

***Statement by H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas
President of the State of Palestine
United Nations General Assembly
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In the name of God the most compassionate and merciful.

H.E. Mr. Abdullah Shahid, President of the United Nations General Assembly
H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Excellencies Heads of Delegations and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year marks the 73rd anniversary of the *Nakba*. More than half the Palestinian people were uprooted from their land and deprived of their property in that time. Myself, my family and many others still possess the deeds to our land. These deeds are registered as part of the United Nations' records.

Here is that deed, and many Palestinians carry theirs, as they still hold onto the keys of their houses to this day. We have not been able to recover our properties due to Israeli laws that disregard international law and violate United Nations resolutions, which affirm the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homeland and to recover their properties and receive just compensation, most notably as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Contravening those rights, Israel, the occupying Power, enacts laws and holds court hearings to unlawfully and forcibly displace Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in Jerusalem, which can only be characterized under international law as ethnic cleansing, which is rejected by our people and the international community as a whole and constitutes a crime under international law.

This year also marks the passing of 54 years since Israel's military occupation of the rest of the Palestinian territory in the West Bank, including, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967.

This occupation persists despite having concluded an agreement of principles – known as the “Oslo Agreement” – to achieve peace and mutual recognition with Israel in 1993. While we remained committed to all of its elements to this day and agreed to every call and initiative to achieve a political solution on the basis of international legitimacy, including the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the 2003 Quartet Roadmap, Israel has not honored its obligations under the signed agreements and has evaded participating in peace initiatives and instead pursued its expansionist, colonial enterprise, destroying the prospect of a political settlement based on the two-State solution.

To those who claim there is no Palestinian partner for peace and that we do not “miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity”, I challenge them to demonstrate that we have rejected even once a genuine and serious initiative to achieve peace, and I accept the judgement of the world in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Does the Israeli occupying Power believe that it can elude its responsibility for the crime of uprooting more than half of the Palestinian people from their land and for committing numerous massacres, killing and maiming thousands of Palestinians in 1948, in Bald el-Sheikh, Deir Yassin, Abushusha,

Tantoura, Ein Zaytoun, Kabia and others and the subsequent destruction of over 500 Palestinian towns and villages? Does Israel believe it can simply ignore the legitimate rights, including political rights, of millions of Palestinians within and outside of Palestine, the owners and sons and daughters of this land, at the heart of it Jerusalem? Does it believe it can continue its policies to steal their land, suffocate their economy and prevent them from breathing the air of freedom?

Does Israel believe it can endlessly promote a false narrative that ignores the historic and present right of the Palestinian people to their homeland? The crimes and aggressive policies of the Israeli occupying Power against our people, land and holy sites will not thwart our people's struggle to achieve their freedom and independence on their land. This colonial regime it has established on our land will disappear, regardless of how long it takes. We will not allow them to hijack our lives and kill our people's dreams, hopes and aspirations to realize freedom and independence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is regrettable that the policies of the international community and the decisions of the relevant United Nations bodies regarding a solution for the Question of Palestine have until now not been upheld and implemented, resulting in a failure to hold Israel accountable and sanction it for its violations of international law, allowing Israel, which claims to be a democratic State, to act as a State above the law.

There are still some countries that refuse to acknowledge the reality that Israel is an occupying Power, practicing apartheid and ethnic cleansing. These countries proudly state that they have shared values with Israel, what shared values are you referring to? This has emboldened Israel, only furthering its arrogance and allowing it to reject and violate all UN resolutions.

At the same time, there are those who demand from the Palestinian people and institutions, who believe in the culture of peace and the rule of law, to provide explanations and justifications to demonstrate they do not incite hatred and promote violence. For example, we have to explain and justify what appears in our curriculum, which reflects our narrative and national identity, while no one is demanding to review the Israeli curriculum and media, so the world can see the real incitement by Israeli institutions. We reject these double standards.

Why should we have to clarify and justify providing assistance to families of prisoners and martyrs who are the victims of the occupation and its oppressive policies? We cannot abandon our people and we will continue striving to free all our prisoners. And I salute here the prisoners' heroic stand. If the occupation ends, there will no longer be a prisoners' issue. I cannot but wonder as I address the universal conscience, is there anyone on this earth who would punish the dead and prevent their families from burying them except those who are deprived of morality and humanity?

