

*Permanent Observer Mission
of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations*



البعثة المراقبة الدائمة
لدولة فلسطين
لدى الأمم المتحدة

Statement of His Excellency

Mahmoud Abbas

President of the State of Palestine

Before the

United Nations General Assembly

72nd session

New York

20 September 2017

Check against delivery

Mr. President of the United Nations General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty-four years have passed since the signing of the Oslo Accords, an interim agreement that set a five-year period for bringing an end to the Israeli occupation, granting hope to the Palestinian people that they would soon achieve independence within their State and achieve peace between Palestinians and Israelis. What is left of this hope today?

We recognized the state of Israel on the 1967 borders. But Israel's continuous refusal to recognize these borders has put into question the mutual recognition we signed in Oslo in 1993.

Since my speech before your august Assembly last year, when I appealed for 2017 to be the year for ending the Israeli occupation of the territory of the State of Palestine, the Israeli Government has relentlessly pursued its settlement campaign on our land, in contravention of all international conventions and the relevant resolutions on the question of Palestine. It has persisted with its flagrant disregard for the two-State solution, resorting to delay policies and tactics and devising pretexts to evade its responsibility to end its occupation of the territory of the State of Palestine.

Instead of addressing the underlying issues and resolving the root causes of the conflict, it has tried to misdirect international attention to the secondary issues actually caused by its colonial policies. While we call – just as the international community continues to call – for an end of the Israeli occupation of the territory of our State, it incites and makes false accusations, pretends there is no Palestinian partner, and imposes unreasonable, obstructive conditions. Israel is well aware, as you all are, that its occupation breeds incitement and violence, and this Israeli military occupation of our land has now lasted for over half a century.

It is thus very strange to hear some of those who hold the responsibility to end this occupation referring to it as an “alleged occupation”. Such perceptions are totally disconnected from reality.

Israel bares first and foremost the shame for continuation of this occupation, but so does the international community. The United Nations bears a legal, political, moral and humanitarian obligation to end this occupation and enable the Palestinian people to live in freedom and prosperity in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the 4 June 1967 borders.

Beyond any doubt, draining the swamp of colonial occupation of our land and ending its unjust, oppressive and illegal practices against our people would greatly affect the fight against terrorism, depriving terrorist groups of one of the key rallying cries they exploit to promote their repugnant ideas. We must thus reiterate that ending the Israeli occupation of our land is of urgency and an integral part of the efforts that must be undertaken to confront such groups.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have explored every avenue and exerted far-reaching efforts to achieve peace with our Israeli neighbors, and together, with the Arab and Islamic States, have adopted an invaluable initiative – the Arab Peace Initiative – aimed at resolving the Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflict. According to this initiative,

upon Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967, the Arab and Islamic States would recognize Israel and normalize relations with it. What was the Israeli response to this initiative?

There was also the 2003 Quartet Roadmap for peace, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council and accepted by the Palestinian side. It too was rejected by the Israeli Government.

Indeed, there have been countless initiatives seeking to break the deadlock in the peace process and ensure the success of peace efforts. The French Initiative – aimed at salvaging the peace process and the two-State solution – led to the convening of the Paris Conference earlier this year, which was attended by seventy States and four international organizations. Israel not only rejected this initiative, but boycotted the Conference. In addition, President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Xi Jinping of China, have launched initiatives for peace. And the latest of these peace efforts, all of which we are thankful for, is being led by United States President Donald Trump.

On our part, we have also repeatedly tried to revive the peace process and called on the Israeli Prime Minister to affirm his commitment to the two-State solution and sit with us at the negotiations table to delineate the borders between Israel and the State of Palestine in order to open a path for meaningful negotiations to resolve all other final status issues. Unfortunately, he rejected this offer.

Even as we continue our genuine efforts for success of the peace process and the achievement of its ultimate goals, Israel continues to breach its commitments and to obstruct efforts, guaranteeing the process' failure by its relentless settlement activities and undermining of the two-State solution. This represents a real threat to both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis, and compels us to undertake a comprehensive, strategic review of the entire process.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

A commitment by one side to peace is never enough to achieve peace.

