

Special Meeting on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

Remarks by Judith Le Blanc, National Steering Committee, US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

Thank you Mr. Secretary-General, President of the General Assembly, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Ambassadors, & friends,

It is **an honor** to address the Special Meeting on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People today.

In the past I have attended these important UN events. The first time was just after returning from participating in a peace delegation to the West Bank during the Second Intifada.

Upon my return I went on a national tour, speaking at community centers, churches, synagogues and mosques. **It is with sadness that I say** that I could give nearly the same speech today as then about the cruel, inhumane realities of the Israeli occupation and the stalled political negotiations.

As a member of the **national steering committee of the US Campaign to End the Occupation and organizer for Peace Action**, the largest grassroots peace organization in the US, I am **mindful of the opportunities and challenges we face** in a world with **many conflicts, inequalities and pressures to undermine international institutions and law**.

The International Day of Solidarity is **a moment to examine the opportunities and challenges** in the fight for the implementation of all relevant UN resolutions including the right of return, return to the 1967 borders, for economic and social rights for Palestinian refugees, **against US military aid to the Israeli occupation**, and international law.

To paraphrase Richard Falk, the United Nations Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Israeli-Occupied Territories of Palestine, **the daunting challenge we confront** is the prolonged occupation combined with the expansion of the settlements **now amounts to de facto annexation**.

The prospects for a comprehensive and just peace are precarious in a moment when there is a growing consensus in support of a two state solution. The only path forward is negotiations based on international law and all relevant UN resolutions.

No great social change, resolution of international crisis or just solution has happened without civil society being engaged and organized for justice.

The opportunity and challenge we have as civil society organizations today is to shape and mobilize international public opinion to help break the deadlock of more than sixty years of occupation.

The tactics of nonviolent direct action, boycotts, divestment and sanctions and more are best when aimed at solidifying public opinion in support of the implementation of United Nations resolutions and international law. In this, the public opinion in the U.S. is decisive.

The Israeli military action on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla ignited a groundswell of international solidarity, indignation and debate. As a result, the international movement in support of the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions issued by Palestinian civil society continues to grow. But U.S. public opinion and official policy remains the biggest barrier to affecting change in the conflict.

Organizing to shift and solidify public opinion in the US for effective political pressure on the Obama administration and Congress is critical.

Recent US public opinion polls show that pluralities know the ongoing illegal Israeli settlements in occupied land are wrong and should be stopped. They support President Obama's efforts but a majority of Americans still do not understand the history of and issues surrounding the conflict or the role that the US plays in supporting the Israeli regime.

Most do not understand that Israel ignores UN & international law because the U.S. government has poured over 3 trillion into Israel's economy plus 3 billion annual military aid and have used over 48 UN Security Council vetoes to protect Israel from international condemnation.

The recent U.S. midterm elections compound the complexity for solidarity organizing here in the US.

Now, two-thirds of registered Democrats are opposed to Israeli policies compared to two-thirds of registered Republicans who support Israeli policy at all costs. This is not new; it existed under the Clinton and Bush administrations. The divide has deepened with President Obama's support for a freeze on settlements.

The U.S. solidarity movement must develop tactics that **engage the new level of concern about US policy in the Middle East while at the same time educate** on what **in fact** the U.S. must do differently to break the impasse in the region.

Many had **hoped** that the election of President Obama represented a **break in the continuum of U.S. foreign policy** towards Israel. The reality is that **the US continues to interfere with the UN Charter mandated diplomatic role of the UN**, implementation of UN resolutions — **such as the Goldstone Report** — all based on **politically driven domestic pressures**.

The **most recent example** is the US promise to turn over 3 billion in stealth fighters to Israel and veto any UN resolution that questions Israel's legitimacy in exchange for Israel's pledge to extend a ten-month partial settlement moratorium for another 90 days.

The cold reality is that the **powerful, moneyed pro-Israel lobby remains one of the strongest influences on U.S. foreign policy**.

On this International Day of Solidarity, we **must recommit to organizing civil society**. The powerful pro-Israel lobby's influence on US policy will only be challenged by **internationally organized, sustained civil society pressure**. The most critical part of that movement **must be organized in the US**. The US solidarity movement must creatively organize actions and campaigns that capture the hearts and minds of the American people.

There are new and important examples **towards this end**.

In California, member groups of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation successfully campaigned to place a referendum on the state ballot in the next elections **It calls on the state to divest teacher and state workers retirement pension funds** from companies that profit from **the Israeli occupation**.

Nationally, churches and other civic groups are **increasingly debating divestment from companies that do business with Israel**, that sell weapons to Israel, or that provide them bulldozers for the demolition of houses.

In the last few weeks, international pressures are making it difficult for the U.S. government to **send previously promised Caterpillar tractors**, long a target for boycott organizing since the killing of Rachel Corrie.

Frustration over UN and U.S. failures continues to **compel organizing for more humanitarian efforts by U.S. citizens and others to break the cruel and inhuman blockade** of the people of Gaza.

The boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns all over the world **are having a real impact on Israel**. They say that this so called “de-legitimization project” **is more dangerous to their security than the violence on the part of Palestinian resistance**.

These are **all important developments**, but civil society **alone** will not end the occupation of Palestine.

The United Nations **must continue to challenge the unilateral role of the U.S. government** in the region. It must **resist the attempts** to circumvent international law. The UN’s various bodies and institutions remain **critical to revealing the truth about the Israeli occupation and the plight of the Palestinian people**, while creating a framework for the **long-term resolution** of the conflict.

The UN **is where international public opinion can be registered** and international law maintained. The UN **is the standard** by which we judge the actions of **our own governments**.

Our road map for reversing the damage of the Gaza blockade, removing the Apartheid Wall, and ending the occupation as a whole **must combine the moral authority of the UN**, with the collaboration of our own governments **and** the grassroots reach of global civil society. Only through the **harnessing of all these forces**, the UN, our governments and civil society, can **“right overcome might “** in Israel and Palestine; **will rule of international law** be the norm rather than the exception in the Middle East; **can we put an end to the threat of nuclear proliferation in the region**, **will we realize the implementation of all relevant UN resolutions**.

I **thank the Committee** for providing the opportunity for **civil society voices to be raised in support of justice for the Palestinian people**. Our cause is **just** our task is **urgent**.