

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI, OPEN DEBATE ON SITUATION IN
THE MIDDLE EAST INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION AT THE UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL, ON OCTOBER 15, 2012

Thank you, Mr President.

Let me begin by thanking Under Secretary General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their valuable statements.

2. Mr. President, the Arab world has been undergoing unprecedented transformation during the last two years. Democratic aspirations of people in several countries are being addressed through national political processes. It is, however, regrettable that the Palestinian question and the related Arab-Israeli issues have largely remained unaddressed and unresolved. Also, the Palestinian application for full membership of the United Nations submitted more than a year ago has not evinced any positive action from this Council, despite overwhelming support from the UN member-states.

3. The issue of Palestine is facing the real danger of getting relegated to the sidelines. The current period of stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process is perhaps one of the longest since the signing of the Oslo Accords 19 years back. The efforts of the Quartet can at best be described as feeble and have failed to break the stalemate. If this situation continues, the international community will risk destabilization in the region.

4. We, therefore, call for serious efforts to arrest this trend. If there is one decision that can help revive the Peace Process, it is an end to settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories. The settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are creating a new ground reality and threaten the very premise of a two-state solution. Settlements, road blocks and the related infrastructure of occupation have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people and adversely affect the normal functioning of Palestinian state institutions. We join others in urging Israel to stop its settlement policy without further delay.

5. Mr. President, the blockade of Gaza has entered its sixth year, and is causing severe hardship to the population. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, and essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development have been disrupted. Israel should immediately lift the blockade and allow the resumption of normal socio-economic activities in Gaza so that the Gazans can rebuild their lives and reduce their dependence on external assistance.

6. The recent measures taken by Israel, including transfer of tax revenue, increase in work permits to the Palestinian population, visits of Palestinian families to

meet Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli detention, etc., are positive. These measures are, however, inadequate to address the magnitude of the problems, and need to be built upon to promote mutual trust and confidence between the parties. In this connection, Mr. President, it is important to avoid violence on all sides, and ensure that legitimate security interests of all parties are met.

7. We note the reconciliation process between the Palestinian factions, which is crucial. We hope that efforts towards the promotion of reconciliation will bear fruit soon, leading to the formation a Unity Government, holding of elections, reunification of Palestinian state institutions, and measures for reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

8. The financial crisis that the Palestinian Authority is currently facing is eroding the significant progress made by the Palestinian Authority in building state institutions. There is an urgent need to support the Palestinian Authority to meet its budgetary shortfalls. In this regard, we welcome the commitment shown by the international community at the recently held meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee on 23 September.

9. On our part, Mr. President, India has continued to support the Palestinian state building efforts. President Abbas visited India in September this year. During the visit, three agreements were signed for establishment of an Information and Communication Technology Centre of Excellence in Palestine, provision of technical and vocational education training equipment and services for the Palestinian Ministry of Labour, and construction and equipping of two secondary schools in Asera Al Shamalyeh and Abu Dis. India will also contribute US\$ 10 million to Palestine's budget for this year, as we have done in the two previous years.

10. During the visit of President Abbas, India reaffirmed its firm support 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. We strongly support all efforts towards realization of that objective, including Palestine's enhanced status in this organization as announced by President Abbas during the General Debate of the 67th session of the UN General Assembly last month.

11. Mr. President, we remain seriously concerned at the deteriorating situation in Syria. We strongly condemn all violence and violations of human rights irrespective of who their perpetrators are. We also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be committed in Syria. We call upon all parties to dissociate themselves from terrorist groups and ensure that no space is provided for these groups. We urge all parties to cooperate with Joint Special Representative Mr Lakhdar Brahimi to resolve the crisis without any further bloodshed through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

12. Before I conclude, Mr. President, let me state that while the Palestinian question remains at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there are other Arab lands under occupation. A final and comprehensive settlement of all Arab-Israeli issues is necessary for enduring peace in the region. India stands ready to play its part in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

I thank you.

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