We have warned in the past and continue to warn of Israeli policies aimed at entrenching the occupation and colonial facts on the ground in East Jerusalem. These policies stir religious animosity and may lead to a violent religious conflict. We have called on the Israeli Government to uphold the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites in the City. However, the Israeli Government, since its occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, has repeatedly acted to consolidate its unilateral annexation of the City, a decision we rejected then and still reject today alongside the whole international community, including the Security Council. Al-Quds is an occupied city and Israel's decisions and practices there are null and void and illegal in their entirety. The same applies to all Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Israel's attempts to change the historic status quo in Al-Quds and in particular vis-à-vis the status and integrity of Al Aqsa Mosque can only be described as playing with fire and an infringement upon our responsibilities as well as those of brotherly Jordan. We caution the Israeli Government of the implications of such an aggression and hold it fully responsible for the consequences.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentleman,

Despite this ongoing occupation and its oppressive policies and practices, we have been able to build the institutions of our State, which has been recognized by a majority of Member States of this organization. Here, I seize the opportunity to once again thank all of those countries that have recognized the State of Palestine and that have voted for upgrading its status at the United Nations. These steps certainly constitute contributions to remedying the historic injustice that has befallen our people and are steps in favor of the principles of justice and the vision of peace between Palestinians and Israelis and in the Middle East region and the world.

I further stressed in my speech last year before your august Assembly that the status quo in the occupied territory of the State of Palestine is not sustainable. As the situation has only deteriorated due to Israel's insistence on pursuing its occupation, aggressive policies and unending violations of international law, we must once again call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to fully respect and uphold all obligations stemming from this occupation and to bear its consequences. We cannot continue to be an Authority without any authority, or to allow this occupation to continue without cost. We are fast approaching this point.

The two-State solution is today in jeopardy. We cannot as Palestinians stand still in the face of this threat targeting our national, political and social existence on our land, and endangering regional and international peace and security. We will have to take steps or look for alternatives to preserve our national existence and to keep open the horizons for peace and security.

In such a situation, it is our right to search for alternatives that preserve our rights and protect our land and our people from an entrenching system of Apartheid. We have called on the International Criminal Court to open an investigation and to prosecute Israeli officials for their involvement in settlement activities and aggressions against our people, and we will continue to pursue our accessions to international conventions, protocols and organizations, as Palestine has acquired observer State status in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 2012. I will call for the convening of the Palestinian National Council in the near future to operationalize this strategic review.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The path we have chosen as Palestinians and Arabs, and the path chosen by the world is that of international law and international legitimacy. Our choice is the two-State solution on the 1967 borders, and we will grant every chance for the efforts being undertaken by President Donald Trump and the Quartet and international community as a whole to achieve an historic agreement that brings the two-State solution to reality, enabling the State of Palestine with its capital East Jerusalem to live in peace and security side by side with Israel.

But if the two-State solution were to be destroyed due to the creation of a one-State reality with two systems – Apartheid – from the unchecked imposition of this occupation that is rejected by our people and the world, this would be a failure, and neither you, nor we, will have any other choice but to continue the struggle and demand full, equal rights for all inhabitants of historic Palestine. This is not a threat, but a warning of the realities before us as a result of ongoing Israeli policies that are gravely undermining the two-State solution.

From here, I address the Israeli people, across the spectrum of their society, and tell them: We want to live in peace. Do not listen to those who try to convince you that peace between us is not possible.

Our problem is with the Israeli colonial occupation and not with Judaism as a religion. Judaism for us Palestinians – Christians and Muslims – will never be considered a threat. It is a monotheistic religion like Islam and Christianity. The Creator says in the Quran: In the name of God the merciful “*we do not distinguish between his prophets*”. Almighty God spoke the truth.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have dutifully upheld our responsibilities towards our people in the Gaza Strip in spite of the division since 2007. From then until now, we have provided all forms of support on our own to our people in Gaza, who are gravely suffering the cruel Israeli blockade. Further, we have repeatedly affirmed the need for protection for our people in Gaza. We have also repeatedly affirmed that Gaza will not be the Palestinian State, and that there can be no Palestinian State without Gaza.

Today, I must express my relief at the agreement reached in Cairo as a result of Egyptian efforts. We are thankful for these efforts aimed at nullifying the measures undertaken by Hamas following the division, including the formation of a government; enabling the national consensus government to fully carry out its mandate in the Gaza Strip; and allowing for general elections to be held.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Also in my speech before this Assembly last year, I appealed to the British Government to rectify the grave injustice it inflicted upon the Palestinian people when it issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, promising Jews a national homeland in Palestine, despite the fact that Palestine was inhabited by the Palestinian people and was among the most progressive and prosperous countries, and should not have been colonized or placed under the mandate of a great Power. Until this moment, the British Government has not taken any step to correct this historical injustice and has neither apologized to the Palestinian people nor compensated them, nor has it recognized the State of Palestine.