Until when will this historical injustice against our people continue? Do the States that provide financial and military support to Israel, which it uses to prolong its occupation and kill Palestinians, or those that remain silent in the face of its aggressive policies, besieging and suffocating Palestinians, do these States actually believe they are ensuring peace and security for the Israeli people and stability for the region? I say it loud and clear: they are not.

What more do you want from the Palestinian people? We have honored all our obligations under United Nations resolutions, we have pressured our people and ourselves to endure the suffering imposed on

us in the pursuit of hope, but all for what outcome? Historical events over the decades have proven that these international policies towards Israel are misguided.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As regards unifying our internal front, we reiterate that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people, and that we are committed to the unity of our people and land and to holding legislative and presidential elections and to the Palestinian National Council as soon as holding such elections in Jerusalem is guaranteed as per signed agreements. We call on the international community to help us bring pressure to bear upon the occupying Power to ensure these elections are held in Jerusalem as we cannot continue being deprived of elections.

Let me state here that we did not cancel the elections, but only postponed them as we could not hold them in Jerusalem. Until this situation is addressed, we will continue striving to create the necessary conditions for the formation of a successful unity government so we can assist our people everywhere and implement reconstruction plans in the Gaza Strip, what requires a complete end to the aggression throughout the territory of the State of Palestine.

I am glad to reaffirm that the coming months will witness the holding of municipal elections in accordance with the law, and elections for all unions and universities are underway.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As regards building state institutions, we stress that we have a full-fledged State with institutions that act in accordance with the rule of law and the principles of accountability and transparency, democracy and pluralism, respect for human rights and empowerment of women and youth. We have acceded to 115 legal instruments and international organizations, committed to upholding our people's rights and strengthening our legislation and regulations, including as they pertain to human rights. We will continue our endeavors to join international organizations.

We have taken the initiative of working jointly with human rights organizations and civil society to preserve these national accomplishments and to guide and adapt the work of our institutions on the basis of the rule of law.

I have issued instructions to take the necessary measures to correct any wrongdoing and continue upholding the rule of law, the freedom of expression and human rights as the path our country insists to remain on.

I reaffirm to the international community our commitment to political engagement and dialogue as the path to achieve peace, and to peaceful popular resistance and to combating terrorism in all its forms and origins in our region and the world. We have numerous agreements with countries around the world to combat global terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to refer here to the constructive dialogue currently underway with the United States administration to resume Palestinian-US relations and to undertake steps that will ensure the occupying Power's abidance by signed agreements. From our side, we will strive to succeed in this endeavor so

as to create conditions conducive to moving swiftly towards a final political settlement that ends the Israeli occupation of our country.

However, the current and former Israeli governments have persisted in evading the two-State solution based on international law and UN resolutions, and insisted in pursuing occupation and military control over the Palestinian people while presenting illusionary economic and security plans as an alternative. These unilateral plans will not achieve security and stability for anyone as they undermine efforts for a genuine peace and prolong occupation and entrench the reality of one apartheid state.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is a moment of truth with the occupying Power. We are at a crossroads. We have had enough. This situation cannot continue and our people cannot endure it any longer.

I have dedicated my life to achieving peace and chose the path of peaceful, legal and diplomatic work in international fora. We have extended our hands time and time again for peace and still we cannot find a partner in Israel that believes in and accepts the two-State solution.

The leaders of Israel no longer feel any shame while stating their blunt opposition to this solution that is supported by global consensus. I warn that undermining the two-State solution based on international law and UN resolutions will open the way for other alternatives imposed on us by the situation on the ground as a result of the continuation of the Israeli occupation of our State; the absence of a just solution for the plight of 7 million Palestine refugees uprooted from their land in 1948; the systematic theft of Palestinian land and the ongoing crimes of the occupation and demolition of homes as a means of collective punishment; the killings and arrests and detention by the thousands, including of women, the sick and children as well as the imposition of the inhumane blockade over the Gaza Strip; and measures annexation under numerous pretexts and names, including the settlement plan they now invented in the City of Jerusalem and that we fully reject, all coupled with the crime of forcibly displacing Palestinians from their land, as part of a policy of racial discrimination and ethnic cleansing pursued by the occupation in the absence of a deterrent international response.

Our people will not surrender to the reality of occupation and it's illegal policies and practices. They will pursue their just struggle to fulfill their right to self-determination, and options are available, including returning to a solution based on the partition plan of resolution 181 (II) adopted in 1947 which gives the State of Palestine 44% of the land, double the space provided for on the 1967 borders. We remind everyone that Israel seized by military force half of the land dedicated to the State of Palestine in 1948, which is a solution in conformity with international legitimacy.

