

**Statement by H.E. Mr. E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs, at United Nations Security Council's Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question, on, 24 October 2011**

**Thank you, Madam President.**

I would like to express our deep condolences to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Royal Highness of Saudi Arabia Sultan bin Abdel Aziz Al Saud.



I would also like to express our solidarity with the Government and people of Turkey in dealing with the aftermath of the devastating earthquake.

First of all, I would like to thank you for organizing this Open Debate on the Middle East, a region witnessing momentous transformation.

I would also like to thank Under Secretary General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on developments in the region.

**Madam President,**

Clearly, the issue of Palestine has taken a decisive turn in the history of the Middle East conflict after President Mahmoud Abbas filed an application with the Secretary General on 23 September 2011 for Palestine's full membership to the United Nations.

Speaking a day after President Abbas filed the application, my Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said in the General Assembly on 24 September 2011 that India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per

the relevant resolutions of this Organization, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap.

The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations.

**Madam President,**

India recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1975 and its Office in New Delhi was accorded full diplomatic recognition in 1980.

India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. We have maintained diplomatic relations with Palestine for over two decades now.

It is also pertinent to note that Palestine has been recognized by more than two-thirds of the membership of this Organization.

Obviously, the State of Palestine fulfills all criteria mentioned in Article 4 of the Charter for membership to this Organization.

We, therefore, support Palestine's application and hope that the process will be concluded expeditiously.

**Madam President,**

During my long political career, I have had the honour to work closely with the Palestinian leaders.

I had met the undisputed leader of the Palestinian people late President Yasser Arafat on 17 September 2004 at Ramallah, just a few months before he left his earthly abode.

At that meeting, I had the opportunity to reiterate India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause.

He had warmly recalled his close relations with Indian leaders, particularly Mrs Indira Gandhi and Mr Rajiv Gandhi, and appreciated India's unwavering support for the cause of the Palestinian people.

We have continued our interactions with the Palestinian leadership under President Abbas. He has paid state visits to India in 2008 and 2010.

**Madam President,**

As the world's largest democracy and arguably its most diverse country, India recognizes the democratic aspirations of all peoples, including in the Middle East.

The call of the international community for democracy and respect of fundamental rights will sound hollow if the present impasse continues and Palestinians are denied their aspirations.

It is also our firm conviction that lasting peace and security in the region can be achieved only through peaceful dialogue and not through use of force.

In this context, we have noted the Quartet Statement of 23 September and hope that the timelines indicated in the Statement would be realized.

The biggest stumbling block to direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians remains continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We call upon Israel to stop settlement activities. This will facilitate resumption of negotiations in which all Final Status issues should be addressed.

We cannot, however, make Palestine's membership to the United Nations conditional upon a peace agreement for that will be legally untenable, even while we support resumption of direct talks to resolve the outstanding issues.

**Madame President,**

We welcome the recent agreement between Israel and Hamas on exchange of prisoners. We hope this will ease tension and build confidence.

We also hope this would pave the way for an early and significant easing of restrictions on movement of goods and people into the Gaza Strip, thereby addressing the dire humanitarian situation there.

India on its part has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority.

From the year 2009-10, we enhanced our annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] to US\$ 1 million, in addition to a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010.

During the last two years, India has also contributed US\$ 10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority.

We are offering 100 slots to the Palestinian Authority for capacity building and human resource development under our technical and economic cooperation programme.

We have also undertaken joint projects with our IBSA partners in Palestine with a sports complex having just been completed.

**Madam President,**

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most serious one in the region, we need to be mindful that resolution of this conflict by itself may not result in achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region.

Other issues relating to Arab lands that remain under occupation are equally important. Progress in the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the Middle East Peace Process is, therefore, necessary for comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Developments in the Middle East since February this year underline the need for reinvigorating the search for this comprehensive peace, while the countries in the region undertake inclusive political processes and implement reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people.

It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than resorting to arms.

It is the responsibility of all countries to create conditions that enable their people to freely determine their pathways to development. This is the essence of democracy and fundamental human freedoms.

No action should be taken from outside that exacerbates problems and gives space for the rise of extremism.

The international community should stand ready to assist the countries in these efforts while respecting sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries.

As my Prime Minister said in the General Assembly on 24 September, societies cannot be reordered from outside through military force.

Observance of the rule of law is as important in international affairs as it is within countries.

Guided by these principles, Madam President, India stands ready to play its role in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Thank you.

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