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**Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, before the Second Committee, Agenda item 40
“Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including
East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural
resources”, 64th Session, New York, 27 October 2009**

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to begin by congratulating you on your election as the Vice-Chairperson of the Second Committee and to wish you along with the bureau members and secretariat all success in steering the work of the Second Committee in the coming weeks. I wish also to express our delegations pleasure to see your friendly country chairing our meeting today. Our thanks go to Ambassador Uche Joy OGWU of Nigeria for her endeavours in the previous session. I wish also to thank the members of the bureau of the Second Committee of the previous session for their efforts. Our appreciation also goes to the secretariat and interpreters for their remarkable efforts.

Today we are talking about the source of life and the future of Palestine and its people, and the unceasing attempts to strip Palestinians of that which is most precious, the very basic elements of survival. For over 42 years, Palestine and its land have witnessed all kinds of cruelty, destruction and abuse at the hands of Israel, the occupying Power, targeting Palestinian life, livelihoods, and resources. In the past few years, these practices have only intensified, in a hopeless attempt by the occupier to extend the ending life term? of the occupation by destroying the basic elements of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in order to strip Palestinians of hope and the ability to survive unmatched deprivation. Yet, Palestinians, the indigenous people of this land, are deeply rooted in their land, as they have been for thousands of years. They continue to live there, defying all attempts aimed at forcing them to abandon their ancestral homeland. History teaches us the notion that a people can just pick up and leave their home is a folly for all previous and similarly cruel attempts have failed. The Palestinian people shall defy all the odds and ultimately stay as their ancestors did before to protect the shadows of the olive trees from any criminal hands that attempts to cut them down in a malicious attempt to erase that which cannot be denied; the heritage and history of Palestine as well as Palestinians' inalienable right to be in their land and enjoy a life of dignity, provided by their exercise of sovereignty over their natural resources.

Israeli policies are tailored around the concept of silent transfer by way of choking life out of communities through an intricate system of multiple sieges and cages. For the sake of our debate here today, I will only focus on one aspect of this silent war, the illegal exploitation and degradation of the natural resources of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel, the occupying Power. During these four decades, Palestinians living under the iron clamp of military occupation have watched helplessly, and with increasing desperation, as the occupying Power illegally confiscated, exploited, and degraded their natural resources, threatening their survival, and more strategically the viability of their legitimate aspirations for self-determination.

P R E S S I R E L E A S E

I shall start with water, the most precious of all natural resources; the source of life itself. Aside from natural-occurring circumstances, like droughts, Israeli practices and policies have directly contributed to desertification in Palestine. They are also solely responsible for the reprehensible level of water deprivation Palestinians now suffer from.

A report published today by Amnesty International discusses in detail the level of discriminatory and illegal practices by Israel, the occupying Power, bringing into sharp focus the harsh reality of Palestinian communities across the Occupied Territory. While illegal Israeli settlers enjoy unfettered access to Palestinian water, consuming up to 300 litres a day, Palestinians have less than the bare minimum they need for a dignified and healthy life because they are provided with barely 70 litres of water a day, less than the minimum standard set by the WHO. In some cases, the situation is even worse, with some Palestinian families barely able to access 20 litres a day, the minimum recommended for humanitarian emergencies.

The most recent studies and reports indicate to what extent Israel, the occupying Power, has sucked water out of Palestinian life. In defiance of customary international practices, Israel, the occupying Power, now exploits 90% of the naturally shared water resources with Palestine, allotting a mere 10% of that to the entire Palestinian population. Through its policy of discrimination and water theft, Israel has manufactured a situation whereby 9000 illegal Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley consume as much water as one third of the entire Palestinian population in the West Bank of 2.5 million. This, at a time, when Israel's illegal exploitation of the shared aquifers that feeds the Gaza Strip has made it so that only 10% of Gaza's water meets the international standards of safety.

I ask you here to consider these figures carefully and to ponder how you, your people, could survive on such a forced and manufactured state of water shortage. When calamities hit, the world rallies to lend a helping hand to those suffering, providing them with water, food, and shelter. The Palestinians now wonder why does the world stand by as they are forced to be parched, denied access to the water that is rightfully theirs, when lending a hand would not cost resources but rather require political will? Moreover and while Israel, the Occupying Power, continues to divert Palestinian water for the use of illegal settlers, it continues to deny Palestinians the right to repair existing water networks, dig wells, build cisterns, or carry out any work that could help manage this manufactured water crisis, which is undoubtedly one of the most stark examples of the discriminatory policies of the occupation. Such a reality has had a devastating effect on the living standards of Palestinians across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with some communities, like those in southern Hebron left completely parched, their generations-old lifestyle of herding and agriculture on the brink of extinction.

These bans are compounded with another on-going illegal policy of land confiscation, settlement expansion, and wall construction. This colonial regime that has institutionalized layers of siege on the Palestinian people and their access to natural resources has dealt a heavy blow to the agriculture sector, which is one of the main pillars of Palestinian economy and heritage. During the first phase of the Wall's illegal construction, the occupying Power, confiscated 200 cisterns and 36 groundwater wells while threatening at least 14 others. All this, while the Wall's route, and the illegal settlements it encompass, are built on Palestine's most important water resources, depriving Palestinians from their right to develop or use their resources. They watch as Israeli illegal settlers splash their water around while they are thirsty, their crops burned under the sun without water.