If the Israeli occupation authorities continue to entrench the reality of one apartheid state as is happening today, our Palestinian people and the entire world will not tolerate such a situation and circumstances on the ground will inevitably impose equal and full political rights for all on the land of historical Palestine, within one State. In all cases, Israel has to choose. These are the options, and it has to choose.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

International law stipulates the right to a free and dignified life, and calls on States to take the necessary measures to protect and secure this right, as protection constitutes an indispensable and decisive element for the maintenance of peace, security, stability, and development. In this regard, I call on the

Secretary-General António Guterres to work on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions on protection, including the resolution adopted during the General Assembly emergency session held in June 2018 under “Uniting for Peace” to take the necessary steps towards developing an international mechanism for protection, as foreseen in his report of August 2018, and to activate this mechanism on the borders of the occupied State of Palestine in 1967, including East Jerusalem, to avail our people of international protection.

In parallel, and in accordance with the same resolution, I call on the Secretary- General to convene an international peace conference, in line with the internationally-recognized terms of reference and United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and under the sole auspices of the international Quartet.

To ensure our initiative is not open-ended, we must state that Israel, the occupying Power, has one year to withdraw from the Palestinian territory it occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and we are ready to work throughout this year on the delineation of borders and solving all final status issues under the auspices of the international Quartet and in accordance with United Nations resolutions. If this is not achieved, why maintain recognition of Israel based on the 1967 borders? Why maintain this recognition?

Moreover, in this regard, we will go to the International Court of Justice as the supreme international judicial body, on the issue of the legality of the occupation of the land of the Palestinian state and the relevant obligations for the United Nations and States around the world in this regard and all will have to respect the conclusions of the Court. Colonialism and apartheid are prohibited under international law and they are crimes that must be confronted and a regime that needs to be dismantled.

The international community’s support for this initiative, consistent with international law and United Nations resolutions, may save the region from an unknown fate. We all have a chance to live in peace and security, good neighborly relations, each in our State, and delaying implementation of these steps will keep the region in a situation of turmoil and instability with dire consequences. Do the leaders of Israel dream of maintaining their occupation forever? Do they want this occupation to last forever?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Why should a Palestinian continue living either under Israel’s racist occupation or as a refugee in neighboring countries? Are there no other alternatives, freedom for example? The Palestinian everywhere is a creative and dynamic human being and the entire world can testify to that. Palestinians deserve to live free in their homeland.

From this podium I call on the sons and daughters of Palestine everywhere around the world to continue pursuit of their peaceful and popular struggle that has shown the true image of the valiant Palestinian people striving for freedom and independence by resisting occupation and apartheid.

I salute our people everywhere and salute all nations and countries that have stood in solidarity with our people during the Jerusalem uprising and the prisoners uprising and against the aggression that killed hundreds, spread destruction and displaced thousands of our people in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip

I also salute all those who took part in demonstrations in the United States and Europe and everywhere across the globe to demand an end to the Israeli occupation, apartheid and ethnic cleansing and to call

for justice, freedom and self-determination for our people. This is an awakening, recognizing the true Palestinian story, and I urge all to continue raising and defending it and defending the Palestinian right to life, equality and statehood. Opposing aggressive policies and practices of the Israeli occupation and settlers and of the Zionist narrative in general is not an act of incitement or anti-Semitism, but rather the duty of every free man and woman in the world.

In this connection, I convey to the international community our gratitude and appreciation for their political and material support to our people and for the building our institutions and national economy. But the time has come to take tangible steps to revive hope and end the Israeli occupation of our land and people and to consecrate the values of justice and peace in our region. I wonder what prevents countries that recognize Israel from recognizing the State of Palestine, since they support the two state solution?

I say to Israel's leaders: do not oppress and corner the Palestinian people and deprive them of dignity and their right to their land and State as you will destroy everything. Our patience and the patience of our people have limits. I reiterate yet again that the Palestinian people will defend their existence and identity and will not kneel or surrender, they will not leave and will remain on their land defending it, defending their fate and pursuing their great journey towards ending the occupation. Of the land of the State of Palestine and its capital East Jerusalem. We say once more: this is our land, our Jerusalem, our Palestinian identity, and we shall defend it until the occupier leaves, as the future belongs to us and you cannot claim peace and security for yourselves alone. Let us be.

Peace be upon you.