

24 November 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the 57th Plenary Meeting on Agenda Item 16, the Question of Palestine**

Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to open this plenary session in which we take up the Question of Palestine. This morning, with heavy heart, we observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I joined the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, H.E. Ambassador Paul Badji, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to voice our ongoing concern for the terrible situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and express our solidarity with this long-suffering People

We heard the comprehensive report of the Chairman on the current situation of Palestinians living under occupation. As well, the Secretary-General summarized the complex initiatives that are being undertaken by the international community to move forward peace talks and the establishment of the Palestinian state.

I urged the international community to raise its voice against the collective punishment of the people of Gaza, a policy which we cannot tolerate. We demand an end to this massive abuse of human rights and call on Israel, the occupying Power, to allow humanitarian and other supplies to enter the Gaza Strip without delay.

I spoke this morning about apartheid and how Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories appear so similar to the apartheid of an earlier era, a continent away.

I believe it is very important that we in the United Nations use this term. We must not be afraid to call something what it is. It is the United Nations, after all, that passed the International Convention against the Crime of Apartheid, making clear to all the world that such practices of official discrimination must be outlawed wherever they occur.

We heard today from a representative of South African civil society. We know that all around the world, civil society organizations are working to defend Palestinian rights, and are trying to protect the Palestinian population that we, the United Nations, are failing to protect.

More than twenty years ago we in the United Nations took the lead from civil society when we agreed that sanctions were required to provide a non-violent means of pressuring South Africa to end its violations.

Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations.

I have attended a great many meetings on the rights of the Palestinian People. I am amazed at how people continue to insist on patience while our Brothers and Sisters are being crucified.

Patience is a virtue in which I believe. But there is nothing virtuous about being patient with the suffering of others.

We must endeavour, with all our heart, to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian People.

I have great love for the Jewish People and this has been true all my life. I have never hesitated to condemn the crimes of the holocaust or any of the many abuses committed against our Jewish Brothers and Sisters.

However, their suffering does not give anyone the right to abuse others, especially those who historically have such deep and exemplary relations with the Jewish People.

Having said this, I would like to remind our Israeli Brothers and Sisters that even though they have the protective shield of the United States in the Security Council, no amount of arm twisting and intimidation will change the Security Council resolution 181, adopted 61 years ago, calling for the creation of two states.

Shamefully, there is no Palestinian state to celebrate today and the prospects are as distant as ever. All explanations notwithstanding, this central fact makes a mockery of the United Nations and gravely hurt its image and prestige. How can we continue like this?

I call upon our dear Brothers and Sisters at the decision-making level in our Host Country to end the policy that only retards justice in the Middle East.

The international community should spare no effort in assisting both Israelis and Palestinians to reach a solution that will fulfill the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The United Nations has an ongoing responsibility to resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects and in accordance with international law. Let us be sure that this not become a permanent responsibility.

The enmity between our Palestinian and Israeli brothers and sisters is a bitter and self-perpetuating tragedy. We must find new ways to defuse this enmity, to enable both peoples to reassert their historic bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood.

I urge the international community to defuse the political deadlock that cynically perpetuates this hatred, isolation and abuse. Our solidarity must prompt concrete action to realize those elusive rights that most of us can take for granted.

Thank you.