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**STATEMENT
BY**

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
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**AT THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE
ON ITEM 15:
“QUESTION OF PALESTINE”**

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Mr President,

For once, there have been a number of positive changes in the Middle East that may present yet another opportunity to revitalise the peace process. However, even these hopeful signs may not amount to much unless the international community becomes fully engaged in supporting the peace process.

Israel has taken a courageous step towards ending the occupation of Gaza by withdrawing its military forces and the illegal settlements from that area, as well as parts of the northern West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority has taken bold efforts to reform the Palestinian security services, re-establish the rule of law in areas that were only recently vacated by the Israeli military and to prepare for fully inclusive and democratic legislative elections.

The Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that resulted with the re-opening of the Rafah border crossing between Palestine and Egypt may be the beginning of a process of cooperation between the Parties, which should definitely be encouraged.

Yet, South Africa remains concerned that these latest opportunities for a peace in the Middle East may be squandered if decisive action is not taken to stop the construction of settlements on Palestinian lands and to halt and reverse the construction of the separation wall.

Mr President,

Sixteen months ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution ES/10-15 by an overwhelming margin, upholding the International Court of Justice's finding that the Israeli separation wall is illegal and that Israel has an obligation to dismantle the wall and make reparation for all damages caused by its construction. The international community committed itself to further action to bring an end to the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and requested the Secretary-General to establish a register of damages incurred by Palestinians due to the construction of the wall.

The General Assembly acted because the United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in its entirety based on the Charter, the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law.

In his report (A/60/539), the Secretary-General notes that Israel has "failed to make progress on the implementation of its core commitments under the roadmap." The Secretary-General further states that "Government sponsored settlement activity may

have a negative impact on the territorial contiguity of Palestinian territory and thus remains a source of serious concern."

In his latest report (A/60/271), Professor John Dugard, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation in Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1976, reminds that the international community has proclaimed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the need to create a Palestinian State living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel. Yet, Professor Dugard reports that "This vision is unattainable without a viable Palestinian territory. The construction of the wall, the expansion of settlements, and the de-Palestinization of Jerusalem threaten the viability of a Palestinian State."

The conclusion of Professor Dugard is that the accelerated construction of the separation wall and settlements, together with the exodus of non-Jews from East Jerusalem and other key parts of the Occupied West Bank, are creating new facts on the ground in the Middle East. Professor Dugard argues that Israel has embarked "upon major changes in Jerusalem in order to make the city more Jewish".

Mr President,

The history of the peace process in the Middle East is that whenever there are positive indications, progress becomes threatened because the international community is slow to fully engage in supporting the peace process.

We would hope that in the 60th year of the founding of the United Nations, the international community will become even more committed in addressing the underlying political issues in the Middle East. The humanitarian efforts are welcome but their impact will remain limited without addressing the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I thank you, Mr President.