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STATEMENT BY

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CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF CANADA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

TO THE 60TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ITEM 15: QUESTION OF PALESTINE

NEW YORK, 30 NOVEMBER 2005

DÉCLARATION DE

L'AMBASSADEUR GILBERT LAURIN
CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I. DU CANADA
AUPRÈS DES NATIONS UNIES

À LA 60^E SESSION DE L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE DES NATIONS UNIES

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NEW YORK, LE 30 NOVEMBRE 2005

Mr. President,

Last year, in this chamber and during this debate, we spoke of a window of opportunity for the Middle East peace process and called on both parties to embrace an historic chance for real change in the lives of Israelis and Palestinians.

Both sides have risen to the challenge, and it is critical for us as an international community to retain and reinforce the momentum of these positive developments.

Historic steps have been taken by Israel to withdraw from Gaza and parts of the West Bank. The Palestinian people have elected a leader committed to the process of political reform. Together, Palestinians and Israelis, with the support of the US and EU, reached a vital border agreement that gives control over an international frontier to Palestinians for the first time, and that will foster economic activity in the Gaza strip and improve the lives of ordinary Palestinians.

Our discussion today of the question of Palestine within the context of these new realities fosters a renewed sense of hope that the parties may indeed work towards a lasting, comprehensive settlement of all issues.

Mr. President,

It is not only in the region that we have seen some positive change, but also here at the United Nations.

Canada commends Israel's new engagement with the United Nations. We strongly supported Israel's Vice-Presidency of the General Assembly and welcome other breakthroughs achieved over the last year. In particular, Canada applauds Israel and its distinguished Permanent Representative, for achieving consensus on the resolution on Holocaust Remembrance. Canada was proud to co-sponsor that resolution, along with 103 other countries

At the same time, the Palestinian delegation has demonstrated a constructive approach to negotiations over their General Assembly resolutions this year. The resolutions have been modified to welcome Israeli withdrawal and in some cases provocative language has been removed. We have worked very constructively with the distinguished Palestinian Permanent Observer and applaud the move to withdraw the resolution on the situation of and assistance to the Palestinian children, which is a step towards reducing what we have long regarded as the excessive number of Middle East resolutions.

Canadian policy towards the Middle East

Mr. President,

I want Canada's position on particular issues that arise here in the General Assembly to be seen in the context of our long-standing policy in the region.

Canada has always been, and remains, wholly committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We support Israel's right to live within secure borders, free from the threat of violence, conflict and terror. We also support an independent, viable, democratic and territorially-contiguous Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with its neighbours.

Canada has always strongly condemned all forms of violence and terror. Indeed, it is a widely accepted view that non-combatants should not be targeted, by any means, by any party to a conflict. We therefore firmly and unequivocally condemn any form of support, either direct or indirect, to terrorist organizations. The use of suicide-bombing against innocent civilians is particularly abhorrent. No legitimate, democratic state can ever be built through the use of terrorism. Terrorists and their supporters should immediately be brought to justice and networks disarmed and dismantled.

Israel must also strive to build trust by refraining from unilateral actions that may prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. These include ensuring that the route of the security barrier does not stray from the 1967 border, nor disrupt the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers working to secure a future for their families. While the withdrawal was a courageous step in the right direction, further efforts to negotiate borders should be achieved through negotiation. It is not a small point: when negotiations succeed, even in modest steps, they provide the strongest ammunition against violence.

Canada continues to look for new ways to support peacebuilding in the Middle East. We are proud to sponsor the Regional Forum for the Middle East Ministers of Justice, an initiative of Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney-General, and one that has been endorsed by the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Egypt and Jordan.

Canada continues to exercise custodianship and leadership in the process of seeking a just, viable and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian refugee issue. Canada has also ramped up financial and expert assistance to the Palestinian Authority to strengthen their capacity for internal reform and to build a sustainable peace in the region. Canadian funds and expertise are contributing to such initiatives as building the capacity of a Palestinian border agency, critical to the management of safe borders, and to training programs for Palestinian jurists. And yesterday, as a further indication of our commitment to a peaceful resolution, the Government of Canada announced its intention to establish a Centre for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East.

Approach to the UNGA resolutions

Mr. President,

In the context of those broad policy objectives and activities, let me now turn to the business of this Assembly. And let me begin with the question that must be asked first of all. How can the work of the General Assembly in New York be used to advance the objectives I have described? And, if the process here distracts from or undermines the effort to achieve those objectives, how can our General Assembly process be improved?