The impunity that continues to be granted by the international community with regard to Israel’s aggressive policies has clearly only emboldened its pursuit of these policies. Let me remind you that Israel has violated international resolutions since its establishment. It has violated the United Nations Charter and continues to do so, as well as resolutions 181 (II), 194 (III), 242 (1967), 338 (1973), all the way to Security Council resolution 2334 of 2016.

Has the international community surrendered itself to the fact that Israel is a country above the law? Why does it deal with States according to double standards?

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To save the peace process and the two-State solution, I urge this organization and your honorable States to do the following:

First: Actively pursue efforts to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine within a set timeframe. It is no longer enough to issue generic, endless statements calling for an end to the occupation and the achievement of peace without a deadline. Efforts must be made to implement the Arab Peace Initiative, including a just solution for the Palestine refugee question in accordance with resolution 194 (III).

Second: Act to bring a halt to all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as demanded in numerous United Nations resolutions, including the most recent resolution 2334 (2016), and in compliance with the 4th Geneva Convention.

Third: Ensure international protection to the land and people of the State of Palestine, until the end of the occupation, as we are unable to provide protection to our people, land and holy sites from this abhorrent occupation. The actions of this occupation cannot be met with silence; ensuring protection to the Palestinian people is a moral imperative before being a political or legal matter, in line with Security Council resolutions 605 (1987), 672 (1990), 673 (1990) and 904 (1994), which were based on the Geneva Conventions and stressed their applicability to the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

Fourth: Demand that Israel endorse and commit to the borders of 1967 as basis for the two-State solution and set such borders in line with international resolutions. Once we delineate the borders, each party can act in its territory as it pleases without affecting the rights of the other party.

Fifth: I must ask you: what are the borders of the State of Israel that many States in this Assembly have recognized? I urge all Member States of the United Nations that have recognized Israel to proclaim that their recognition is based on the 1967 borders, thus aligning themselves with international resolutions and reaffirming their commitment to these resolutions and the requirements of a peaceful solution founded upon them.

Sixth: I call on all States to end all forms of direct and indirect involvement with, and support to, the illegal Israeli colonial settlement regime in the land of the occupied State of Palestine, in accordance with UN resolutions and with the affirmed positions of States in this regard, and similar to the international community's approach towards the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

Seventh: I urge those States that have not recognized the State of Palestine yet to do so, in fulfillment of the principle of equality, which can enhance the chances of peace. I do not understand how recognizing the State of Palestine harms the chances of peace, especially since we Palestinians have recognized Israel on the 1967 borders.

Eighth: We look to the Security Council to approve our application for full membership of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. All those who support the two-State solution should recognize the other State, the State of Palestine.

Ninth: We urge the international community to continue providing economic and financial support to the Palestinian people to achieve self-reliance. We also urge you to continue providing support to UNRWA to enable it to continue its vital humanitarian assistance and services to the Palestine refugees in all areas of operation. We warn in this regard against the attempts to change the mandate of UNRWA and its statutes. We also warn against attempts at eliminating item 7 on the agenda of the Human Rights Council or obstructing issuance of the list of companies operating in Israeli settlements in the territory of the Occupied State of Palestine.

Tenth: We once again affirm our commitment to respect human rights and international conventions and to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and all other treaties and conventions that we have acceded to.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The State of Palestine will reflect on these imperatives in draft resolutions, as appropriate, to be presented to the UN General Assembly. We call upon you to vote in favor of these resolutions with the clear aim of preserving the two-State solution and salvaging and promoting the chances for achieving peace. Your support would most certainly be in line with your expressed concerns for, and commitments to, ensuring security, stability and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis alike, and for the peoples and States of the region.

In conclusion, allow me ladies and gentlemen, to salute our great people who remain steadfast in their homeland and continue to struggle against foreign occupation and for the achievement of their freedom and independence and for the preservation of their national and human dignity.

I salute our people in Jerusalem who gave one of the most shining examples of peaceful popular resistance against the Israeli colonial occupation.

I salute our people in exile and in the Diaspora.

I salute our people who remain steadfast in the West Bank. I salute our people who remain patiently steadfast in besieged Gaza.

I salute our glorious martyrs and our courageous prisoners in Israeli jails.

I tell them all that freedom is coming and is inevitable, and that occupation shall come to an end. It will either be the independence of the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with the state of Israel on the 1967 borders, or equal rights for all of the inhabitants of the land of historic Palestine from the river to the sea.

I thank you.

Peace be upon you.