



**STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON
AGENDA ITEM 37: QUESTION OF PALESTINE, AGENDA ITEM 36: THE
SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE 59TH SESSION OF THE UN
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 30, 2004**

Mr. President,

We express deep sorrow, on behalf of the Government and people of India, on the passing away of His Excellency Yasser Arafat, the late President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. We convey our sincere condolences on this occasion to the wife and daughter of the late President and to the Palestinian people in their time of grief.

Mr. President,

In his message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, said: "For four decades, President Arafat had been the enduring symbol of steadfast courage in leading the struggle of the Palestinian people for an independent homeland. On this solemn occasion, we pay homage to his memory and recall his ever-lasting contribution to the cause. We also take this opportunity to wish the Palestinian people, under their new leadership, peace and an end to this decades-old conflict. India reaffirms its solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people for the realisation of its legitimate rights".

President Arafat was the elected leader of the Palestinian people and the symbol of their cause. He embodied their will and aspirations. He was a towering and highly respected international personality who fought selflessly and courageously, at great personal sacrifice, for the Palestinian cause and an independent homeland for the Palestinian people, to which he dedicated his whole life. India has consistently supported the Palestinian struggle for independence, and was the first country outside of the Arab world to recognise the Palestinian Liberation Organisation as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

President Arafat was greatly respected and admired by the people and leaders of India, and will always be remembered as a sincere and steadfast friend of India. The people of India share the grief of the leadership of the Palestinian National Authority and the people of Palestine at the passing away of a great patriot and statesman.

Mr. President,

India is deeply concerned at the ongoing conflict in the region. The violence that has beset the region since September 2000, has claimed almost 4000 Palestinian and 1000 Israeli lives, besides the physical or psychological scars not visible in conflicts that involve civilians as much as combatants. India has joined the international community in voicing its concern over the endless cycle of violence and counter-violence that has characterised the current phase of this conflict. India has maintained consistently that violence was a serious impediment to the peace process, and that the solution did not lie in more violence but in pursuing the path of political dialogue.

The economies of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have suffered immeasurably as a result of the ongoing conflict. Palestine has been particularly hard hit. It continues to reel under what the World Bank has described as 'one of the worst recessions in modern history'. The widespread increase in poverty and unemployment, coupled with the decreasing revenues of the Palestinian Authority, has brought the economy to the verge of collapse.

India has called for an easing of the restrictions placed on the Palestinian areas and an immediate amelioration of the ongoing humanitarian crisis there. To demonstrate our support for the Palestinian people in their quest for nationhood, India recently announced the provision of assistance and medicines worth approximately \$ 450,000 to the Palestinian Authority. We have also decided to double our contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA) this year.

Mr. President,

The Palestinian leadership has shown great courage and fortitude in the period following the demise of President Arafat. Their decision to hold elections on January 9, 2005 has been in the best traditions of a smooth transfer of power in accordance with the Basic Law. Israel's decision to release the approximately \$ 33 million in attached arrears to the Palestinian Authority has also been encouraging. However, the success of elections depends a great deal on the continued actions of the parties involved.

Israel, in the critical period before Palestinian elections, has to refrain from actions that could undermine trust, including settlement activity; facilitate the preparations and conduct of elections; take steps to lift curfews and ease restrictions on the movement of persons and goods; and significantly improve the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian Authority would have to undertake action on the ground to halt violence.

Israel has to allow residents of East Jerusalem to vote in the forthcoming elections; to ease the closures and blockades on major Palestinian towns and cities; to provide unhindered access to candidates and voters; and to allow international observers. The international community would need to be fully involved with the Palestinian election process to ensure that it is conducted in the best possible circumstances and is free and fair.

Mr. President,

Both Palestinians and Israelis should make optimal use of the opportunities represented in this new beginning. Most Israelis and Palestinians appear to be in favour of the resumption of the peace process after four years of conflict and loss. Elections in the Palestinian Authority in the wake of an easing of the restrictions on the territories should pave the way for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, thereby reviving the peace process. There is no doubt that for this initiative to succeed, Israel's redeployment would have to be part of the overall peace-process and coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and the international community. If these requirements were met, withdrawal could be a useful step towards an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, by means of direct negotiations between the parties leading to the goal of two States, Israel and a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestine.

We recall, in this connection, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction by Israel of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Court had opined that the wall is contrary to international law and should be dismantled. We had called on Israel to take full account of the Advisory Opinion, in keeping with the overwhelming international opinion in the matter, with a view to its early implementation.

Renewed and redoubled efforts are necessary for the peace process to move forward in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the "Quartet" roadmap and international law, with the support of the international community. We hope that a negotiated solution to end this conflict will be found urgently. The vision of two States living side by side in secure and recognised borders remains as valid, and perhaps more attainable now, than at any other time. India strongly urges the parties concerned and the international community to press for a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict within the earliest possible time-frame, based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515.

Mr. President,

There have been recent signs indicative of interest in the revival of the Lebanese and Syrian tracks. India has advocated a comprehensive solution to the situation, as the logical next step in the resolution of the wider Israeli-Arab conflict on the regional level as envisaged in the Saudi Arabian peace initiative. The principle of "land for peace" holds equally valid in addressing the other tracks of the Middle East conflict. We sincerely hope the comprehensive political process can be revived at the earliest.

Mr. President,

The late Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi whose untimely death Chairman Arafat had deeply mourned, as we mourn his death today, was fond of some lines from the writings of a remarkable woman of India, the poet Sarojini Naidu, who had said, "True peace is not the peace of negation, not the peace of surrender, not the

peace of the coward, not the peace of the dying, not the peace of the dead but the peace militant, dynamic, creative, of the human spirit which exalts".

Thank you, Mr. President.

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