

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANEIL MATHRANI, MEMBER OF THE INDIAN
DELEGATION ON AGENDA ITEM 38: QUESTION OF PALESTINE AT THE
58TH REGULAR SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON
DECEMBER 1, 2003**

Mr. President,

As we honour the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we would like to reiterate our traditional solidarity with the people of Palestine and express India's principled and continuing support for their inalienable rights. India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people is resolute and unchangeable and based on a rich and diverse interaction spanning over decades.

Mr. President,

The situation regarding the question of Palestine, continues to remain a matter of abiding and profound concern for us and the international community. Earlier this year, there was a possibility of a turning point with the launching of the Road Map. The agreement signed in June 2003 between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the Gaza strip and Bethlehem and the declaration of a ceasefire by various Palestinian groups, raised expectations in this direction. The renewed upsurge of violence since August 2003 has, derailed this process. And, as such, the implementation of the Road Map is frozen and some steps have, in fact, reversed the political process.

We have had occasion to express our views in some detail in the Security Council in September this year and later on the occasion of the Tenth Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly in October. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to adding to our previous remarks.

We continue to be deeply dismayed and gravely concerned over the spiral of violence, revenge and escalation of tensions witnessed in the region. The number of casualties speaks for itself. Since September 2000, more than 2800 Palestinians and more than 800 Israelis have been killed. Thousands have been injured. Behind each and every one of these numbers are stories of human loss and suffering. Some of the

recent actions by the Government of Israel – including military strikes using disproportionate force, targetted assassinations, the construction of a separation wall, demolition of homes and the expansion of settlements – have been particularly responsible for the grave situation. Bombs have been set off in cafes and restaurants and attacks have been carried out against public transport, including schools and buses, creating a climate of fear and constant watchfulness. The result is a peace process in shambles.

India strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and violence and reiterates its position that there can be no justification whatsoever for attacks against unarmed civilians, women and children. Only an immediate and complete cessation of violence, including all acts of terrorism, provocation, incitement and destruction, can provide the environment conducive to a continuation of a dialogue.

These setbacks in the quest for peace are not without their deleterious effect on the humanitarian conditions in the occupied territories. According to a World Bank report published in May 2003, 92,000 Palestinians have lost their job in Israel and the Israeli settlements while another 105,000 jobs have been lost in the occupied Palestinian territory. The real per capita income fell by 46 per cent and total investment declined by approximately 90 per cent during the same period. As a result, 60 per cent of the Palestinian population is living below the poverty line.

It is unfortunate that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has become a victim or target of the continuing hostilities. Six UNRWA staff members were killed during the past year. The environment in which the Agency has to carry out its operations continues to affect negatively its ability to deliver services. Closures and blockades need to be lifted, unhindered access allowed to humanitarian supplies and finances released to the Palestinian authority for alleviating the grave situation and averting further crises.

Continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands including the construction of a wall serve to further exacerbate an already aggravated situation. The erection of the wall is a unilateral act not in keeping with the Road Map. Its building would involve the separation of Palestinians from their lands and from each other. Such action cannot be justified and must be halted. More important, Israel's insistence in continuing with its construction would be widely interpreted as an attempt to pre-determine the outcome of any final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian authority on the basis of the principle of "land for peace" as called for by relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. President,

India is convinced that the key to achieving a lasting, just and peaceful settlement of the conflict and a comprehensive peace in the region lies in speedy implementation and in good faith by all sides, of the Quartet's Road Map, which contains clear time-lines for the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state, living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders. We welcome the recent adoption of Security Council Resolution 1515 which contains a reiteration of those

principles. We are also encouraged to read reports that renewed peace negotiations may be possible. With the requisite will and determination and strong commitment to establishing durable peace, we hope that diplomacy and statesmanship shall prevail.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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