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115 EAST 65TH ST.
NEW YORK NY 10021

TEL 212 288 8500
FAX 212 517 2377



Statement by Mr. Rabii AlHantouli, First Secretary, before the Second Committee on agenda item 61 "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", 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly: New York, 26 October 2011: (Check against delivery)

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, I would like once again to extend Palestine's sincere congratulations on your assumption of the Chair of this Committee, as well as to the distinguished members of the Bureau. I would like also to express our gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Rima Khalaf, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for her valuable presentation and for the efforts exerted by the Commission in preparing the report.

The ESCWA report, which was presented today, highlights the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The report reflects the harsh reality and injustice inflicted upon the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, for more than 44 years, while the international community stands powerless towards the occupying Power, which considers itself above all laws and continues its violations of international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions. These violations by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people have included, but have not limited to, the killing of Palestinian civilians, arbitrary arrests, confiscation of land, destruction of property, including agricultural land, water wells, demolition of homes and imposition of strict restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Indisputedly, all these illegal actions are not only hindering the potential for growth of the Palestinian economy but are also completely undermining its development.

Israel, the occupying Power, also persists in its attempts to change the character, status and demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, through the continued construction of illegal settlements, construction of the apartheid annexation Wall in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of July 2004.

According to the ESCWA report, the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements, construction of the Wall, and the continuing Israeli military operations have severely restricted the ability of the Palestinian people to access their natural resources,

namely water, land and energy, in addition to its negative impact on the environment, through the depletion of water resources and the deterioration of its quality level. The report also affirms that the land has been degraded and has been polluted, as well as the air. This will have long-term ecological and health effects for the entire Palestinian people for generations.

Moreover, serious impediments to the potential economic development of Palestine has been caused by Israeli control over water resources, which are already scarce, the deterioration of water quality, and the depletion of the greater part of water resources by the nearly half million illegal Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The building of the apartheid Wall has also compounded the scarcity of water through confiscation of many groundwater wells and water springs. Together, this has caused the serious deprivation of the Palestinian people of their water rights guaranteed by international law.

Mr. Chair,

The reports issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) affirmed that the pace of construction of Israeli settlements has doubled from the previous year. Along with the escalation of Israeli military operations, the attacks waged by the settlers against the Palestinian people and their property, including farmlands and water resources have also doubled. The settlers are viciously waging their barbaric and brutal raids against Palestinian farmers, uprooting trees, looting crops and flooding agricultural lands with wastewater, all under the protection of the Israeli occupying forces. According to a recent report by OCHA, the settlers have uprooted, burned and destroyed more than 8000 olive trees since the beginning of this year, including 900 trees during the last week. For the Palestinian people, olive cultivation is part of their history and culture, and the majority of Palestinian farmers depend on it for their income. More than one hundred thousand Palestinian families livelihood comes from olive cultivation.

In this regard, and as a result of the severe effects which are caused by the continuing Israeli military occupation, illegal settlement activities and construction of the Wall, the Palestinian Government, through the implementation of its programme entitled "*Palestine: Ending the occupation, Establishing the State*," and in collaboration with the donor countries, has stepped up its efforts to support the affected areas through building, repairing, and developing projects and providing relief support to the these areas, particularly in East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, as well as to the areas that have been isolated because of the annexation Wall and the expansion of illegal settlements. These efforts are aimed at enabling the Palestinian population to withstand the Israeli scheme to displace them from their homes and workplaces. The Palestinian Government also has established specialized Ministerial committees to deal with water and natural resources issues and the preservation of the environment in the framework of safeguarding these sectors which are facing serious difficulties and challenges because of the illegal policies and practices of the Israeli occupation.

Mr. Chair,

Israel, the occupying Power, continues to impose its illegal and inhumane blockade on the Gaza Strip, preventing the movement of imports and exports from and to the Strip, and restricting the free movement of people. Israel also continues to deny Palestinian farmers access to their lands in areas located 1,500 meters from the border fence, which constitutes 35% of the area of the Gaza Strip. Israel also continues to prevent Palestinian fishermen from reaching areas located more than three miles from the coast, thus preventing them from using more than 80% of the fishing waters of Palestine. All of these factors led to the worsening of living conditions in the Strip, where more than 38% of its population live under the line of poverty.

Mr. Chair,

For several years, many friendly and sisterly countries have provided support to the Palestinian people in several areas in order to help in improving the social, economic and humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which have seriously deteriorated as a result of the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation for more than 44 years. The reports submitted by the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund at a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), held on 18 September 2011 at UN headquarters in New York, affirmed that the only obstacle to economic, social and institutional development in Palestine is the Israeli occupation.

Therefore, we call upon the Member States of the United Nations and the international community as a whole to shoulder their responsibilities and compel Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by the provisions of international law, international treaties and relevant United Nations resolutions, which ensure the rights of the Palestinian people, and the rights of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, to sovereignty over their natural resources, and demand Israel's cessation of exploiting and depleting these resources.

I conclude by saying that the Palestinian people have not and will never accept the status quo manifested in the continuation of the ruthless Israeli occupation that tries to control their fate and destiny, plunders their natural resources, undermines their economic and social development and seeks to destroy their hopes and aspirations to live in freedom, dignity and prosperity, like other peoples of the earth. Regaining sovereignty over our natural resources in the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, is an integral part of the exercise of our right to self-determination which would enable us to achieve the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. We are determined to continue our efforts and our legitimate struggle to achieve this noble objective in the very near future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.