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**STATEMENT BY
H.E. MR. PAUL BADJI
CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
AT THE
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY
WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

Thursday, 29 November 2007

Today, as in years past, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

I am pleased and honoured to welcome here **H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim**, President of the General Assembly; **Mr. Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General of the United Nations; President of the Security Council **H.E. Mr. Marty M. Natalegawa**, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia; **H.E. Ambassador Hamidon Ali**, Vice Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; **H.E. Mr. Yasser Abed Rabbo**, Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and **Mr. Haile Menkerios**, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, defined by the General Assembly as the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and the return of Palestine refugees to their ancestral homes and lands, represent not only a political issue and an essential part of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They also represent an enduring human story, both individual and collective, one of suffering, sacrifice and perseverance in the face of adversity, which finds few parallels in modern history. The courageous journey of the Palestinians, many of whom have been dispossessed, driven away, and ignored for so long, but nevertheless stand proud, hopeful, and uncompromising in their insistence that their legitimate rights be respected, resonates deeply with people worldwide. On this solemn occasion, we reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine.

This year's observance is particularly meaningful because of the convergence of several important anniversaries. It was 30 years ago that the General Assembly called for the International Day of Solidarity to be observed annually. It was 90 years ago that the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration encouraging the creation of a Jewish

national home in Palestine. It was 60 years ago to this day that the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) partitioning the mandated Palestine. It was 40 years ago that, following the 1967 war, the Palestinian land came under Israeli occupation, which has continued up until this day. It was 20 years ago that the Palestinians as a people stood up to the occupation, and the world learned a new word - *intifada*.

These and other fateful events have defined the destiny of the Palestinian people over the decades. The Palestinians remain in limbo, dispersed, exiled, or internally displaced, stateless, and suffering from the occupation. Over the years, the occupation has been accompanied by an increasingly disproportionate and arbitrary use of military force against the civilian population, taking of Palestinian land for the construction of settlements and more recently – the separation wall, repeated acts of collective punishment and grave violations of international humanitarian law.

An already impoverished and overcrowded Gaza Strip has been choking in recent months under an increasingly suffocating Israeli blockade. Designated a “hostile territory” by Israel, Gaza experiences shortages of everything, including life-saving medicines. It is now faced with cutbacks of vital fuel and power supplies.

Our Committee has repeatedly condemned all attacks against civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, including the Palestinian rocket attacks originating from the Gaza Strip. However, to force the 1.4 million Gazans to a life of deprivation is both illegal under international law and morally unacceptable. The situation has been further exacerbated by internal Palestinian tensions, culminating in an armed takeover of the Gaza Strip by Palestinian militias. The Committee urges the Palestinians to unite behind President Mahmoud Abbas, the elected leader of the Palestinian people, and to respect the legitimate institutions of the Palestinian Authority.

The question of Palestine has frustrated the peacemaking efforts of the international community for a very long time. On the conceptual level, however, the progress in the

past decades has been nothing short of remarkable, as the inalienable national right of the Palestinians to their own sovereign State became part of an international consensus. The right of return of Palestine refugees remains widely recognized. The Road Map has charted a course to a final peaceful settlement. The Arab Peace Initiative, a major element in moving the peace process forward, was re-launched in Riyadh early this year.

Seen against this backdrop, the slow pace of practical progress on the road to Palestinian statehood looks all the more disheartening. Concerted and vigorous action is needed to close the gap between rhetoric and reality. The credibility of the international community is at stake. The time for a Palestinian State is now. There should be an end to the proverbial “windows of opportunity” and promises of a political horizon for Palestinians. The Palestinians yearn for peace, freedom and justice now. It is in our common interest and it indeed it is our moral obligation to help the Palestinian people achieve their national rights. To quote William Gladstone’s famous words, “Justice delayed is justice denied”.

Despite the many setbacks, there are reasons for hope. Our Committee is encouraged by the latest diplomatic efforts aimed at revitalizing the peace process. In this connection, we are hopeful that the Annapolis conference will generate the much-needed momentum and lead to effective permanent status negotiations, resulting in a two-State solution. It is also important that the members of the Quartet and their regional partners assist the parties by engaging themselves in this crucial endeavour.

Today’s observance of the International Day of Solidarity offers us an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to work tirelessly to advance the cause of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. I would like to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the Quartet, the League of Arab States, and of the entire international community. As the United Nations body entrusted to work on the question of Palestine, the Committee feels an especially heavy sense of responsibility for the implementation of its important mandate.

I should like to express our Committee's profound gratitude to **Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**, for his personal involvement in the efforts towards finding an equitable solution to the question of Palestine, an issue which he put very high on his agenda.

I should also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to **H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim**, President of the General Assembly, for his able stewardship of the work of the General Assembly, and to **H.E. Mr. Marty M. Natalegawa**, President of the Security Council, who is also the Permanent Representative of a country, Indonesia, which has been a tireless champion of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

On your behalf, I would also like to acknowledge the dedicated work of the United Nations agencies and programmes, who work tirelessly to provide the Palestinian people with vital assistance. These agencies often become, especially in the case of the Gaza Strip, the only available lifeline to the outside world.

Our special thanks also go out to our valued partners - civil society organizations. Always a source of dynamism, always challenging the status quo, these volunteers have played a crucial advocacy role by promoting policy change in their own societies and filled critical gaps by providing much-needed assistance to the Palestinian people.

The year 2007 has been rich in anniversaries and symbolism, but lacking in reasons to celebrate, much like the modern Palestinian history itself. Over the years, new words have entered the international vocabulary, such as *Al-Nakba* (catastrophe) and *intifada*, which conjure up images of loss and confrontation. Let us all hope that in the years ahead Arabic words signifying rebirth and hope will enter worldwide circulation as well.

Thank you.

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