

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI, PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGENDA ITEM 36 'THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE
EAST' AT THE 66TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON
NOVEMBER 30, 2011

Mr. President,

At the outset, please allow me to express our sincere appreciation for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that demands our collective attention - The situation in the Middle East. Today's discussions that follow the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people are timely and appropriate.

The West Asian region, a cradle of human civilization, is of importance and concern to the entire international community including India. The region is home to nearly 5 million Indians and is an important source for India's energy needs. As a nation with age-old historic and cultural ties with the Middle East, India has an abiding interest in the early resolution of all pending issues that have troubled the region since the inception of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

The situation in the region is quite different from what it was when we discussed this topic last year in the General Assembly. While the issue of Palestine has taken a decisive turn in the history after Palestine's application on 23 September 2011 full membership to the United Nations, the region is also witnessing unprecedented events. People of many countries in the region are demanding the right to shape their own future.

Speaking a day after President Abbas filed the application, my Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said in the General Assembly on 24 September 2011 that 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. The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

While the Council could not reach unanimity on the application of Palestine for

full membership to the UN, the overwhelming vote in Paris on 31 October in favour of Palestine's membership to UNESCO demonstrated that the international community supports recognition of Palestine as an equal member of the comity of nations. We remain 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 be able to support this soon.

For peace and security on the ground, however, it is necessary that direct talks between Israel and Palestine resume without any further delay. In this regard, we are encouraged by the efforts of the Quartet. We hope that the Quartet would pursue with both parties the timeline set in its September 23 statement.

Mr. President,

The biggest stumbling block to direct negotiations is the continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon Israel to stop settlement activities. This will facilitate resumption of negotiations in which all Final Status issues should be addressed. We also call on Israel to release the Palestinian tax revenue to the Palestinian Authority which is already facing severe shortage of funds. Equally important is the implementation of reconciliation agreement between Palestinian factions leading to formation of a unity government.

We also welcome the negotiated prisoners swap between Israel and Hamas and hope this will ease tension and build confidence. It is also necessary that the cycle of violence between the Gaza Strip and Southern Israel come to an end given the security concerns of Israel. The blockade of Gaza which has led to difficult humanitarian conditions for people needs to be lifted completely.

India on its part has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. From the year 2009-10, we enhanced our annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] to US\$ 1 million, in addition to a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010. This year we have requested UNRWA to utilize the funding to provide daily supplement of food assistance to more than 76,000 students attending UNRWA schools in Gaza for 50 school-days. During the last two years, India has also contributed US\$ 10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. President,

The progress on Lebanese and Syrian tracks constitutes the essential core to achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. Developments in the Middle East since February this year underline the need for reinvigorating the search for this comprehensive peace, while the countries in the region undertake inclusive political processes and implement reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. It is important that the grievances of the people are addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than resorting to arms.

It is the responsibility of all countries to create conditions that enable their people to freely determine their pathways to development. This is the essence of democracy and fundamental human freedoms. No action should be taken from outside that exacerbates problems and gives space for the rise of extremism. The international community should stand ready to assist the countries in these efforts while respecting sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries.

Mr. President,

As my Prime Minister said in the General Assembly on 24 September, societies cannot be reordered from outside through military force. Observance of the rule of law is as important in international affairs as it is within countries.

In conclusion, Mr. President, India is ready to play a supportive role in this collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)