

Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India at the UN Security Council open debate on the Middle East, 23 April 2012

Thank you, Madame President.

I would like to begin by thanking Under Secretary General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question, during the last one month. I also would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their useful statements.

Madame President,

2. The Middle East peace process is undoubtedly passing through one of the most difficult times since the signing of the Oslo accord. The continuing stalemate in the peace process is undermining the gains made so far. In fact, dramatic developments in West Asia and North Africa since the beginning of 2011 appear to have pushed the Palestinian issue on the backburner. Ironically, this is happening at a time when the international community is supporting the democratic aspirations of other people in the region.

3. If the present stalemate is allowed to continue and Palestinian aspirations denied, we run the risk of a sharp deterioration in the situation. The lack of trust between parties, primarily due to intensification of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, needs to be seriously and urgently addressed. In this regard, we call for a renewed commitment of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to the accepted principles for settlement of the Palestinian issue in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Oslo Accords, the Arab Peace Plan and the Quartet Principles. The parties should take urgent steps to recommence negotiation for realising the aspiration of the Palestinian people to have a state of their own, living side by side and at peace with Israel. In this regard, the complete cessation of settlement activities is of utmost importance. At the same time, all violence against civilians, irrespective of their source and cause, must stop. The international community, particularly the Quartet, must redouble its efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table. We hope that the meeting that took place between the Palestinian and the Israeli negotiators on 17 April will facilitate their efforts towards commencement of direct talks.

Madame President,

4. As I have said, if there is one issue that has become the major hindrance to the peace process, it is Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Several reports, including those of OCHA, have clearly shown that the intensification of these activities is not compatible with the two-state solution. In fact, it is destroying the very possibility of the two-state solution. Settlement activities have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people

in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They have led to violence and aggravation of tension between the Israeli settlers and the Palestinian population. We, therefore, reiterate our call for Israel to stop all settlement activities.

5. Indiscriminate violence not only puts the lives of civilians in real danger, but also leads to a vicious cycle of violence. We condemn all these attacks that cause harm to the civilian population and damage civilian infrastructure, and call for their full cessation.

6. The humanitarian situation in Gaza due to the continuing blockade and restrictions on exports is constantly aggravating the living conditions of the civilian population. As has been brought out in several reports of the UN agencies, poverty and aid dependency have increased. Demands for emergency services like health, water, sanitation, education and temporary shelter have overstretched UNRWA's resources. While we welcome some steps in easing restrictions and blockade, much more is required to be done urgently.

7. There is also a need to enhance the level of humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza and West Bank. This should be done through the established channels. At the same time, the capacity of these channels should be increased. On its part, India is continuing its development cooperation with Palestine through untied direct budgetary support of US\$ 10 million for last two years, training of personnel in various areas, annual contributions of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA and projects under the IBSA fund.

Madam President,

8. Formation of a unity government and implementation of the reconciliation agreement between the Palestinian factions signed last May are important for strengthening the administrative and security achievements made by the Palestinian Authority, despite severe financial crisis. It will not only bring all Palestinian factions together but also ensure establishment of one authority for the whole of the Palestinian territories. An early action on this front will help reaching a political common ground essential for future democratic processes in Palestine.

Madame President,

9. The Palestinian question remains at the core of Arab-Israeli conflict. Resolution of this issue should be a priority for the international community. 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 the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap. For achievement of this dream, India will continue to support all efforts, including the Quartet's.

10. At the same time, it is also important not to lose sight of other Arab lands under the Israeli occupation for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli problems.

I thank you.

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