



STATEMENT BY MR. SHATRUGHAN SINHA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 32: REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AT THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 08, 2006.

Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs in the occupied territories, under Agenda Item 32. It is timely and meaningful, given the situation before us on an issue that the Secretary-General has eloquently described as "carrying a powerful symbolic and emotional charge for people throughout the world".

Mr. Chairman,

Since the last report of this Special Committee, there were moments that held out hope for a better day ahead in the painful saga of the Middle East. India welcomed the implementation by Israel of its disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. We saw this as a positive development; a significant first step that we hoped would culminate in a mutually acceptable, negotiated settlement in accordance with the Roadmap and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Similarly, we had nurtured hopes that this year's elections in the Palestinian National Authority would enable the peace process to resume, just as we hoped that the formation of a new coalition in Israel in March this year could perhaps lead to a redefinition of entrenched positions.

However, these hopes have been belied by events this year. We have watched with dismay as the reluctance of the international community to deal with the newly-elected Palestinian government led to both an almost-complete suspension of international assistance and non-payment of taxes and revenues by Israel to the Palestinian authority. The result has been an almost total collapse of the Palestinian economy, contributing more frustration and anger to an already

volatile situation. There has been a resumption of rocket attacks and suicide bombings by Palestinian militants in Israeli territory and massive, disproportionate Israeli violence that impacts grievously upon ordinary Palestinians. The abduction of an Israeli soldier, and the massive retaliation, including detention of elected representatives, has made it harder for either side to de-escalate the situation. Daily acts of violence continue to take place almost routinely.

Mr. Chairman,

India is deeply concerned at the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Support for the Palestinian cause is a central feature of India's foreign policy. Over sixty years of violence convince us that there can be no military solution to the Palestinian issue. We have joined the international community in voicing concern over the endless cycle of violence and counter-violence that characterizes the current phase of this conflict. Violence remains a serious impediment to the peace process, and a solution does not lie in more violence, but in pursuing the path of political dialogue.

India condemns all acts of terrorism, provocation and incitement to violence as well as harsh and disproportionate retaliatory measures. We believe that the world should collectively exhort all parties to exercise utmost restraint, abjure violence, and return to the negotiating table and thereby make progress towards a peaceful solution that will lead, within a reasonable time frame, to the creation of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State within well-defined and secure borders, living side-by-side and at peace with Israel.

Mr Chairman,

The focus of the Report of the Special Committee, as contained in document A/61/500, is on the human rights of the Palestinian people. Human rights are universal and indivisible in nature and we have strongly espoused the philosophy of "all human rights for all people". Apart from the reprehensible extension of collective punishment of the entire Palestinian people, the report outlines various human rights that have been violated in the occupied Palestinian Territories. It chronicles rights violated by restrictions on daily life; by the continued construction of the separation wall and the provision of segregated roads for settlers; and by the devastation of the Palestinian economy and civil infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman,

It is in this unhappy context that the thirty-eighth report of the Special Committee is set. We cannot but regret that this year, not only has the Committee been unable to visit the Occupied Palestinian Territories or the Syrian Golan, it has also been unable to carry out its annual site visit to the Middle East at all. While the report is a credible effort to collate information from the ground and to examine the

impact of the ongoing tragedy in the occupied territories upon the human rights of the Palestinian and other Arab peoples in these lands, there is no gainsaying the fact that the report would have benefited from a site visit, at the very least, to the region itself.

This is all the more a matter of concern since, as the report observes, “not since the inception of its mandate in 1968 has the Committee ever confronted such anger and misery among the Palestinian people and other Arabs in occupied territories and disrespect for their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.” More disturbing is the fact that this sense of desolation and frustration is leading people in the region to increasingly call into question the very role of the United Nations in the current crisis, and to wonder if their plight has been neglected by the international community.

Such reports are a frightening augury for the future. It is in recognition of the terrible implications of continued misery, frustration and bitterness in the region that we have launched efforts on a modest scale, to contribute to the amelioration of the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Palestine. For instance, earlier, we had extended material and technical assistance, including in the infrastructure and pharmaceuticals sectors, to help consolidate progress towards self-government and nation-building. We have pledged US\$3 million as donor assistance to the PNA, and projects have been completed in the field of higher education and training slots have been offered. A grant of US\$15 million was announced during President Mahmoud Abbas’ visit to India last May. This May, in response to a request from the Palestinian authorities, we announced humanitarian assistance worth Rs.100 million, primarily in the form of medicines and medical supplies; its first tranche was delivered in August.

Mr. Chairman,

We are deeply concerned by the humanitarian crisis that the report outlines so starkly. We call on all parties to show restraint and avoid action that could worsen the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people. We urge adoption of urgent measures in accordance with the Roadmap, to improve security and the humanitarian and economic conditions of the Palestinian people. We also affirm our support for most recommendations and requests made to the General Assembly, the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, by the report of the Special Committee. We support the suggestion that the Special Committee be provided a renewed mandate in line with current realities; one that takes into account the hopes, aspirations and also the deep-rooted sense of frustration of those living in the occupied territories.

Mr. Chairman,

India reaffirms its commitment to a negotiated two-State solution agreed between the parties that would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing side-by-side with Israel in peace and security. We regard the Roadmap, as the framework for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We support the call of the Secretary-General to consider innovative ways by all sides in order to take steps to fully implement the Roadmap which would lead to, without delay, a fair, stable and equitable solution to the conflict based on relevant UN resolutions, including Security Council resolutions. We also welcome the announcement by the Quartet principals in September this year, of the continuation and extension of the Temporary International Mechanism, to provide a channel for the donor community to extend need-based assistance directly to the Palestinian people. We hope that the process of reviving the peace process, symbolized by the Ministerial-level meeting at the Security Council on the margins of the General Debate this September, will eventually lead to a clearly-defined and comprehensive peace. We hope that in the months ahead, the Quartet and the regional parties, will help de-escalate the situation, end the cycle of violence and counter-violence, and remove restrictions on the normal functioning of the Palestinian economy and society. This will help create an atmosphere conducive to resuming direct negotiations with a time bound solution that brings peace to this sorely troubled land.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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