



Remarks

by

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President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

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First Meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the
Palestinian People in 2014 and the launch of the
International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

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Excellencies,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Chairman of the Committee,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning one and all.

Let me begin by thanking the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the opportunity to participate in its first meeting for 2014. I wish to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Chairman of the Committee and the other members of the Bureau for their unanimous election to this important body.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank you, the Committee, for your dedicated work towards the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for promoting international solidarity with the people of Palestine in their legitimate aspirations for independence and sovereignty.

Excellencies,

Last November, the General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions that attest to the international community's continued support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people. The Assembly gave specific mandates to this Committee to support it in maximizing international support for the people of Palestine, as they seek to enjoy their fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination in their own independent state, with pre-1967 borders.

One of these resolutions proclaimed 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, an effort to be led by this Committee in cooperation with Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. I am confident that you, Chairman, will be vigilant in guiding your colleagues in the fulfilment of these mandates, which would be most appropriate and, hopefully, contribute to the on-going the peace process.

We all hope that the renewed round of negotiations will lead to a just and lasting settlement to the conflict. In this context, I reiterate our appreciation of diplomatic efforts spearheaded by US Secretary of State John Kerry, complemented by a comprehensive Palestinian economic revival plan developed by the Office of the Middle East Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

I also welcome the agreement by Israeli authorities to release 104 Palestinian prisoners who had been behind bars for over 20 years, a step repeatedly called for by the General Assembly. The latest group of 26 Palestinian prisoners was released on 30 December 2013.

Further, I am encouraged by the recent commitment of Arab leaders to renew the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which holds promise for regional stability and can indeed become an important part of current peace efforts.

Recent announcements of new settlement construction, coupled with property demolition and/or confiscation of lands in widely accepted Palestinian areas of the region are all considered to be in contravention of international law and serve to remind that major impediments to peace in the Middle East region still remain.

The General Assembly has repeatedly condemned these and other acts against the Palestinian people and within their territories, including in East Jerusalem. Such actions serve to raise considerable doubts on the validity of efforts aimed at achieving peace, and could ultimately complicate the search for a two-State solution, which enjoys almost universal support within the international community. In this regard, it would be instructive to recall that East Jerusalem, which remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory, is subject to the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The international community is also rightly concerned by the recent tensions on the border between Gaza and Israel, rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, and Israeli air strikes on Gaza. This aggression not only undermines the fragile ceasefire between the two sides, but could very well

jeopardize any sense of hope or optimism where this renewed round of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations is concerned.

I join our Secretary-General in calling on all sides in the conflict to refrain from actions that create or reinforce doubts regarding the sincerity or intentions of the other. The ongoing peace negotiations must be given a sincere chance to realize their potential.

I also call for all to fully respect the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to live in their own independent state. Equally, similar respect must be given for the right of the people of Israel to live in peace and security.

It remains the General Assembly's resolute position that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility to engage with the question of Palestine until it is resolved in accordance with international law.

Distinguished Delegates,

I sincerely hope that the observance of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People leads to robust support for the people of Palestine. As the Year coincides with preparations for the post 2015 development agenda, let us remain mindful of the unique circumstances of the Palestinian people as we proceed in this process. For as we all know, there can be no lasting and durable peace without economic and social development.

I am sure I speak for many when I say that I hope the Year helps foster an atmosphere of dialogue and mutual understanding between the two sides of this decades-long conflict. We live in an international context that requires cooperation among all parties, entities and beings in order to find solutions to the challenges facing the human family. There are no exceptions; Israel and Palestine must find agreement on the conditions in which they can live side by side in peace and security.

Now is the time for vision, compromise and deepening of respect. Let us make this year – 2014 – the decisive year for achieving peace between Israel and Palestine. I implore all those who have a stake in this outcome – Governments, international organizations, and people everywhere – to do their part.

Thank you.
