by Hamas in our region.

Hamas – recognized as a terror organization by the EU, U.S. and other nations – has remained in control of the Gaza Strip since it took over the area in a bloody coup in 2007. The organization openly calls for Israel's destruction. It maintains Gaza as an epicenter of terrorism. It continues to launch attacks against the Israeli civilian population.

During the past several months, we have witnessed the most serious escalation in rocket fire from Gaza since the end of Operation Cast Lead in 2009. In the past three months alone, some 200 rockets and mortars have been fired into southern Israel.

Hamas also continues to violently disturb the efforts of the international community in Gaza, particularly the work of UNRWA.

In May and June 2010, Hamas set fire to two UNRWA summer camps, most likely because those camps pose an alternative to Hamas summer camps, where young children are given weapons training and indoctrinated to pursue violence, hate Jews and seek martyrdom.

Recently the entire UNRWA education system, 243 schools in Gaza, were paralyzed by a union strike, following UNRWA's decision to suspend the head of the teachers' union for engaging in political activity with Hamas officials. It shows the continued attempts by Hamas to control the activities of UNRWA in Gaza.

Let me ask the distinguished representatives of this committee a few simple questions. Why do the resolution drafts before us make no mention of the violent takeover of the Gaza Strip? Why do they ignore the rockets that continue to rain down on Israeli civilians? Why is there no discussion about the violence that Hamas continues to unleash against UNRWA?

I look forward to the day when this committee examines these basic questions, engaging in a real discussion about the challenges facing our region.

Madame Chair,

In closing, I would like to state clearly that Israel shares the goal of all parties to resolve the refugee problem as part of a comprehensive solution to the conflict. All of these issues are interconnected. We can only solve the conflict through direct negotiations and realistic compromises. Prime Minister Netanyahu has called again and again for direct negotiations to begin immediately, without preconditions. We hope that the Palestinians will take Israel's outstretched hand and sit down at the negotiating table, instead of simply offering the same empty rhetoric in international fora.

Thank you, Madame Chair.