

29 November 2000

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Harri Holkeri,
President of the 55th Session of the General Assembly,
on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the
Palestinian People**

It is an honour for me to address this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations. I am following in the steps of my predecessors, who come here every year to reaffirm, in front of you all, the international community's overwhelming support and commitment to promote the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda for more than fifty years. It was on 29 November 1947 that the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), partitioning Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with an economic union between them. Jerusalem was to be placed under a special international regime. This plan was never implemented but it is interesting to note how proposals aimed at breaking the current impasse go back to these or similar arrangements.

Since the 1991 Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, a number of important agreements have been reached by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed in 1993, was welcomed by the international community as a significant step towards peace in the Middle East. It showed that it was indeed possible to overcome years of animosity, mistrust and suspicion.

The path the two sides have embarked upon since has not been an easy one. There have been numerous setbacks in recent years but also many achievements. This year should have been special, in the sense that a final status agreement should have been reached. Instead, in recent weeks we have been witnessing a sharp deterioration of the situation, which challenges the very foundations of the peace process.

The United Nations has been present throughout all this, consistently upholding the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the norms of international law and human rights, and relevant resolutions. In view of the recent outbreak of violence, the General Assembly and the Security Council responded with urgency and determination. The General Assembly, in its resumed tenth emergency special session in October condemned the violence and the excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians. It reiterated the illegality of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem and demanded that the occupying Power abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons. The General Assembly supported the establishment of a mechanism of inquiry into the recent tragic events and called for the

resumption of peace talks and the speedy conclusion of the final settlement agreement between the two sides.

I would like to pay special tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his role at the recent Sharm el-Sheikh summit and subsequent efforts at ending the violence and bringing the negotiating process back on track. I fully support the efforts of the Secretary-General and his representatives, in coordination with the co-sponsors of the peace process and other interested parties, at ending the current spiral of violence, and restarting peaceful negotiations towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. With respect to human rights I would like to refer to the recent report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in which she expressed her deep concern about the serious deterioration of the human rights situation. She also noted the importance of the quest for peace with justice and respect for human rights and the need for renewed efforts by both sides to halt the violence.

As President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, I would like to reaffirm the Assembly's position that the United Nations should retain a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine, until it is effectively resolved in all its aspects, in accordance with international law and justice. We are all committed to working towards that goal, guided by respect for the universally recognized principles of international law, the United Nations Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions, notably Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. The Palestinian people should be able to exercise their inalienable rights, as spelled out by the General Assembly, in particular the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right to return to their homes and properties or to receive compensation for those choosing not to return.

For peace to take root and become viable, social and economic development is essential. In particular it must accompany political agreements and arrangements. In this respect, the international community should step up their efforts at providing much-needed economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

Allow me to end my intervention by paying tribute to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which, under your most able and dedicated guidance, has continued to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to support the peace process and to bring the question of Palestine to the forefront of issues dealt with by the General Assembly, the Security Council, the broader United Nations system, as well as international civil society. In implementation of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee has made and continues to make an important contribution to the accomplishment of all these tasks. I wish you every success in your mission.