

Statement by Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji, Permanent Representative in the
Security Council Open Debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the
Palestinian Question” on April 24, 2013

Thank you, Mr. President,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your Presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I also would like to express our appreciation for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank Under Secretary General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

2. Mr. President, the Middle East Peace Process is passing through its most difficult phase in recent times. For more than two years, the parties have not held any official meeting. Efforts of the international community, including that of the Quartet, have failed to make any impact on the ground. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, intensification of settlement activities is fast eroding the very foundation of a two-state solution. The plight of ordinary Palestinians is worsening everyday due to roadblocks and related infrastructure of occupation that put restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods.

3. The blockade of Gaza has also continued causing a great deal of hardships to Palestinians. The plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails requires immediate attention. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority is facing one of the worst financial crises that threaten to erode the progress made in building Palestinian state institutions. If the present situation persists, the international community will risk a serious destabilization in the region. It is therefore imperative that efforts aimed at breaking the deadlock and resumption of peace process are reinvigorated.

4. Mr. President, any political process in order to be meaningful must put an end to Israeli settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities are a violation of international law and harmful to the peace process. We join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities in order for the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

5. Mr. President, we have noted that Israel has recently taken some measures to allow flow of essential goods into Gaza. Still the continuing blockade remains in force, and is adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. We continue to call for complete lifting of the blockade. The parties should also fully implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement reached in November 2012.

6. Mr. President, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in its recent meeting in Brussels last month underscored the urgent need of closing the Palestinian Government's financing gap, estimated at \$1.2 billion for the current year. In this context, it is important that international community continues to support financial needs of the Palestinian authority.

7. Mr. President, since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. Since then, India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people have been strengthened and reinvigorated by regular interactions. As a member of this Council during 2011-12, India supported Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. Continuing this support, India co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution in November 2012 that upgraded the status of Palestine to a non-member Observer state. India has consistently supported a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side and at peace with Israel as endorsed in various United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the Quartet Road Map.

8. India has also partnered Palestine in socio-economic development and extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority. As in previous years, India pledged an amount of US \$ 10 million in 2012 as budgetary support to Palestine. India also contributes US\$ 1 million annually to UNRWA. India is in the process of implementing projects, bilaterally and through IBSA fund, including in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and construction of schools.

9. In conclusion, Mr. President, let me express our deep concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria. We believe that the Joint Communiqué of the Action Group, adopted in June 2012, provides a good basis for resolution of the Syrian crisis. A Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society can alone resolve the crisis, and must be seriously pursued by all parties concerned.

I thank you.

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