

# ISRAEL

Statement by:

**Mr. Ran Gidor**

**Israel's Representative to the Fourth Committee**

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## **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**

### **Statement by Ran Gidor, Israel's Representative to the 4<sup>th</sup> Committee**

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to start by thanking you for the skillful and expeditious manner in which you have administered this Committee's proceedings so far. We would also like to offer our warmest wishes to the newly appointed Commissioner - General, Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayid, under whose leadership we have already experienced an improved dialogue and working relationship with UNWRA.

Assistance to the Palestinian people is an important part of Israeli policy, arising from our belief that stimulating the economic growth of the Palestinian economy and enhancing the welfare of the Palestinian population is integral to the stability of our region. Israel continues to attach great significance to UNRWA's activities and appreciates the difficult conditions under which the Agency operates. Despite an intensely challenging situation on the ground, it remains Israel's policy to facilitate and assist the humanitarian operations of the Agency as much as possible.

Indeed, even during the month-long massive Israeli operation of disengagement and withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which included the dismantling of 24 Jewish communities and the evacuation of about 8,000 people, the IDF made extensive efforts to avoid disrupting UNRWA's work in any way. We were pleased to note UNRWA's acknowledgment of these efforts in para.19 of the Commissioner-General's report. Despite five weeks of civil unrest inside Israel, with mass demonstrations and other forms of popular protest that represent an inalienable expression of our democracy, and while thousands of Israeli families were uprooted from their communities, not one complaint was lodged by UNRWA expressing any disruption of its activities.

Mr. Chairman,

The Report under consideration here, which pertains to the period between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005, refers to circumstances that have since been altered most dramatically. In this respect, the Report may very well be the last of its kind. Israel is no longer in Gaza. There is no longer a scapegoat around to blame for every hardship, obstacle, or personal loss suffered by the Palestinian population. Indeed now—when the Israeli military and civilian administration has ceased to exist in Gaza—it is the duty of the Palestinian Authority to boost its nation-building efforts and assume some of UNRWA's responsibilities on the ground, especially those related to education, health, and food.

Notwithstanding the Israeli initiative, the situation on the ground continues to be difficult for all. As demonstrated only last week in Hadera, Israel still confronts a concerted terrorist campaign, launched by Palestinian terrorist organizations that are determined to sabotage any progress toward peace in the region. The Palestinians are struggling to lead normal lives while terrorist organizations exploit the weakest of them for their own murderous aims. But it is in the interest of all - and first and

foremost that of the donors financing UNRWA's important work - that the Agency maintain neutrality and impartiality at all times while fulfilling its important mandate.

That is why we were disappointed to learn that the current report adheres to the same approach that had characterized its predecessors. UNRWA should be able to promote its vital humanitarian goals without politicizing its overall mission. The duty to assist one party to a conflict should not necessitate ignoring the other party's legitimate perspective. Specifically, the Report lacks a presentation of the context in which UNRWA activities are carried out, with regard to Israel's perennial need to protect its citizens. The right to life is, after all, the most fundamental human right.

Israel has been fighting the recent round of its war on terrorism since October of 2000. During this period, over 1000 Israelis have been killed, and 6000 injured as a direct result of Palestinian terror attacks. During the period covered by the report, Israel has had to endure no less than 2,000 separate incidents of terrorism, including suicide bombings, Qassam rocket attacks, shootings, and road-side ambushes.

Even after disengagement and since the completion of the Commissioner-General's Report, the terrorist organizations have continued their efforts to sabotage any incipient momentum for peace. The most recent atrocity, occurring only a few days ago, on 26<sup>th</sup> October, was perpetrated when a Palestinian suicide terrorist murdered 5 civilians and injured more than 50 in the central Israeli town of Hadera

We would like to remind our distinguished colleagues that Security Council Resolutions 1373 (2001), 1566 (2004) and 1624 (2005), specifically obligate states to combat terrorism wherever it may be found. Furthermore, the 1967 Comay-Michelmores Exchange of Letters solidifying the relationship between the Government of Israel and UNRWA contain the following proviso: "... the Israeli Government will facilitate the task of UNRWA to the best of its ability, subject only to regulations or arrangements which may be necessitated of military security."

