



INDIA भारत

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STATEMENT

BY

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MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
AND
MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION
ON
AGENDA ITEM : 31

: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE
REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

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Mr Chairman,

At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's appreciation to Ms Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East for presenting an insightful and comprehensive report on the work by the Agency. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to commend the work of the staff members of the Agency in the service of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Mr Chairman,

India is deeply concerned at the on-going conflict in the Middle East. The support for the Palestinian cause has been a central feature of India's foreign policy since even before it achieved independence in 1947. We believe that there can be no military solution to the Palestinian issue. The violence that has beset the region since September 2000 has claimed several thousand Palestinian and Israeli lives, besides the physical and psychological scars affecting civilians and combatants. India has joined the international community in voicing its concern over the endless cycle of violence and counter-violence that has characterised the current phase of this conflict. India has maintained consistently that violence was a serious impediment to the peace process, and that the solution did not lie in more violence but in pursuing the path of political dialogue.

The economy of the Palestinian Authority has suffered immeasurably as a result of the on-going conflict. Some of the grim details are contained in Paragraph 14 of document A/61/13. Palestine has been particularly hard hit. According to the World Bank report, about 43% of the Palestinian population still fall below the poverty line, with perhaps 15% living in deep poverty and unable to meet subsistence needs. The widespread increase in

poverty and unemployment, coupled with the decreasing revenues of the Palestinian Authority, has brought the economy to the verge of collapse.

We note the concern of the Chairperson of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA that “the separation wall/fence, closures, curfews and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, will lead to further hardship for the affected Palestinian population.” As we have stated in the past, the walls/encroachment on Palestinian land and interests creates great hardships for the people affected by its construction and exacerbates the already grim situation. Besides, the continued construction of the wall on Palestinian land threatens to prejudge the eventual outcome of the final status negotiations between the parties.

Mr Chairman,

The services provided by UNRWA are of a critical importance in the context of the continuing spiral of violence in the Middle East. Since its inception over half-a-century ago, the Agency has played a key role in addressing the multifaceted needs of the Palestinian refugees, and it is today a symbol of the international community’s commitment to the well being of the Palestinian refugees until a just and durable settlement of the refugee problem is achieved. As the largest UN programme in the Middle East, the Agency is a key instrument in providing education, health, relief and social services and other vital programmes to the most vulnerable segments of the Palestinian population, not only in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but also in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

India has called for an urgent easing of the restrictions placed on the Palestinian areas and an immediate amelioration of the on-going humanitarian crisis there. We have, in the past, manifested our support to the Palestinian people through regular assistance and supply of medicines to the Palestinian Authority. In May 2006, in response to a request from the Palestinian authorities, India

announced humanitarian assistance worth Rs.100 million, primarily in the form of medicines and medical supplies, to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate the difficult situation in which the Palestinian people find themselves. We have also been a regular, albeit modest, contributor to the UNRWA budget.

An area of continuing concern is the restriction in freedom of movement of UNRWA staff members. Regrettably, the environment in which the Agency carries out its operations continues to hamper its ability to deliver services. Of equal concern is that these restrictions have had a serious impact on the ability of UNRWA to move staff and provide humanitarian assistance to those in urgent need. Closures and blockades need to be lifted and unhindered access allowed to humanitarian supplies. We support the plea of the UNRWA Chairperson regarding removal of restrictions on the movement of agency staff and goods, as specified in his letter dated 28 September 2006. We salute the staff members of UNRWA for their efforts to assist Palestinian refugees under difficult and often dangerous circumstances.

Mr Chairman,

UNRWA is the primary source of humanitarian relief assistance to Palestinian refugees. We believe that the Agency's activities constitute an important component in the struggle for the realisation of peace in the Middle East. Its continued operations in the region are crucial to address the mounting humanitarian crisis among the Palestinians. Under the circumstances, it is imperative that the international community remains firmly committed in carrying out its shared responsibility to provide the vital support required by UNRWA to continue to effectively fulfil its mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

At this juncture, it is critical for the international community, in particular the Middle East Quartet to work closely with the parties with a view to encouraging them to fulfil their commitments and obligations. It must also be ensured that vested interests are not allowed to derail the process. India is confident that a just and

comprehensive solution to the conflict is attainable and we call upon all sides to work together to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in secure and recognised borders, based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.