In short, how can we, here in New York, hasten the day when the parties rise from a table following the successful negotiation of final status issues?

Last year, I announced that Canada would begin a process of reviewing our voting on the numerous Middle East resolutions which come before the General Assembly. While the fundamental elements of Canada's policy in the Middle East are unwavering, we believe this annual process in New York is becoming a diversion from the reality and real needs on the ground. It is divisive and unhelpful to the overall goal of strengthening dialogue and building confidence and trust among parties.

Countries, including Canada, invest time, energy and resources in analysing and negotiating resolutions, yet their ultimate value remains questionable. For this reason, Canada began last year to advocate more strongly for a reformed approach.

First, Canada has strongly encouraged more constructive resolutions that reflect current dynamics and include mechanisms for follow-up on agreed benchmarks. Resolutions, to be credible and effective, should reflect and reinforce Roadmap obligations.

Second, Canada has criticized inflammatory, provocative and divisive language in resolutions. Language that creates a sense of imbalance, and seems to suggest that it is only Israel that has obligations. The responsibilities of other actors, including Palestinians, are often not sufficiently emphasized, nor are references to Israeli security needs. Canada will not support resolutions that use emotive and provocative language in place of the straight facts.

Due to these concerns, Canada has become increasingly involved in text negotiation in order to work towards fewer, more focused, and more balanced resolutions.

Mr. President,

Among the many resolutions this year, Canada was pleased to be able to support this year the 4th committee draft on *Israeli settlements*. This is an issue of fundamental importance to Canada. Likewise, Canada will again be supporting the resolution before us now on *Jerusalem*. Canada's position is that Jerusalem remains an issue for negotiation by the two sides, and that Israel should desist from measures which pre-empt such negotiations and risk complicating peaceful resolution. This includes measures such as the expansion of settlements within and around Jerusalem. Our support to both resolutions would not have been possible without the flexibility and openness shown by the Palestinian mission during negotiations.

Last year, Canada changed its vote on four of the annual Middle East resolutions so that they more closely reflected Canadian policy towards the Middle East.

This year, we have serious concerns with two additional resolutions.

As we signalled last year, when we voted against the resolution *Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People* we believe scarce UN resources should only be committed to bodies that can clearly demonstrate achievements in support of the peace process. For this same reason, we have considered the work of the *Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat*, which supports the Committee, and have decided to vote against its mandate resolution. In our Explanation of Vote last year we signalled that we would vote against this resolution in the absence of demonstrable value-added, which we do not believe has been achieved over the past year.

We have also raised concerns about the resolution *Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine* with its authors. While Canada strongly and unshakeably supports the premise of this resolution, we also believe that this broad resolution requires a stronger and more unequivocal condemnation of suicide-bombing, by the expression of such condemnation in a stand-alone paragraph. Such an explicit condemnation could help to end the use of terror throughout the region and beyond. We see no valid argument against this proposal, and will not be able to support the resolution without it.

Finally, Canada signalled last year that we felt the resolution *The Syrian Golan*, unfairly placed the onus of responsibility for renewed negotiations on Israel only, while the reality is that confidence building measures and good-will gestures are needed from both sides. We believe this language is unbalanced and unhelpful to overall goals of the peace process. Furthermore, we do not support the ongoing tabling of this resolution, while a broadly supported resolution from the Fourth Committee on the Syrian Golan issue is adopted every year by the General Assembly. For these reasons we will be moving to oppose this resolution.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

I mentioned that Canada continues to seek new ways to build peace and dialogue between the parties in the Middle East. We find the process of these resolutions less than helpful in achieving the goal we all seek – peace in the Middle East – and we are of the view that the resolutions do not contribute to a balanced starting point, which is so critical to ensuring a successful outcome.

We will start on a process of building the consensus necessary for an inclusive and thorough resolution on the peace process – free of divisive rhetoric, accurate, detailed in approach and balanced in outcome. We will seek and welcome the support of all nations.

In so doing, we will be further assisting the continuing reform of the UN by helping to ensure a sharper focus on outcomes. By moving in this manner, we hope we can make the UN a key player in driving real change at this important time. We hope that all nations will engage with us in this goal and in so doing. We also hope to improve the tone of the dialogue by reducing the politicization of the debate. This is our goal and the task we believe will drive Canada's work at the UN in this important region. We hope that everyone will join with us.