UNRWA has expressly recognized in its Report Israel's right of self-defense and its duty to protect its citizens. Israel, in turn, respects its obligations towards UNRWA and will continue to endeavour to facilitate its mandate. Nevertheless limitations must be placed occasionally on the movement of goods and individuals, in order to prevent infiltrations and security infringements. That is implicit in the Agreement. Security at times unfortunately demands limiting certain activities - and UNRWA has itself agreed to this reality.

That is why we find the Report's omission of a relevant contextual background surprising. For instance the term 'severe strife,' laconically mentioned by UNRWA, is a curious euphemism for a savage onslaught of terrorism directed first and foremost against the Israeli civilian population, which necessitated a military response, based on the universally recognized right to self-defense. When the context is omitted, there is no chain of causation, no clear relation between cause and effect. The result is a document that simply catalogues one party's actions in a way presenting a highly inaccurate and distorted summary of events. Although the increasing hardship of the Palestinians is a sad truth, the presentation of Israel's actions as the cause of this suffering is disingenuous. It amounts to beginning to tell a story from the middle.

There were several cases of 'severe strife' (to borrow UNRWA's term) around the world in the past few years, most recently in New Delhi, London, Madrid, Istanbul, Bali, and of-course New-York. No one challenged the right of the Indian, British, Spanish, Turkish, Indonesian, and American governments to protect the lives of their citizens and respond with all the necessary force. Why then is Israel expected to allow its citizens to be targeted repeatedly without doing all it can to fight the scourge of terrorism?

The Report details Israeli military activities that impede UNWRA's efforts in a way that implies such activities were carried out arbitrarily rather than in response to Palestinian terror. An example is the reference to damage caused by the IDF to a Palestinian school in Jabalia on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004. The Report mentions heavy fighting, but fails to mention that those same premises had been used that day for launching grenades at Israeli forces. Nor is this flagrant incursion into an UNWRA installation mentioned in the section of the Report that addresses armed interference by Palestinian authorities. Israel regrets the abuse of UNWRA installations by Palestinian terrorist groups and expects UNWRA to take all possible steps to ensure such abuse is not repeated. Similarly, the Report refers to delays at checkpoints yet also does not reference the security issues that link checkpoints to Israel's fight against terrorism and in particular suicide bombers.

Mr. Chairman,

It is assumed that UNRWA would agree, that its dialogue with the Israeli authorities has considerably improved in recent times. We, on our part, are pleased to note that UNRWA's team has been displaying a more constructive approach toward Israel's concerns. We are not beyond criticism, and there is always scope for improvement. Israeli officials, at all levels, have been continuously available to meet and coordinate matters with UNRWA officials regarding both general and practical issues arising out of Agency operations. For example, Israeli coordination officials continuously facilitate the movement of medical personnel and ambulances, as well as the transit of patients in need of urgent or chronic medical treatment to hospitals within the Palestinian Authority and in Israel. We remain committed to such coordination even in times of increased security alert and widespread military activity, which can impose great difficulties on such efforts.

We would equally expect UNRWA to rise up to the challenges that have confronted it of late. Last year at this meeting we referred to the special report submitted by the General Accounting Office of the United States Congress (GAO-04-276R of 17 November 2003), and the US State Department's letter of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2002 to former Commissioner-General Hansen, both of which contained a number of disturbing observations. Unfortunately, too little has been done by UNRWA to address the problematic issues outlined in both those documents.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel supports the humanitarian mandate of UNRWA and its practical execution on the ground. Every day arrangements are made at the border crossings between Israel and Gaza, in order to enable the smooth passage of UNRWA vehicles, goods and personnel. This occurs despite repeated attacks directed against the Israeli personnel

working at the crossings – those very people whose job it is to speed up the movement of Palestinian persons and goods across the border. Nevertheless, Israel continues to risk the lives of some of its citizens and soldiers in order to facilitate UNRWA's humanitarian work.

