

**UNITED NATIONS  
LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN MEETING  
IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE**

*The urgency of realizing a two-State solution*

**Montevideo, 29 and 30 March 2011**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**OPENING SESSION**

Keynote presentation by

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## **Opening**

In 1933, a Convention signed in this city set-out in its first article elements of statehood today considered reflective of customary international law. Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention noted that a state “as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a ) a permanent population; b ) a defined territory; c ) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states.”

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly recommended the division of historic Palestine in a Partition Plan to create two states, one Jewish and one Arab, that left the Palestinian people with less than half of their historic homeland.

In the 1948 War, Zionist forces drove out over 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, ethnically cleansing hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages of their native inhabitants., At the end of this war in 1949, a State of Israel was admitted as a member of the United Nations by the United Nations General Assembly. The General Assembly, in its resolution, noted that “in the judgment of the Security Council, Israel is a peace-loving State and is able and willing to carry out the obligations contained in the Charter.” The General Assembly resolution also noted that Israel, in its declaration “unreservedly accepts the obligations of the United Nations Charter and undertakes to honour them from the day when it becomes a Member of the United Nations.”

Since then, our people have been denied peace, dignity and the right to self-determination.

This September, as a step towards a just and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, Palestine should be admitted as a full member of the United Nations.

## **Negotiating History and Obstacles to an Israeli-Palestinian Peace**

Over the past two decades, Palestinians have engaged in peace talks with Israel in good faith. When, in 1988, we limited our national aspirations to statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, just 22% of our historic homeland, we made a historic compromise. Since then, in various negotiating rounds, we have put forward a number of solutions to address all of the core issues to our conflict with Israel.

In recent U.S.-mediated “proximity talks,” we put forward detailed proposals for achieving a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace on the basis of the two-state solution. These included detailed position papers and proposals on borders, refugees, Jerusalem, water and compensation.

But while past Israeli governments put forward proposals for a comprehensive peace that fell short of being just, fair and acceptable, the current Israeli government did not put forward any proposal for a comprehensive peace. To the contrary, the Netanyahu-led Government does not even recognize that the 1967 is the baseline for a discussion on borders, let alone the other internationally recognized legal principles and terms of reference, including UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and General Assembly Resolution 194.

Yet, the current Israeli government is not exceptional to past Israeli governments in at least one respect. All past Israeli governments have systematically transformed the physical and demographic landscape of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) to entrench Israeli control over Palestinian land Israel seeks to annex, while at the same time displacing Palestinians from those same areas. In doing so, successive Israeli governments have tried to erode the standing of the 1967 border as the basis for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in an attempt to unilaterally set conditions for an agreement.

Today, there are approximately half a million settlers living in the West Bank, and that number continues to grow rapidly. Of these, roughly 200,000 are located in East Jerusalem, which Israel has severed from the rest of the West Bank with its illegal Wall, military checkpoints and other obstacles to movement.

Tragically, the period in which we saw Israel most aggressively colonizing our land was the period following the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993. Many of our critics argued that the Government of Israel engaged in a peace process to deflect international pressure to resolve its conflict with Palestinians and other Arab States without any real intention of doing so. Others suggested that, by building more settlements and grabbing more Palestinian land, Israel has attempted to advance its negotiating position, even if illegally. We relied on Israeli good faith, and assumed that the international community would hold Israel accountable to violations of international law and agreements. But today we have reached the point where Israel's colonization of our land has completely undermined the credibility of the peace process in general and of our negotiations with Israel in particular.

Paradoxically, by building more settlements on our land, Israel did not improve its negotiating position but instead undermined the two-state solution as a model for a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli peace. In the very near term, the two-state solution may cease to be a practicable option available to Palestinians for concluding a Palestinian-Israeli peace. Today, over 40% of West Bank land falls under settlement council jurisdiction.

### **Evolving Conditions and Opportunities for Peace**

Despite significant challenges we face in the way of a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli peace, there exist today also a number of important opportunities resulting from evolving conditions in the region and in Palestine.

First, the Middle East today is witnessing significant change. The people of the Arab World are demanding government accountability and respect for their basic rights and dignity. Committed to betterment in their communities, people have mobilized, stood for principle and succeeded in effecting rapid change few believed to be possible. Many lessons can be drawn from recent events in the region. One such lesson is that human rights and people's dignity cannot be ignored without consequence. In my talks with Israelis, I have consistently insisted that any solution to our conflict must be grounded in principles of international law if it is to be legitimate and endure. Force is limited and unilateralism cannot bring peace.

Second, Palestinian Authority institutions have been substantially strengthened in recent years. According to the World Bank, "if the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance in institution-building and delivery of public services, it is well positioned for the establishment of a state at any point in the near future."<sup>1</sup> PA institutions are not perfect. But in only a few years, we have, through trial and error and a sense of purpose, built tremendous capacity in trying to serve our people

Third, members of the international community increasingly recognize today that a just resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a critical global interest, and indeed, an important element for stability and prosperity in the Middle East. Moreover, more and more people around the world are finding it difficult to remain silent in the face of Israel's illegal policies towards Palestinians, which offend people's sense of justice and humanity. Perhaps now, members of the global community will act to do what's right and necessary to achieve a lasting peace in the region.

### **Steps Latin American States Can Take to Advance Peace**

I would here like to identify some steps Latin American and Caribbean states can take to advance peace.

First, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Latin American countries that have already recognized our statehood. Such recognition helps generate diplomatic momentum for meaningful engagement and shows us, and Israel, that the global community is committed to seeing a just resolution to this conflict. It also helps reassert the central role of customary international legal principles. Indeed, Article 11 of the Montevideo Convention states that "The contracting states definitely establish as the rule of their conduct the precise obligation not to recognize territorial acquisitions or special advantages which have been obtained by force whether this consists in the employment of arms, in threatening diplomatic representations, or in any other effective coercive measure." By recognizing the State of Palestine, states reject Israel's claim to the territory it acquired by force in 1967.

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<sup>1</sup> See [The Underpinnings of the Future Palestinian State: Sustainable Growth and Institutions](#), *World Bank*, September 21, 2010

Now, we hope that other Latin American and Caribbean states, and other members of the international community, will also recognize the State of Palestine in the 1967 border.

Second, the world recognizes Israel's settlement enterprise as perhaps the single largest impediment to a two-state solution on the 1967 borders. We accordingly hope that Latin American countries take a leading role in stopping the import of goods produced in Israeli settlements. Goods produced in Israeli settlements are inextricably linked to violations of international humanitarian law: vineyards in settlements are grown on stolen Palestinian land and are irrigated with Palestinian water. By importing goods produced in settlements, third parties unwittingly provide Israel with incentives to retain and expand its settlements in the oPt. Trade between Israel and Mercusor, the South American trade bloc, is in the billions of dollars annually. Goods produced in Israeli settlements have found their way into Latin America, too. It is imperative that economic trade does not help sustain Israel's settlement project.

Finally, Latin American countries can play an important role in any future diplomatic process that aims to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Latin American states have already contributed significantly to the prospects of a just peace in the region. Through your principled and courageous support of a just solution, you can continue to serve the interest of peace, help create global momentum for a solution and give our people much needed hope.

### **Conclusion:**

We have been struggling for decades to achieve our rights, and we will continue that struggle until our rights are respected; until Palestinians in Lebanon no longer have to live in refugee camps, until a Palestinian from Nablus can pray freely in Jerusalem, and until Palestinian children no longer have to pass through walls and checkpoints on their way to and from school. This is what we are fighting for. We know that the path to a just peace will be long, with many obstacles and challenges. But we are confident that, with your principled support and active engagement, we can get there.

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