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Statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Rabiha Diab, Minister of Women's Affairs, before the Commission on the Status of Women, fifty-sixth session, United Nations, New York, 28 February 2012: (check against delivery)

Madam Chair,

At the outset, allow me, on behalf of Palestine, to extend our warmest congratulations to you Madam Chair, as well as the other members of the Bureau, on your election and for the excellent manner in which you are steering the proceedings of the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Palestine wishes to assure you of its full cooperation during the deliberations of this very important session. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted to this session, including the report entitled " *The Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women*," which will certainly enhance our discussions.

It is a great honor that I stand before you to address the important issues facing women and to work hand and hand together to find the tools and mechanisms to improve the conditions and status of women worldwide and to promote and enhance their role in society in all social, economic and political fields.

Madam Chair,

The aim of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to encourage development by improving social and economic conditions in the world's poorest countries through the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, particularly in developing countries, as well as ensuring environmental sustainability, which includes access to clean and safe water, access to basic sanitation and reducing air pollution. In addition to these important goals, the third objective of the MDGs aims at achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and their right to live free from discrimination and to strengthen their participation in decision-making. It is important to note that in order for this to be realized, efforts must be taken by all members of society, regardless of gender, race, religion, or level of education.

It is also important to note that efforts taken by all members of society for the empowerment of women is not enough and other issues that pose challenges and obstacles to the empowerment of women have to be addressed, such as continued

discrimination, violence and inequality against women. Moreover, the lack of funding for income-generating projects aimed at increasing women's productivity also impedes their endeavors to be self-sufficient and for their full integration into the labor market which would allow them to have a substantial role in the decision-making process in all aspects.

Madam Chair,

In addition to the challenges and obstacles that have been mentioned earlier facing women worldwide, the Palestinian people, including women, are suffering from a challenge and an obstacle that far surpasses all of them, namely the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967, and the oppressive and destructive policies and practices by the occupying Power against the entire Palestinian civilian population.

In this regard, the report of the Secretary-General entitled "*Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women*," (E/CN.6/2012/6) paints a grim picture of the situation facing Palestinian women. It focuses on the continued deterioration of the social, economic, political and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the numerous daily Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights and illegal practices and measures against the Palestinian people. These include, but are not limited to, the construction and expansion of illegal settlements, construction of the Wall, land confiscation, house demolitions, forced evictions, revocation of residency rights, the placement of hundreds of checkpoints, which continue to obstruct Palestinian women and their families from accessing land, markets and basic services, as well as the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, in Israeli prisons and detention centers.

Moreover, the process of empowerment of rural women and their ability to address poverty and hunger is also obstructed by the sheer brutality of the occupying Power and its violations on the ground. It is known that the most important factor for the empowerment of rural women is the cultivation of their land and the achievement of their self-sufficiency. However, the illegal policies and practices by the occupying Power, including its control of water resources and its environmental degradation and destruction of Palestinian land and crops restrict, among other things, women's empowerment and their ability to address poverty and hunger.

Madam Chair,

It has become evidently clear that while Palestinian women build, the occupation continues to destroy, and while they cultivate and plant, the occupation and its illegal settlers attack, devastate, uproot and burn agricultural fields, homes and properties. Even more tragic, Israeli occupying forces and settlers continue to shoot at unarmed civilians, without distinction between young and old or between women and men.

In this regard, we refer to what the Secretary-General stated in his report that "improving the situation of Palestinian women remains closely linked to efforts to find lasting peace". We affirm here that the key step to achieve lasting peace is to end the occupation, the realization of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of return of the Palestine refugees in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions

Madam Chair,

Over the long history of subjugation, dispossession and continued Israeli attacks and violence, Palestinian women have demonstrated resilience, strength and steadfastness. Evidence of this can be confirmed by the efforts exerted by Palestinian women at all levels to gain their rights, achieve freedom and to live in dignity. In this regard, we have undertaken many development projects that empower women politically, economically and socially. We observe this as a reality through the presence of women holding positions such as ministers, judges, ambassadors and governors. In addition, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has undertaken many programs and projects that target the policies and laws related to the rights and needs of women in order to change them for the better. The most important program being undertaken by the Ministry is a program on gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, known as "MDG- F". Moreover, the project "Tawasol" (Intercommunication) is also considered one of the most important projects carried out by the Ministry that contributes to the empowerment of rural women by strengthening cooperation and communication among women's institutions in order to assess the needs of women in different governorates and to propose development projects as needed.

The elimination of all forms of violence against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is considered to be one of the key issues that we are working to achieve and it is contained in the national project aimed at empowering Palestinian women to play a prominent and equal role with men in the process of building our State and its institutions. In this regard, it should be noted that the Palestinian Government has adopted a national strategic plan for nine years aimed at combating all forms of violence against women.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, we reaffirm our commitment and our support of international instruments and norms relating to women issues, and we hope that the United Nations, including this distinguished Commission, will continue its support of the Palestinian people in implementing their national plans and programs, particularly those related to improving women's conditions and for their empowerment. We also call upon the international community to exert all efforts and support our people in their legitimate struggle to end the Israeli occupation and achieve the independence of our Palestinian State, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Thank you, Madam Chair.