A particular example of this is the terrorist attack in January 2005 at the Karni crossing, the main passage for humanitarian and commercial activity of the Gaza Strip, in which 6 Israeli civilians were killed. Despite the fact that Palestinian terrorists continued to target such facilities, Israeli authorities were able to resume operations at Karni expeditiously. Given the complaints mentioned in the Report about delays in the clearing of containers, it seems that the Agency is choosing to focus on administrative and technical constraints without giving due appreciation to very real and imminent security dilemmas faced by Israel.

Mr. Chairman,

The annual debate on the UNRWA Report provides a regular venue for the utterance of high rhetoric and hyperbolic sympathy for the suffering of the refugees, on behalf of my Arab colleagues. Yet at their core their statements are hollow. Allow me to present one example of the double standard present in this debate. Section 4 of Chapter 1 of the UNRWA report describes some of the budgetary constraints that have traditionally encumbered the Agency's operations:

UNRWA's operations are almost wholly funded through voluntary contributions from Member States and other entities. The constraints posed by the unpredictability of funding over the medium term are ameliorated to a certain extent by the readiness of some of the Agency's major donors to provide unearmarked funds to UNRWA's regular budget. The Agency's ten largest donors for 2004, who together provide almost 90 per cent of its current cash income, are, in descending order: the European Commission, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Canada, Switzerland, Japan and Italy.

In short, not a single Arab country is prepared to spend any more than a miniscule part of its ever-increasing oil revenues in order to help alleviate the plight of the Palestinian refugees. At the same time, my Arab colleagues here clearly prefer to continue squandering the United Nations' budget on repetitive sessions, inefficient committees, endless resolutions and useless documents, which do nothing to improve the situation on the ground or help the prospects for peace.

Mr. Chairman,

It is often said that humanitarian needs of a suffering population cannot be separated from political considerations. We do not adhere to this view. It is the Palestinian civilian population, however, that pays the price. Those who point an accusing finger at Israel often conveniently ignore the Qassam rockets fired at our cities from within densely populated Palestinian areas. They turn a blind eye to radical terrorists who use UNRWA schools and facilities as cover for attacks against Israel, thus placing their own civilians at danger through their violent activities.

The most recent example happened on a Friday evening, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, when many innocent Palestinians died as a result of an explosion of a Hamas truck filled with munitions as it was participating in a parade in the Palestinian town of Jabalya, near Gaza. Hamas, desperate to evade its obvious culpability, naturally blamed Israel for the blast and began volleying Qassam rockets at Israeli towns. More than 40 rockets hit the southern Israeli town of Sderot and elsewhere in the Negev over that weekend, wounding 5 persons and causing extensive damage.

Clearly, the rampaging in Gaza of these armed terrorist organizations and the absence of any reaction on the part of the Palestinian leadership exacts a high price from the Palestinian population. In its abandonment of any restraints, Hamas has directly caused the deaths of many Palestinians, among them children and the wounding of many more.

Israel believes that all people should be able to exist in security and in peace, with standards of living befitting the principles of universal human dignity. Israel hopes for adequate living conditions for all our neighbouring communities, especially the Palestinians. Well-being within a nation fosters harmony between nations. The Palestinians are not our enemies; they are our neighbours. We seek to live side by side with them in mutual respect and dignity. Both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in security and peace – both peoples' suffering is a humanitarian problem – both peoples' rights to self-determination must be respected.

The Israeli pull-out from Gaza infused the region with a new sense of cautious optimism, and provided the Palestinians with an opportunity to utilize their undisputed skills and talents in order to build a better future for themselves. We hope that next year's report will duly reflect this new reality.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.