

**STATEMENT
BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MR. FODE SECK
Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
On the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**

24 November 2014

Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa, President of the United Nations General Assembly,
Mr. Gary Quinlan, President of the United Nations Security Council,
Mr. Palitha Kohona, Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices,
Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs,
Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of UNRWA
Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I welcome you warmly to our Special Meeting in commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People 2014. I wish to express my sincere gratitude for your participation and show of solidarity with the Palestinian people here today.

As we gather on this Day, we are still deeply affected by the last conflict in Gaza, the third Israeli war on Gaza since the Palestinian legislative elections in January of 2006. In opening this Day of Solidarity, I wish to ask for a minute of silence to remember the loss of 1,486 civilian lives in Gaza this summer, including 513 children and 269 women, with the number of deaths still rising from the after effects of the war. It also bears noting that six civilian lives were lost on the Israeli side.

Please rise.

1 MINUTE SILENCE

Please take your seats.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

At lot has happened in 2014, and as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is drawing to a close, please allow me to review some of the most important events of this year. Let me start with the many positive developments that are instrumental in supporting the freedom and independence of the Palestinian people.

First, on 11 April, Palestine officially acceded to the four Geneva Conventions, as well as 10 other international treaties and conventions. This is a historic and long-overdue move in the face of the ongoing harassment and violence against Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers and military forces, which includes the razing of homes, the displacement of civilians, the imprisonment of children, the uprooting of olive trees and the destruction of agricultural livelihoods.

Second, several European Governments and parliaments have decided to take bold initiatives to end the occupation of Palestine. The new Government of Sweden recognized the Palestinian State on 30 October, in a historic move, becoming the 135th country in the world to do so. The House of Commons of the United Kingdom and the Irish Parliament held votes that overwhelmingly recognized the State of Palestine in a non-binding motion. France and Spain are to follow soon with their own parliamentary votes and are expected to adopt similar motions.

I would like in this regard, to recall the International Meeting of Parliamentarians in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace held by our Committee last week. The meeting supported and encouraged parliamentarians from around the world, in their special role and responsibility to ensure a peaceful, but definite end to the occupation.

The Committee strongly endorses these positive developments. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all the remaining governments to recognize the State of Palestine, as taking this step will expedite creating an equal playing field for negotiations on the peaceful settlement of the conflict, and help the Parties to reach a just political solution. For obvious reasons, it is impossible for a people under occupation to achieve equal and fair treatment by the occupying force. Thus the initial step of recognizing the Palestinian State, within the framework of core international instruments, will help put an end to this enduring conflict.

Third, Palestinian political factions achieved a long-awaited break-through by forming a Government of National Unity and holding its first cabinet session in Gaza on 9 October. The Committee applauds the new government and strongly encourages it to strengthen and consolidate its ties for the greater good of the Palestinian people. The international community can only support a strong and effective unity government that acts in accordance with internationally accepted norms and standards.

Finally, global solidarity with the Palestinian people was demonstrated in the wake of the destruction in Gaza, resulting in \$5.4 billion pledged in Cairo on 12 October. Reconstruction efforts in Gaza have now begun with the first shipments of building materials entering the Strip over recent weeks. The Committee commends the efforts of the Governments of Egypt and Norway, as well as the United Nations Special Coordinator, in achieving this significant result.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Our Committee has supported these positive developments by the international community, and has organized a variety of political and cultural events within the framework of the International Year of Solidarity. This included a lecture by the renowned intellectual Noam Chomsky at UN Headquarters, the meeting of Parliamentarians held on 21 November, film screenings of Palestinian movies, and, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine, a fashion show by one of Palestine's most talented designers, showcasing the cultural vitality of the Palestinian people, an important source of their resilience in the face of great hardship. Earlier in the year, we held conferences on the Question of Jerusalem in Ankara, convened jointly with the Government of Turkey and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation; on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Nairobi, Kenya; and an international meeting in Quito, Ecuador that demonstrated the strong solidarity of Latin American and Caribbean countries with the people of Palestine. We also held a joint meeting with the League of Arab States, in Cairo that resulted in the Cairo Declaration, as well as a roundtable in Geneva on legal aspects of the question of Palestine that was joined by a number of renowned international law experts from various parts of the globe.

We still have one important meeting before us, the Civil Society Meeting in Seville, Spain on the 2nd and 3rd of December, where the Committee will hear the views of local governments and many civil society movements around the world. These civil society organizations are an important link between the Palestinian people and governments as they gather, convey their needs and concerns, and lobby for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People.

In this regard, it is important also to remember the importance of social media and the opportunities it presents to impact the youth of the world.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

This year has also seen many disturbing developments that are reason for great concern. The illegal expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, notably in the strategic E1 zone of the West Bank, and the only recently lifted access restriction of the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem to men over the age of 35 years of age.

Also of great concern is the detention of scores of Palestinians in connection with their resistance to the occupation, including the re-arrest of over 2000 former Palestinian prisoners this year, who had been released under prisoner exchange and other agreements between Israel and Palestine. The Gaza war in July and August, which lasted 50 days and destroyed the homes of over 100,000 Palestinians, as well as vital water sewage and electricity infrastructure, businesses and UNRWA facilities, caused disproportionate civilian casualties and a disastrous humanitarian situation in the Strip.

The Committee strongly condemned this year's war in several statements and called for the full lifting of the blockade of the Gaza border crossings to allow the entry of goods and materials for humanitarian aid and reconstruction. The Palestinian people continue to suffer collective punishment, which is illegal under international law, and the international community must do everything it can to address this injustice.

The Committee is mandated to support Palestine and its pursuit of a just political solution that allows the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights, the right to self-determination, to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property. This year marks a changing tide, which we hope will end with Palestine's accession as a full Member State to the United Nations. The status quo is unacceptable; we must move forward and find new solutions to give the Palestinians the necessary means to succeed in their aspirations.

I thank you for your attention.
