

Agenda Item 41: Question of Palestine

Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, PR on November 29, 2000

Mr. President,

As we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the international community today underlines its support for the people of Palestine in its quest for peace and justice and the realisation of their legitimate goals and aspirations. We would like to reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine and express India's principled and continuing support for their inalienable rights.

India's cherished bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people are based on civilisational links spanning almost every aspect of human endeavour - cultural, social, religious, economic and political. These links have been strengthened and reinvigorated with the passage of time. Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. We have stood and continue to stand side by side with the people of Palestine in their struggle to achieve their just and legitimate national rights, which is the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. India's advocacy of the Palestinian cause is manifest in our continuous and consistent support to Palestinian issues in the UN and other international fora.

India has consistently advocated a peaceful solution to all disputes. The road to peace is often tortuous and strewn with impediments. What is imperative is the commitment of the parties concerned to a peaceful resolution of all outstanding problems. India has closely followed developments concerning the Middle East Peace Process. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, followed by the interim agreement on the West Bank and Gaza two years later and the Hebron accord of January 1997, were courageous initial steps by visionaries aiming to put an end to the saga of feuding and bloodshed and to usher in a new era of peace, stability and co-existence in the region free of animosity and friction. Subsequently, India has welcomed other interim agreements, including the Wye River Memorandum of 1998 and the Sharm Al Sheikh Agreement of 1999, which form various milestones in the peace process.

The Camp David Summit brought in bold relief the complexities of various issues facing the two sides. India supports continuation of dialogue between them. We hope that the Final Agreement reached would be mutually beneficial to both sides and would address basic requirements of the situation on a lasting basis.

As a country that has all along had a deep interest in and belief in the cause of justice and peace in the Middle East, India has been convinced of the need for dialogue and peaceful negotiations to find a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of all issues between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We have, therefore, watched with very deep concern and dismay the recent incidents of violence in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza Strip and other parts of the Palestinian National Authority and Israel. These incidents have involved deliberate acts of provocation, excessive use of force and violation of basic human rights including the right to life. India is encouraged by the understandings reached at the Summit

meeting at Sharm el Sheikh on October 17. We hope that these would assist in quickly ending the cycle of violence, diffusing regional tensions and preparing the way for the resumption of the peace process. We believe that implementation of these understandings in good faith will go a long way in alleviating suffering and create the necessary climate for achieving the goal of a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and other relevant understandings.

Mr. President, there is general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation building. The fledgling Palestine Authority requires generous assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education, human resources development and creation of employment. Infrastructure development is an area of critical importance. The challenges confronting the people of Palestine are also challenges for the international community and merit its urgent attention and support. Regional cooperation, complemented by international efforts, is an essential prerequisite for enhancing peace and prosperity in the region.

India will continue within its resource constraints, to extend material and technical assistance to the people of Palestine to consolidate their progress towards self-government and nation building. We seek to assist the Palestinian people through scholarships and exchange programmes. We have offered more than 189 specialised training slots in 1996-2000 at an estimated cost of Rs. 16.4 million. India had also pledged US\$ 1 million each at the Washington Donors Conference in October 1995, at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996 and at the third Donor's conference at Washington on 30th November, 1998. A portion of this amount went towards construction of a library-cum-activity centre at Palestine Technical College and a Library building at A1-Azhar University in Gaza. During his recent visit to Palestine on 30th June 2000, the External Affairs Minister of India, Shri Jaswant Singh, inaugurated these facilities.

While the international community must assist in realising the cherished objective of peace and prosperity in the region, the actual impetus for a permanent and lasting solution will have to come from the parties themselves. We trust that the wisdom and sagacity displayed, resulting in a momentum towards peaceful and mutually beneficial co-existence, will continue to guide future negotiations. We trust in a successful and just outcome.