

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION, ON JANUARY 24, 2012

Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset, I would like to welcome you, Mr President, to the Security Council and thank you for presiding over this meeting. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

2. Mr President, today's Open Debate is taking place at a crucial time when the international community is engaged with Israel and Palestine to re-start direct peace talks. On 23rd September, the day when President Mahmoud Abbas filed an application with the Secretary General for Palestine's membership to the United Nations, the Quartet issued a statement proposing a series of steps to re-start the peace process. It included a preparatory meeting between the parties within a month, commitment of the parties to submit their preliminary proposals on territory and security within three months, to make substantive progress within six months, to hold a donors' conference and to reach an agreement on the final status issues by the end of 2012.

3. During the last four months, the Quartet has been engaged with the parties separately and met them several times and sought proposals on security and border. These were followed by a series of meetings in Amman this month under the auspices of King Abdullah II. While the possibility of direct talks has remained elusive, it is encouraging that the parties have remained engaged in these processes. We believe that such engagements need to become more serious and purposeful with a view to resolving the issues in a time-bound manner.

4. Mr President, for the Quartet's timeframe for reaching an agreement by the end of the year to be realized, it is necessary for Israel to completely stop settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, other than being illegal under the international law, are undermining the efforts of the international community to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the two-state solution. Several reports, including those of OCHA, clearly indicate that the

increasing trend of settlement activities in the Palestinian lands is not compatible with the two-state solution.

5. Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. More than 43% of the West Bank being outside the control of the Palestinian Authority has deprived the Palestinian people of access to their natural resources and prevented them from undertaking rightful economic, social and cultural activities. It has resulted in a large number of Palestinian people losing their homes, access to their farms and their livelihoods. Settlement activities have also led to violence and aggravated social tension between settlers and the Palestinian population. We, therefore, reiterate our call for Israel to stop all settlement activities.

6. In Gaza, the blockade and restrictions on exports continue to have far reaching consequences. Poverty and aid dependency have increased and demands for emergency services like health, water, sanitation, education and temporary shelter have overstretched UNRWA's resources. There is an urgent need to further ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies to the Gaza Strip. Established channels for such supplies should be used even while the capacity of these channels is improved.

7. Mr President, intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an important issue that needs no emphasis. We support the efforts of the Palestinian leadership to expedite implementation of the reconciliation agreement reached last year between the Palestinian factions.

8. It is also necessary that all violence come to an end. We condemn all attacks that cause harm to the civilian population and damage civilian infrastructure.

9. Mr. President, for a comprehensive and durable peace in the region, other issues relating to the Arab lands that remain under occupation are also important. For the Middle East Peace Process to succeed, progress has to be made on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks as well. These critical issues must not be lost sight of amidst unprecedented social and political upheaval that the region is witnessing.

10. In fact, developments in the region call for consolidation of the collective efforts of the international community to assist the countries in undertaking inclusive political processes and implementing reforms to meet legitimate aspirations of their people. In such collective efforts, we must respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than resort to arms. No action should be taken from outside that may exacerbate the problems and give rise to extremism.

11. Mr. President, 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. This support was reiterated to the Palestinian leadership last week when the Minister of External Affairs of India visited Ramallah.

12. India also remains committed to continue its development cooperation with Palestine through direct budgetary support, training of personnel in various areas, annual contributions to UNRWA and projects under IBSA fund.

13. Mr President, Palestine is recognized by more than two-thirds of the membership of the United Nations. This was clearly demonstrated by the overwhelming vote in Paris on 31 October 2011 in favour of Palestine's membership to UNESCO. Being the first non-Arab country to have recognized Palestine in 1988, India remains convinced that Palestine meets all criteria for UN membership as set out in the UN Charter and deserves to become a full-fledged member of this Organization. We hope that the Council will support Palestine's application for membership of the UN sooner than later.

14. In conclusion, Mr President, let me reiterate India's support for Quartet's efforts for a lasting resolution of the Israel-Palestinian issues based on the two-state solution. India stands ready to play its role in the Council's collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

I thank you.

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