This overall grim situation has resulted in yet another economic burden for Palestinians. Our families now pay 12% more of their household income on water, bringing into question their very ability to access fresh water. After all, the first requirement of accessibility is affordability and this requirement, is now in doubt, due to Israel's multiple siege and theft policies.

Mr. Chairman,

As if water theft and forced thirst was not enough, the occupying power is also literally stealing land from Palestinians, by way of illegally exploiting the West Bank quarries. ESCWA report (A/64/77-E/2009/13) has recently exposed this form of topography-changing illegal exploitation of Palestinian natural resources carried out by Israel, the occupying Power. The ESCWA report mentions that 11 Israeli corporations are illegally operating quarries in the West Bank, while using 75 per cent of the output for illegal construction activities, in violation of Israeli obligations under international law as an occupying Power. According to the Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din, quoted in the ESCWA report, Israel is transferring natural resources from the West Bank to Israel. "The quarries are damaging the ecological balance and biodiversity of the area's flora and fauna. They are also causing damage to agricultural land as it takes time to rehabilitate the land at the quarried areas to the point where it is fit again for agricultural use". This most literal form of illegal transfer is also associated with high levels of pollution, which is already impacting Palestinians in exploited areas, with increased levels of asthma, particularly amongst children, now reported in the vicinity of the mining.

Mr. Chairman,

The land, gravel, and rocks Israel cannot literally transfer into Israel, it illegally confiscates or severs from its Palestinian owners. In open defiance of the the collective will of the international community, represented by numerous resolutions that call on the occupying Power to cease its illegal settlement activity, confiscation of Palestinian land, and collective punishment against the civilian population, Israel continues to fine-tune these illegal policies and practices. Around 120 illegal settlements in the West Bank, or better said - 120 war crimes - continue to torment Palestinians and devour their land, crops, and livelihood inch by inch. This is in addition to a ring of 17 settlements around and within the Old City of occupied East Jerusalem along with exclusive settler roads that connect them. This, while 1500 demolition orders await implementation against Palestinian homes in Occupied East Jerusalem.

International reports leave no doubt that the occupying Power has thus far completed 58% of the 705 kilometres route of the illegal Wall, in flagrant violation of the ICJ ruling of 9 July 2004. These reports also confirm that the majority of the Wall's route - in fact 85% of its route - runs deep into the West Bank, devouring at least 10% of the total area of the Occupied Territory and its most important water resources, in a flagrant and shamelessly illegal act. This colonial regime is also guarded and maintained by an intricate and multi-layered system of roadblocks and movement restrictions, with hundreds of such roadblocks firmly in place. Here, I want to caution you against allowing numbers to sidetrack you into confusion. Instead, allow me to translate what all these numbers mean; how they translate into misery and deprivation for ordinary Palestinians. Farmers cannot access their land - end result: no crops, no income, a life of destitution. Palestinians are isolated from primary health care and education - end result: poor health, higher infant mortality rates, and trauma for the children.

These bleak pictures I have just described so bluntly are not a figment of Palestinian imagination. They are also not 'isolated incidents' or exceptions. An OCHA/UNRWA survey in 2007 identified 67 communities with an estimated population of 222,000 in the northern West Bank alone, which had land isolated in the closed area between the "Wall" and the Green Line. And the World Bank estimates this denial of access to agricultural land, has an average economic value, now lost, of \$US 38 million. This is equal to roughly 8% of Palestinian agriculture product.

Again, this situation is tolerated no where else in the world. It is also the direct result of a discriminatory colonial policy that has made it a policy to build wealth and achieve prosperity at the expense of an entire people and by illegally using their natural resources. And it must be stopped.

Mr. Chairman,

Gaza is not exempt from these illegal policies. In fact, the crisis in the Gaza Strip is a serious reflection of human brutality and collective punishment. The cruel Israeli blockade on the Strip is now in its third year and humanitarian organizations have been bravely reporting of the extreme difficulties they face in bringing vitally needed help to Gaza; help that only aides in the survival of the population.

The UN's most senior humanitarian official, John Holmes, characterized this Israeli blockade as a form of collective punishment on the entire Palestinian population in Gaza. But Israel did not suffice with denying the Palestinians in Gaza of their basic rights. Instead, it launched a criminal war against the population that wreaked death, destruction, and possibly permanent damage to environment there.

The war left Gaza's infrastructure in utter devastation, turning the task of providing basic services to over 1.5 million people into a nearly impossible mission. The effects are appalling. With the electricity, sewage and water systems in utter devastation, only 10% of Gaza's drinking water is now safe for consumption. This has left the majority of the population with no option but to drink the water they know will make them and their children sick. Efforts to repair this health nightmare have been met with the usual Israeli intransigence. Equipment, spare parts, chlorine, and other essential supplies are rarely allowed to enter Gaza and in such limited amounts, they can only maintain the already broken-down system; not repair it.

