

*Permanent Observer Mission  
of Palestine  
to the United Nations*



البعثة الدائمة  
لفلسطين  
لدى الأمم المتحدة

*Statement by*

*H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas  
Chairman of the Executive Committee of the  
Palestine Liberation Organization  
President of the Palestinian National Authority*

*At the*

*General Debate  
of the  
Sixty-Third Session  
United Nations General Assembly*

*New York, 26 September 2008*

*Check Against Delivery*

Mr. President,

At the outset, I congratulate you upon your election as President of our Assembly this year. We wish you all success and express our confidence that you continue pursuit of the great mission undertaken by the United Nations, which constitutes a monumental achievement in the history of humankind for the promotion of dialogue and understanding and for the resolution of issues and conflicts in accordance with the rules and principles of international law, including humanitarian law, and on the basis of the human rights covenants consistent with the spirit of the times and the needs of this Organization for resolving the problems and conflicts and confronting the enormous challenges before us, including poverty and hunger and issues of environment and climate change.

On this occasion, Mr. President, I also wish to commend the role played and positive contribution made by your predecessor, H.E. Mr. Srjan Kerim, during the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the General Assembly.

I would also like to express our deep appreciation for the efforts, positions and initiatives taken by H.E. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, reflecting foresight and pragmatism regarding the various issues before us and regarding all regions in crisis and threats to world peace, including in particular in the Middle East region. I highly value the Secretary-General's understanding of the need to address political as well as the humanitarian issues concerning the Palestinian people and our region along with the important role that continues to be played by various U.N. agencies, including UNRWA, which continues to shoulder great responsibility and burdens, especially in the Gaza Strip and in the refugee camps in the West Bank and the refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. In the absence of such a continuous, central role, we would have suffered even more severe and perilous crises than we have experienced until the present.

Mr. President,

I would have liked to bring to you this year the news of the achievement of a comprehensive agreement between us and our Israeli neighbors bringing an end to Israeli occupation of our land since 1967 and an end to the suffering of the millions of our people living as refugees and displaced persons living in exile outside of their homeland.

I believe that the entire world, with its differing coalitions and trends, shares with me this desire, especially following the Annapolis Conference late last year and the commencement of the political process anew, setting the necessary guidelines and principles for the advancement of negotiations towards the conclusion of a comprehensive and complete agreement on all final status issues. Such agreement would lead to the realization of peace within our region, allowing it to enter a new era of relations characterized by good neighborliness, mutual recognition, security and open borders and not by walls and barriers.

I am certain that the history of the conflict in our region has not before witnessed the gathering of as many countries that came together at the Annapolis Conference or the consensus that arose there demanding not only vigorous action to accelerate and advance negotiations towards the achievement of a final peace agreement, but also explicitly emphasizing the need for

the removal of all the obstacles that have continuously impeded the negotiating process and cast doubt on its credibility, usefulness and ability to actually resolve all aspects of the conflict. The main obstacle I refer to is that of the Israeli settlement campaign and its continuation throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in East Jerusalem.

All of the participants in Annapolis took a united, firm and unprecedented stand calling for the immediate cessation of illegal settlements activities. It was recognized that this was a prerequisite for allowing the negotiations towards ending the conflict to progress and lead to the turning of the page of occupation and the grave, historical injustices inflicted on our people over the long decades.

The participation of our brothers from most Arab countries in the Annapolis Conference was not merely a symbolic gesture. On the contrary, this participation, in terms of both the level of attendance and the substance of positions, was a reflection of the genuine desire to embrace and support the political process and to deal with it with complete seriousness on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut more than six years ago.

Allow me, Mr. President, from this rostrum to once again recall the special importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. I draw attention to the significance of each and every platform because it represents a major joint Arab undertaking offering a historic opportunity for the achievement of peace and security and mutual recognition of all.

Indeed, it has been strange to hear excuses that we cannot understand or accept to justify the continuation of the settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, dealing with the land as if it were not occupied territory or as if peace is possible without an end to the occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied 1967, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a Farms, and including an end to the occupation of East Jerusalem, the capital of our future Palestinian State and a city holy to hundreds of millions of the faithful of the monotheistic religions.

For the purpose of these noble objectives, namely the building of a new Middle East free of destructive mind-sets and irrational tendencies that are contrary to the highest human values preached by all religions and creeds, a new Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. We were and we remain committed to international law and extend our hands for dialogue and negotiation to resolve the conflict in a way that provides all that is required for co-existence and openness to the future for the building of our societies and our nations in accordance with the aspirations of our peoples for progress and with the spirit of the times.

Accordingly, I renew my call with genuineness to all concerned parties, including Israel, and all concerned regional and international powers to seize the opportunity provided by the Arab Peace Initiative, an opportunity that should not be missed or treated lightly.

In this context, we express our full support for the continuation of indirect negotiations currently taking place between Syria and Israel with the help of friendly Turkey. We hope this process will succeed in the achievement of justice and the implementation of international resolutions and the affirmation of international legitimacy.

