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Statement by

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

**before
the 61st session of the United Nations General Assembly**

New York, 21 September 2006

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Unofficial Translation

**Your Excellency Madame President,
Your Excellency United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Madame President,

I would like to start by congratulating you on your election to preside over this session, and to wish you success in achieving the objectives of the United Nations, which are accepted by all nations of the world. These nations believe that this organization was created to protect international peace, human rights, and peoples' right to self-determination. Indeed, in the words of President Wilson:

"Nowhere else in the world have noble men and women exhibited in more striking forms the beauty and energy of sympathy and helpfulness and counsel in their efforts to rectify wrong, alleviate suffering, and set the weak in the way of strength and hope."

Therefore, I hope that this session results in promoting cooperation between nations and peoples in pursuit of their common interest, namely the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which are the basis for membership in this organization.

We highly commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Kofi Annan, for the effective role he played and the great efforts he exerted, and his wise leadership, during the past years to enhance the United Nations and reinvigorate its role. We also commend him for his efforts particularly towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which is the question of Palestine.

Madame President,

Only a few weeks ago, the fire of war stopped raging in Lebanon. Despite the gravity of the losses, destruction and tragedy, the international community expeditiously, effectively and successfully intervened to put an end to the war, and to provide support to the people and legitimate government of Lebanon, in order to safeguard its security and independence and to end the era of war on its soil. As I commend this international role, I hope that this positive and effective intervention extends politically and practically to resolve the root of all the conflicts and wars that have plagued our region over many decades. Indeed, after all the experiences of wars that we have been through, I need not to reconfirm the fact that without resolving the question of Palestine, and the continuation of the occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands since 1967, the elements of tension and conflagration, will keep the conflict alive, and will keep the door wide open to all forms of violence, terrorism, regional confrontations and global crises.

It is unfortunate today to see that international plans and initiatives, foremost amongst it the Road Map, which was endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, have reached a state of stagnation and even regression. Even calls for

the resumption of negotiations are faced with preconditions. Despair and frustration thrive with the roar of bulldozers that build illegal settlements, change of the demographic nature of Jerusalem, and erect the Apartheid Separation Wall inside our occupied land and between its various parts. They thrive on the continuation of the frightful siege, through military checkpoints that have turned our cities and regions into reservations, on the persistent saga of killings and assassinations that have claimed hundreds of civilian lives, on home demolitions and on the ongoing arrests that have reached more than eight thousand Palestinians including parliamentarians and cabinet ministers, as well as some who have been languishing in suffering for three decades, and whose release and freedom is eagerly awaited by their families and whole nation.

Under these conditions, I can legitimately ask how the international community can expect extremism to retreat, or the waves of violence to ebb. How can we and all the forces of moderation and peace in our region forcefully intervene and convince our public opinion that there is hope on the horizon? Or that the option of dialogue, negotiation and international legitimacy - which is our strategic choice and the path which we relentlessly advocate, and which we will never abandon- will be fruitful and will have a real chance of success?

It is not only I who lives in the midst of this tragedy who must answer such a fundamental question. The whole international community, particularly influential powers, is called upon to provide tangible evidence that they will support the unconditional resumption of negotiations, and will provide them with a true international cover and support to ensure their success through the cessation of settlement activity, collective punishment, and separation walls. This will provide the positive atmosphere for launching negotiations and reaching their objectives in achieving a just peace based on the two-state solution as called for by President of the United States of America, George Bush.

Such a solution must be based on international legitimacy which was upheld in the Arab Peace Initiative through the establishment of the independent State of Palestine on the June 4th, 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, and reaching a just and agreed upon solution for the problem of the refugees - who constitute more than half of our Palestinian people - in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

We have heard lately from the Government of Israel that it will abandon the policy of unilateralism and one-sided actions. This is encouraging, provided that the alternative is not stagnation or the imposition of facts on the ground, but rather a return to the negotiation table and reaching a comprehensive solution to all of the permanent status issues, to ensure a secure future for our children and theirs.

Madame President,

I have recently sought, in tandem with all the strands of the Palestinian political spectrum, to establish a government of national unity that is consistent with international and Arab legitimacy and that corresponds to the principles established by the Quartet. Therefore, and based on our commitment to these

criteria, I would like to reaffirm that any future Palestinian government will commit to all the agreements that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority have committed to, particularly the Letters of Mutual Recognition exchanged between the two great late leaders Yasser Arafat and Itzhak Rabin on September 9th, 1993. These letters contain mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, renunciation of violence, and commitment to negotiations as the path towards reaching a permanent solution that will lead to the establishment of the independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel.

Any future government will commit to imposing security and order, to ending the phenomena of multiple militias, indiscipline and chaos, and to the rule of law, since this is primarily a national Palestinian need.

The efforts that we have exerted are for the sole purpose of establishing a national unity government that has real substance, so as to achieve national Palestinian consensus around our national objectives which comply with international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, and around peaceful means for the realization of these objectives. When such a national consensus is reached, and when a new national unity government is established according to it, this must be viewed as a qualitative achievement, not a step backwards or a regression – even a limited one – from the path to which we have always been determinedly committed even in the face of the bleakest of conditions.

I would like to reiterate that negotiations with Israel have been and will remain to be under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the PLO, which I head. The outcome of these negotiations will be presented to the Palestinian National Council (PNC) the highest Palestinian national body, or to a national public referendum.

What we have achieved in this regard should suffice to lift the unjust siege imposed on our people, which has inflicted extensive damage on our society, its livelihood, and the means of its growth and development.

Madame President,

I come to you bearing the wounds of a people that bleed everyday. A people that seek a normal life, where our children go safely to school, where children are born to live, and not die.

Where youth can find honorable work that provides them with a dignified path to a secure future, so that they can be partners in formulating their narrative, not victims to the cruelty of History. Where women give birth to their babies in hospitals, not on the checkpoints of the occupation. Where families gather in the evenings to dream of a new day, devoid of killing, imprisonment, or arrest.

I simply want tomorrow to be better than today. I want my homeland Palestine to be a homeland not a prison, independent and sovereign like all other peoples of this world. I want for Jerusalem to be the meeting point for the dialogue of all prophets. To be the capital of two neighbor states that live in peace and equality.

From this venerated platform, thirty-two years ago, the late President Yasser Arafat issued his famous resounding call: "do not let the olive branch fall from my hand".

And here I am repeating this same call: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand, do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.

Thank You, Madame President