

29 November 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,  
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,  
on International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,

I am honoured to take part in this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly. Recognizing the need to promote and encourage efforts in support of the Palestinian people, the General Assembly, in its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, called for the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Over the years, this event has offered the world community an opportunity to renew its commitment to supporting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and statehood on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The question of Palestine remains the oldest unresolved issue on our Organization's agenda. It was on this day in 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 has never been implemented in its entirety, but it is encouraging to note that a two-State arrangement has now become a broadly accepted basis for any viable solution to the question of Palestine, as affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

In the course of 1990s, despite heightened expectations at the time, the Oslo and subsequent implementation agreements did not realize their promise of bringing peace and security to the region. It was the destructive combination of a failure to live up to those agreements and understandings, and the steady deterioration of the situation and provocative acts on the ground that led to the outbreak of the current intifada in late September 2000. Ever since, we have witnessed a continuing spiral of violence, which has resulted in much pain, suffering and destruction. Most tragically, many innocent civilians on both sides have lost their lives and thousands have been injured. Also, in just over two years, we have seen a complete breakdown in the political process.

The General Assembly has been much preoccupied with the developments on the ground. Frequent Israeli incursions into areas no longer under full Palestinian control, and internal and external closures of the Palestinian Territory mean that many Palestinians are now living under a

military, as well as a crushing economic siege. During the past twelve months, the Assembly has met three times in Emergency Special Sessions dealing with Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The international community has come out strongly against the extrajudicial assassinations of suspected Palestinian militants which are known to have led to large scale civilian casualties, against arbitrary detentions, use of disproportionate force, house demolitions and continuing settlement activity as well as against terrorist acts of Palestinian extremists which resulted in the deaths of Israeli civilians. The anguish, frustration and anger of the Palestinians is understandable but tactics of terror and suicide bombing are counterproductive. For example the recent terrorist attack against Israeli civilians in a hotel in Mombasa in which also a number of Kenyan civilians died will be justifiably condemned the world over but the Palestinian cause will not be advanced a single inch forward, just the contrary. The unending spiral of violence will not bring about peace, security or prosperity. The Secretary-General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy Ms. Catherine Bertini, following her visit to the region in August of 2002, underlined the serious and mounting nature of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the West Bank and Gaza. The plight of the Palestinians, who are now enduring unemployment around 50 per cent and poverty levels nearing 60 per cent, is of great concern to all of us.

As it has done for many years, in spite of the serious funding shortfalls, UNRWA continues to play a vital role in providing essential relief services. The Agency should be assisted in all possible ways by the donor community in order to keep up with the rising needs of Palestine refugees.

It has been unequivocally acknowledged today that there is no alternative to the prompt resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations based on international legality and readiness to take full account of each other's needs and interests. Overcoming mistrust and suspicion, refraining from provocative acts, ending the violence, and resuming the peace talks should be the imperatives at the present stage. A comprehensive, just and lasting peace can and must be established on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1397 (2002), which embody the principles of "land for peace" and the two-State solution.

President Sadat in his famous speech delivered in Knesset made clear that "there is no peace that could be built on the occupation of the land of others" and that "in the absence of a just solution of the Palestinian problem, never will there be that durable and just peace upon which the entire world insists". The world still insists on the same thing but as I had the opportunity to see myself it is an ever increasing distrust on both sides and the violence rather than peace that fills the agendas of the day. It is clear that the Palestinians will never reconcile themselves to the unending occupation of their land and will continue to strive for their own national independence as their national aspirations are undoubtedly as strong as those of the Israelis. They both have the right to their own states as was made clear by the United Nations already 55 years ago. I am glad that the United Nations continues to insist on this right today.

However, for substantial headway to be made, the constructive involvement of third parties is essential. We fully support the sustained and close engagement of the Secretary-General Kofi

Annan and his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (Mr Larson?) in efforts towards resuming the political process. They work in concert with the diplomatic Quartet of international mediators and I hope that the leaders of the region and especially the parties directly concerned will give the Quartet a chance. I do strongly believe that all chances for peace should be properly explored. Indeed, in spite of the current impasse, it is still possible to envisage a road forward. In the past months, the Quartet has worked with the parties on a "road map" designed to lead the two sides to the negotiating table and on to a final settlement, which includes the creation of a Palestinian State within the next three years. I have already mentioned the principle of 'land for peace' that should be among the basis of any peaceful settlement and we are all aware that this prospect has been included in the peace initiative approved by the Arab states at their Beirut summit last March. In parallel, the international donor community continues to play an absolutely critical role in providing the much-needed economic assistance to the Palestinian people. We encourage the donor community to increase the various forms of relief and longer-term assistance to the Palestinian people at this difficult time.

As you are aware, this afternoon the General Assembly will take up its agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine". As President of the General Assembly, I would like to reaffirm the Assembly's position that the United Nations should continue to maintain a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions, until two independent states Israel and Palestine, will live in peace side by side within secure, recognized and respected borders. It is incumbent on all of us to see to it that this objective is brought to fruition.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to end my intervention by paying tribute to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People . In implementing the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, your Committee has made and continues to make a crucial contribution towards peace, security and stability in the region of the Middle East. I wish you every success in your important mission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.