On our part, we will continue to strive for the achievement of the maximum progress possible in the current negotiations between us and Israel through the end of this year, benefiting from past experience and relying on the desire of all our peoples to realize a genuine and comprehensive peace that will end decades of occupation and hostilities and result in the attainment of the two-State solution – the State of Palestine living alongside the State of Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, including the achievement of a just and agreed solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with resolution 194. When I refer to the benefit of past experience, I wish to clearly convey that partial or interim solutions or the dropping or deferral of certain core issues are unacceptable and unviable and will maintain the roots of the conflict, thus undermining any achievements on the road to peace. The solution must be comprehensive, complete and detailed without any reluctance.

The solution we aspire for must include a mechanism to ensure its full and honest implementation according to an agreed-upon timetable. All of this inevitably requires international supervision of the implementation of the solution as well as a more effective role of the international Quartet to safeguard the solution we will reach and an effective and guarantor role of the U.N. Security Council and various U.N. bodies.

At this juncture, I would like to express our appreciation for the role played by the United States administration and President George Bush and Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice in advancing the negotiations and the peace process and their efforts to remove the obstacles that stand in its way. I wish to also commend the positions taken by the Islamic and Non-Aligned countries, which have always taken firm positions in support of a just peace, to express our appreciation for the role played by the European Union, which has supported our efforts in every way possible, and the role and positions of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China and Japan, who have always supported the advancement and continuity of the political process.

Mr. President,

While humankind celebrates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the conditions being endured by our people are increasingly severe and complex. Our nation, which is only a small area of land, continues to suffer from fragmentation and undermined contiguity between its cities and villages as a result of more than 609 checkpoints and roadblocks on all main and secondary roads. There is no precedent for this in modern history. The harshest and most painful of these barriers are those that have surrounded Occupied East Jerusalem, severing the link between it and its Palestinian surroundings.

As for attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian civilians, these have become daily occurrences, where the law of the jungle and the methods of racial terrorism prevail. The situation necessitates a serious stand by the international community and a clear call upon Israel to begin withdrawing its settlers and dismantling its settlements from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, pursuant to the relevant provisions of international law and to pave the way for the forthcoming peace steps between us and Israel.

At the same time, the constant tragedy that affects every Palestinian family continues with the ongoing detention and imprisonment of more than 11,000 Palestinians in the Israeli occupier's jails. I know not of a situation in the today's world such as ours, where a people is subjected to the detention of such large numbers of its civilians and where the prisons continue to be filled with more and more of its youth, who are guilty only of wanting freedom and wanting to see a future that is different the miserable reality of occupation and siege and the loss of hope.

Mr. President,

Despite the harshness of these circumstances, our National Authority and governing institutions have exerted all efforts to improve our conditions in all fields, including in the security, economic, education, health and cultural fields. I wish to express our gratitude to our brothers in the Arab countries and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, as well as the entire international community, for all of the assistance extended to our people and our Authority in all areas for the repair and revival of the Palestinian economy and the provision of real opportunities for its advancement and also for the rebuilding of the Palestinian security apparatus and the various institutions and agencies of the Palestinian Authority. In this regard, I wish to convey special thanks and appreciation to all of the envoys from other countries who have provided assistance in several fields, particularly Mr. Tony Blair, the Quartet's Special Envoy. It is with pride, even under these most difficult conditions, that I can state that we have been able to achieve security and the rule of law and public order in the vast majority of our cities and areas despite all of the obstacles we have had to confront and that remain. We will continue to follow this same path with firm determination and resolve.

In this connection, the Paris Donor's Conference, followed by the Bethlehem Economic Conference, were two special occasions in support of our national economy and our financial and economic institutions as well as in assistance of the Palestinian private sector, which has without hesitation borne heavy burdens over the past years and has not been able to develop and progress.

Here, I must emphasize that the continuation of the siege and isolation of the Gaza Strip is deepening the tragic humanitarian crisis there, where unemployment is endemic, unprecedented in scope and scale, and the opportunities for education and medical care are few, punishing and causing the malnourishment of a whole generation, with all of the consequent risks for the future of the entire people. All of this is in addition to the transformation of Gaza into a virtual prison for 1.5 million Palestinians. We have and continue to exert all efforts to achieve the lifting of the siege on Gaza, this dear part of our homeland. In this regard, we express our deep appreciation to the role being played by the brotherly Arab countries, especially Egypt, to alleviate the suffering and to help us save our people from this extremely difficult situation they have found themselves in, including in particular the efforts to end the division resulting from the coup led by Hamas against Palestinian legitimacy more than a year ago.

As I have expressed on more than one occasion, I reaffirm once more from this rostrum that we will spare no effort to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation and unity and we have already announced a preliminary plan that opens the door for this reconciliation to be realized and the formation of an independent, impartial government that is acceptable to all and that will

not return us under siege. This government will prepare for the holding of legislative and presidential elections and will continue in the rebuilding of the security apparatus based on professional tenets with the support of Arab security. After the completion of these steps, it will be possible for us to proceed with the further strengthening of our reconciliation and deepening the participation of all.

If this is not actualized, whoever rejects these principles and does not conform with them must bear responsibility before our entire people and before the Arab and international positions that reject this split and division.

Mr. President,

In concluding my statement, I recall the words of our great Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, who we recently lost and whose loss is the loss of a great cultural and humanitarian symbol. He highly valued life and cherished his homeland, calling our new generations to love life on their land and to preserve its continuity and keep its torch lit.

Thank you, Mr. President.