

SPECIAL MEETING TO MARK 40 YEARS OF OCCUPATION
BY ISRAEL OF THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORY,
INCLUDING EAST JERUSALEM

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STATEMENT BY

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Your Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee,
Distinguished guests and Excellencies,

It is my honour to be amongst you today, despite the gravity of the occasion being commemorated, on this 40th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

First, let me say that 2007 is the 40th anniversary of 59 years of the brutal occupation of the Palestinian people.

As we called for an end to apartheid in South Africa and the right of all people to live together and have equal rights, we must now, before it is too late, call for true justice for the Palestinians.

Today, we heard about the economic plight of the Palestinian people. We heard about Palestinians in Israeli prisons which number close to 8,000 men and women, including approximately 350 children under the age of 14, most of whom have been tortured.

How many UN resolutions must be passed by the UN? How many years of calling for 2 States before there is an understanding that Israel continues its aggression on the ground against women, children and men, the demolition of thousands of homes and the continued building of the apartheid wall?

Let us not just speak of the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza. We must never forget those who live as second-class citizens inside Israel and most of all, those who were forced from their homes and lands in 1948.

Now is the time to call for a real peace, with justice for all the children in the region. This can only be accomplished by supporting the right of return of all Palestinians.

Now is the time to acknowledge that the two-State solution is not the answer.

From Gaza I came, where the children of my country have no safe homes, no safe streets, no proper and adequate health facilities, no proper food, clean water, or regular electrical power,

no recreational activities and no good education. The list of deprivation of their basic needs is too long to count.

I lived this occupation as a child, and am still living it as an adult. I can see it in the eyes of my daughter when she is afraid, tired, restless and exhausted because of the unsafe and unpredictable quality of life in Gaza under occupation. I saw it as soon as we crossed the borders on our way to Egypt, where she sensed something new and different: freedom, safety and space. Gaza is like a big, unsafe prison. And it is a very small place for 1.4 million people, half of whom are children.

I face the occupation every day during my work when hundreds of Palestinian patients are denied permits and accessibility to proper medical treatment, outside Gaza. There are a few lucky patients who get a referral and permit for treatment outside Gaza. The majority, however, have to wait and wait. Many die while waiting.

What is more heart-breaking than children who do not have adequate food and a healthy atmosphere to grow up to be well rounded adults? According to the Health Work Committees Organization, 42 per cent of children in Gaza under the age of 5

suffer from iron deficiency anemia and 45 per cent suffer from some form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, due to the experiences that they are subjected to as a result of the non-stop military actions of the Israeli Occupation Forces, which almost always affect civilians in one way or another.

I will never forget the story of a woman in labor, who had to wait several hours at a checkpoint last November, during one of many Israeli military operations in the north of Gaza. Eventually she arrived at the Al Awda hospital in Jabalia refugee camp where she gave birth to her baby. When she left the hospital with the baby to go to home in the village of Beit Hanoun, there was no home; her home had been demolished by the Israeli occupying army. There are many cases and many stories, but I believe it is not the numbers that really matter, even one incident such as the above is one enough human rights violation.

I remember a 4-year old child in the same village who was forced to stay in one room with all members of his family for 48 hours while the Israeli Army commandeered their home. The child was thirsty and the soldier was there with his bottle of water, the occupied and the occupier in the same space. The soldier offered water to the thirsty child. The child said “no, no, no”. The child’s

natural reaction was a combination of fear of what the soldier represents and the steadfastness in the face of the occupation. This is what characterizes the Palestinian people: steadfastness and resistance in the face of all adversity; even small children can express it with their natural reactions more than any words or speeches. The soldier on the other hand is a human being that has been forced by the Israeli occupation machine to lose his humanity.

Whenever I think of Palestinian children and their lives under occupation, I always think of the Israeli children. As adults, we have a commitment to both sets of children to provide a safe environment for them to live peacefully. It is not the occupation or the wall or the ongoing aggression against my people that will bring safety or security for Israeli children, only peace that is based on justice will do so. Justice means that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people must be considered. Israel must recognize its moral responsibility towards the Palestinian refugees.

While Israel is physically outside Gaza, it still completely controls our lives, all aspects of our lives: health, education, economy and freedom of movement.

Life under occupation is degrading to human dignity. It has deprived us of our freedom, and only free people can make peace. It is most peculiar that we are forced to deal with the patterns of life under occupation as normal, well-established facts and when people lost hope and faith in the world or any future chances for change, and when the world turns its head away.

On the 40th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, it is fitting to call once again on the international community to put pressure on Israel to fulfil its obligations by abiding by the UN resolutions related to Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Israeli occupation should be ended now and the right of return must not be forgotten.

Thank you.
