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Statement by H.E. Dr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority, High-Level Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, Roundtable on Poverty and Hunger, United Nations, New York, 25 September 2008

- Palestine welcomes the convening of this high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is timely and imperative that we take stock of the progress and, regrettably, the decline in our individual and collective efforts to achieve these goals towards which the international community committed itself at the turn of the century.
- Eradicating poverty and hunger remains the most fundamental of these goals and, due to the interdependency of the goals, the continued prevalence and deepening of poverty and hunger in our nations will directly and negatively impact our abilities to attain all other goals, whether in terms of education, health, the environment, gender equality or development. This will preclude the achievement of socio-economic and political stability and prosperity in our countries. Today, addressing and combating poverty and hunger has taken on even greater urgency as find ourselves facing a global food crisis, rising commodity prices, and the battering of economies, particularly in the developing world.
- While Palestine is fully committed to the eradication of poverty and hunger, we continue to face serious, chronic obstacles undermining our ability to achieve this vital goal by 2015. Despite the integration of the MDGs in our national development plans, despite the large amounts of international aid received, we have has been unable to make the necessary strides in this regard. Poverty and hunger have dramatically risen in recent years and the Palestinian people continue to struggle to cope with a severe socio-economic and humanitarian crisis.
- This critical situation is the direct result of now more than 41 years of Israeli occupation under which the Palestinian people continue to be subjected to the grave violation of their human rights. The years since the adoption of the MDGs witnessed the intensification of unlawful Israeli policies actually intended to inflict hardship and loss on the Palestinian people. Such collective punishment is in contravention of international humanitarian law, including the 4th Geneva Convention, and such deliberate infliction of loss of livelihood, impoverishment and starvation of a people is in contravention to the human rights covenants and totally contrary to the spirit of the MDGs.
- Thus, in addition to the global challenges we all face, Palestine is left to deal with a situation where it is not our policies, but rather the unlawful policies of the occupying Power, Israel, that determine our fate, harm our efforts and investments towards the realization of these goals, and have actually reversed progress previously made. The reality is that it is virtually impossible to achieve the MDGs under a foreign occupation that violates the human rights at

the core of these goals and completely undermines sustainable social, economic, agricultural, infrastructural, and human development.

- The impact on children, women the elderly and refugees – the most vulnerable in society – has been inordinate and social coping mechanisms are being exhausted as poverty and hunger rise. Indeed, the Palestinian social fabric and economy are in tatters as a result of this ongoing conflict and the systematic, destructive Israeli policies carried out in breach of international law and U.N. resolutions, including military assaults against civilian areas, the imposition of severe restrictions on freedom of movement of persons and goods via more than 600 checkpoints and roadblocks, and the illegal construction of settlements and the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, that have resulted in the confiscation of vast areas of Palestinian land, the exploitation and diversion of natural resources, the destruction of orchards and crops, the loss of access to work, education and health services, the demolition of homes and shelters and the displacement of civilians. The Israeli closures and movement restrictions have taken a most extreme form in the suffocating, inhumane blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. There, Palestinian civilians are suffering alarming rates of unemployment, food insecurity, and hardship as their access to food, medicine, fuel and other basic human necessities is completely controlled by the occupying Power, which continues to isolate and collectively punish the entire population.
- Among the many reports, the UNDP's report on the Status of the MDGs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory exposes the catastrophic extent of the decline in economic, healthy and social standards of ordinary Palestinians. It reveals that "in 2007, more than 53.7% of households were living below the national poverty line compared to 23.3% in 1998". In the besieged Gaza Strip, this number rises to a shocking 70%. Moreover, the WFP and FAO estimates for 2007 indicate that at least 41% of the population is food insecure and unable to meet minimum nutritional requirements, resulting in high rates of malnutrition and anemia in children and pregnant women. According to recent joint survey by WFP/FAO/UNRWA, due to rising unemployment, poverty and food prices, at least two-thirds of Palestinian household income is spent on food and, still, families are eating less, with many parents reducing their intake to allow for their children to eat. This is unquestionably a man-made disaster and crisis that must not be allowed to continue.
- In the U.N. Millennium Declaration, world leaders agreed on the collective responsibility "to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level as an obligation and their duty to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable..." Palestine must not be the exception. The international community must continue to support the cause of the Palestinian people to bring an end to the occupation and to realize their right to self-determination and freedom, which the world has come to realize are prerequisites not only for peace and stability but also for development and achievement of the MDGs.