

Statement by H.E. Miroslav Lajcak, President of the General Assembly  
International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People  
29 November

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Excellencies, Deputy-Secretary-General, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

We are all here to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organising this special meeting.

In preparation, I looked up the definition of solidarity. I read that it is a union, which arises from common responsibilities and interests.

There is no doubt about it: the international community has a common responsibility towards the Palestinian people. And we have a shared interest in the peaceful resolution of this long-running conflict.

So, it is clear why we are here, to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people. I will make two main points on this today.

The first is that we can show our solidarity through humanitarian assistance.

We cannot just address the needs of the Palestinian people on international days, or at annual events, like the one we are celebrating today. They demand our attention 365 days a year.

People throughout the Palestinian territory are, as we speak, in need of concrete support. I want to focus, however, on the Gaza Strip, where the situation is grave. The ongoing blockade has left people wholly dependent on international aid. The rebuilding of critical infrastructure has been hampered. The economy remains weak. Many people are in dire humanitarian need, with women and children living in particularly difficult circumstances. And the Strip is home to more unemployed people than almost any other part of the world.

I would like to use this opportunity to sincerely thank all actors and entities which continue to provide humanitarian support to the Palestinian people. These include Member States, UN bodies, and regional and non-governmental organisations.

A vital role is played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I am concerned about the Agency's current serious shortfall of 77.5 million dollars. I encourage discussions on funding modalities to continue. Importantly, I want to express my appreciation to all Member States which contribute, on a voluntary basis, to the Agency's budget and work.

We know that the Question of Palestine can give rise to debate. However, when it comes to assistance to the Palestinian people, all UN Member States have been able to express solidarity in one voice. And consensus of the General Assembly has been essential in this regard.

I want to stress, however, that our responsibility to the Palestinian people extends beyond humanitarian support.

This brings me to my second point, which is that international solidarity must be used to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question.

In 1947, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181. This formed the legal basis for the establishment of the State of Israel, as well as a second state, for the Palestinian people. In the 70 years that followed, only one of these two things has come to pass.

I firmly believe that a two-state solution is the only answer to what we call the question of Palestine. Support to this solution acts also as an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

This further means supporting the establishment of conditions, which are conducive to a successful peace process. We've seen some of these conditions beginning to take shape. I am of course referring here to the recent commitments made to intra-Palestinian reconciliation. But we need more - including an immediate halt to settlement expansion. Other necessary conditions include the cessation and condemnation of all acts of violence, including terrorism, as well as the incitement to these acts.

Excellencies,

Before I conclude, I want to go back to the definition of solidarity. And, in doing so, I want to stress that solidarity is not sympathy. We usually express sympathy when there is nothing we can do. However, when it comes to the question of Palestine, we have a responsibility and we have an interest. Palestinian people do not need our sympathy - they deserve our solidarity.

We came here today to express it. However, the people who need it the most will not be able to hear us. They are not sitting amongst us. They are not listening from the gallery. They are on the ground - many of them in conditions we could not imagine. So, while our words in this hall are important, our actions outside of it will speak louder.

I thank you.