OCHA and UNEP report that every day in Gaza 80 million litres of untreated and partially-treated wastewater are being discharged into the environment, including underground water resources. According to the UNEP's latest report on Gaza's environment: "The most urgent and challenging finding is the state of the underground water supplies, upon which the Palestinian people rely for drinking and agricultural irrigation water." The report says the sustainability of the Gaza Strip is under threat, should these deplorable conditions be allowed to continue.

Israel's war and siege on Gaza devastated every sector of the economy. Agriculture and fishery are prime examples. Israeli razing of land as well as the illegal use of weapons like White Phosphorous bombs, have scorched the earth in Gaza, making most of its previously fertile and lush-green fields parched deserts. And Gaza's generation-old lifestyle of fishery is also almost extinct, with the vast majority of this sector now unable to reach the water, afraid it would cost them their lives. This has plunged thousands more families into deep poverty and utter dependence.

Security Council Resolution 1860 and GA Special Emergency Session Resolution ES10/18, which call for an immediate lifting of this siege, are still fresh in our memory. In line with its consistent and abject disregard to the will of the international community and International Humanitarian Law, Israel continues to defy both. It lavishes in the comfort of previous customary political practice by some allies that have unfortunately ensured Israel is also kept above and beyond the reach of international accountability.

Mr. Chairman,

This systematic illegal exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, coupled with the discriminatory and racially prejudicial mindset of the occupying power, has had a devastating environmental effect.

Illegal Israeli settlements house dozens of chemical plants that operate unchecked, not adhering even to Israeli environmental rules. These factories have been dumping their untreated waste and chemical

by-products onto Palestinian land, polluting water streams and wells, devastating planting fields, and affecting the health of Palestinians living in the area.

Additionally, the recent closure of many landfills by the Israeli military authorities has complicated the problems of solid waste management in the West Bank, forcing Palestinian municipalities to operate make-shift landfills in close proximity of residential neighbourhoods. On the other hand, illegal Israeli settlements' production of garbage - amounting to 224 thousand tons a year - find their way to Palestinian land.

And just like in Gaza, Israel is banning Palestinians from developing, constructing, or repairing a properly functioning sewage treatment infrastructure, include the construction of sewage treatment plants. Several attempts to construct new sewage treatment plants in the West Bank have all been blocked by the Israeli occupation authorities, which never run out of false excuses to justify these illegal practices. The direct result of this imposed infrastructural inadequacy has resulted in pollution and health hazards to Palestinians across the occupied West Bank.

Mr. Chairman,

The circumstances I have just outlined are very clear. In fact, they are undeniable. They have also lead to the internal displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians. A report by Save the Children issued today, warns at least 10 thousand other Palestinian civilians, mostly children, also face the threat of displacement. As shocking as this statement may be, it is unfortunately not surprising for it is the natural result of these unchecked illegal practices by the Occupying Power.

Finally Mr. Chairman, Let me assure you that my statement today, while reflecting a very difficult, almost extreme reality, is not meant to relay despair or surrender to a fate of misery. On the contrary, it is to remind all Member States that ours is a shared fate, based on mutual principles we have enshrined in laws that must govern our practices and policies at all times. Allowing these principles to be broken or disregarded once threatens the very equilibrium of the system we belong to and to which we must all hold onto. It is unacceptable, in fact inexcusable, for such a situation to continue without the slightest promise of change. This misery is not the result of a natural disaster; it is not the by-product of domestic failures. Instead, it is the reflections of our shortcomings as a community of nations - to have allowed this impunity, this racism, this theft to continue at our watch, degrading with every right violated the credibility and viability of the system and principles of our international system. This is not an unattainable situation and it must stop with your collective and active political will.

The actions and policies I have discussed are those of a State attempting to market itself as a country in the "forefront of these advances – by leading innovations in science and technology, medicine and biology, agriculture and water, energy and the environment. These innovations the world over offer humanity a sunlit future of unimagined promise". But truth overcomes such sinister shams. Israel must be told that its illegal colonial actions will be combated and eliminated. The occupying Power must know that the international community shall not tolerate these deplorable actions any more because its commitment to the principles of International Law shall outweigh any other considerations that have so far made a mockery of our international system.

Palestinians shall not allow the reality of Walls, wanton violence, and discrimination to stand in their way. They shall continue to march forward, building, where the occupation destroys, preserving life, where the occupier shatters it, and planting, where the colonial regime razes and uproots. Our commitment to exercise our inalienable right to self-determination, including exercising full sovereignty over our natural resources is unwavering - simply unstoppable. Our empowerment to establish a sovereign and viable Palestinian state is the only option - the only way to achieve peace in the region and restore to this

ancient land its equilibrium, free from the merciless exploitation of this era's last standing occupying Power.

We call on all Member States to join us in our effort to establish justice and peace and to live true to those principles this august assembly stands for. This is undoubtedly a test of our resilience as an oppressed people and equally, a test of international credibility. Either way, allow me to conclude by assuring your Excellency that Palestinians have decided theirs is one option - victory, over oppression, exploitation, and subjugation and a future of freedom, peace, and prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.