



PAKISTAN

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

56 Rue de Moillebeau, 1211 Geneva Tel: (4122) 749.1930 Fax: (4122) 734.8085

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT

BY

AMBASSADOR MASOOD KHAN
PAKISTAN'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

ON BEHALF OF THE ORGANIZATION
OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

AT THE THIRD SPECIAL SESSION

ON
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS EMANATING FROM
ISRAELI MILITARY INCURSIONS IN THE OCCUPIED
PALESTINIAN TERRITORY INCLUDING THE RECENT
ONE IN NORTHERN GAZA AND THE ASSAULT
ON BEIT HANOUN

GENEVA
15 NOVEMBER 2006

Mr. President,

The Organization of the Islamic Conference thanks you for convening this special session. Without your support, resolve and leadership, we could not have held this session. We look forward to the forthcoming visit to the Middle East by Madam Louise Arbour, High Commissioner for Human Rights, starting in a few days.

It is under exceptional circumstances that the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League have requested for a Special Session of the Human Rights Council. We are grateful to all those Council members and observers who have supported this call.

Some say that too frequent special sessions will devalue the currency of the Human Rights Council. We say too frequent human rights violations targeting one particular region make a mockery of the human rights machinery if it cannot respond or take action in real time.

It is indeed eerie how gross and systematic violations of human rights of Palestinians have been unleashed with regularity and precision before, during, and after Council sessions. In the face of such violations, convening the Human Rights Council, which is a standing body, is not an abuse of its mandate. Silence would be an unforgivable dereliction.

In July this year the Council urged Israel to release captive Palestinian ministers, lawmakers and civilians. They are still in captivity. Mr. John Dugard, the Special Rapporteur, has still not been able to visit the region to report on the situation in Gaza.

The Council has failed to implement its resolutions on the appalling human rights situation in the Gaza for the last six months. It should now be not under a gag order so that it cannot even speak up when egregious human rights violations take place. There is no law or custom imposing censorship on the Council barring it from expressing its will. People speak in the Council because they still believe that it is the world's conscience on human rights. If the Council ceases to speak on such horrendous acts, it would give a green signal for human rights violations.

There was no haste in convening the session; there was some delay. A grave human rights situation has been raging in Beit Hanun in the last fortnight. We waited for others to ask the Council to respond. There was no movement. The OIC and the Arab League once again had to take the high moral ground. Others backed us.

Recent violations in Beit Hanun are egregious, without a doubt. Last week's *Newsweek* captured the killings on November 8 in the Hamad Street: A barrage of Israeli shells rained down on a house in the town, killing 18, many of them children. Another house was hit within minutes. There were dead bodies piled on top of each other. They were in pieces. Charred papaya and carob leaves floated in puddles of blood and water; walls chewed by shrapnel. "I saw hands. I saw heads", one traumatized woman recalled. This says it all.

The European Commission called this incident an "unacceptable and unjustified act of violence" "an attack on all the forces working for peace."

The assaulting forces have said that the killings were the result of a technical malfunction. Israeli paper Haaretz writes: "... it takes considerable gall and cynicism to dare to claim that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) did not intend to kill inhabitants of Beit Hanun. ... The shocking fact is that the IDF bombard the helpless civilians." The paper continues: "the blame rests directly on people who hold official positions, flesh and blood human beings".

Mr. President,

Since June this year, continuous military strikes have left more than 350 Palestinians dead. The assaults in Beit Hanun have intensified killings of civilians and destruction of houses, properties and infrastructure or whatever was left of them after earlier incursions. More specifically, the rights to life, food, health and adequate housing have been violated with impunity.

The use of disproportionate force and resort to collective punishment have broken humanitarian law by targeting unarmed civilians – mostly women and children. The current escalation violates the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

People say that the OIC texts condemning killings in the Gaza are unbalanced. Balance cannot be created, where none exists, by *diktat* of realpolitik. We are sorry; we cannot create a balance between those who killed and those who were killed.

This Council should meet its minimum obligations. It should condemn the Israeli killings, call for immediate protection to the beleaguered Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and dispatch a high-level fact finding mission to Beit Hanun to investigate the horrors inflicted on its people. The Council's terms of reference are clear: international human rights law and international humanitarian law. If there is any hope for peace in the Middle East, an end to the violations of human rights of the Palestinians will be the first step. The Council should take that critical step.