

Statement by Ambassador Asoke K. Mukerji, Permanent Representative at the Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question in the United Nations Security Council on April 21, 2015

Thank you Mr. President,

I would like to appreciate your convening of this quarterly open-debate on the situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question. I also thank the Secretary General for today's briefing. We take this opportunity to extend our support to the newly appointed Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process Mr. Nickoloy Mladenov in his efforts and appreciate the work of outgoing Special Coordinator Mr. Robert Serry.

Mr. President,

2. Last month when the outgoing Special Coordinator Robert Serry briefed this council he said and I quote "It remains the primary responsibility of this Council to play its role in developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict at long last". Pointing out that the Security Council resolution 242 embodying the key principle of "land for peace" is nearly half century old, he had rightly questioned whether the time hasn't come for the Council to lead?.

Mr. President,

3. The Palestine Question is the one of the long standing issue before this Council and the international community. While we reiterate our support to the amicable resolution of this issue, we are concerned that the Security Council has not been able to achieve the objective of such a peaceful solution. The Council has at best been a standby witness to phases of escalation and relative calm which has become characteristic of this unsettled issue. The effectiveness of the Council has consequently been brought into question. We therefore join others in urging the Council to step up its efforts and take the lead in resolving this problem.

Mr. President,

4. India's deep association with, and continuing commitment to, Palestine is rooted in our modern history that goes back to our own struggle for independence. India's position on the issue of Palestine is very clear. India re-affirms its support for the cause of Palestine and solidarity with the Palestinian people for their struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and a united State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders side-by-side at peace with Israel and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

5. Apart from political support to the Palestinian cause, India continues to support the development and nation-building efforts of Palestine by consistently extending technical and financial assistance to Palestine. It also contributes US \$ 1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India pledged US\$ 4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. We are also implementing development projects in Palestine, jointly with Brazil and South Africa within the framework of IBSA,

and have pledged US \$ 1 million for a new project to reconstruct the Atta Habib medical centre in Gaza.

Mr. President,

6. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable option that can effectively address the issue. We are particularly worried that last year saw a downward trend in the Peace Process. Efforts for serious negotiations between the parties were inconclusive. In addition, we were faced with an unfortunate situation of resumption of the tragic and escalated conflict in Gaza. Subsequent developments included unilateral actions by the parties, unfortunately moving them further apart. The imperative need is for restraint, to avoid provocation and unilateral actions and to return to the peace process. Diplomacy and statesmanship have to prevail over hatred and violence; there is no other road to a lasting peace. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon, for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.

Mr. President,

7. We express our deep concern with the activities of proscribed outfits, radicalized and extremist groups in the Middle East region especially in northern parts of Iraq and Syria which are critically impacting on peace and stability in the region. The violence perpetrated against the civilians especially against women and children, on the basis of religion, ethnicity as well as sectarianism strikes at our common humanity. Efforts must be taken by all parties and stakeholders in the region to curb these dangerous trends. We believe the consolidation of political processes and solutions while building durable state institutions will be the effective way of addressing such extremism and radicalism in the region.

8. We note that a proscribed terrorist group has targeted UN peacekeepers twice in UNDOF. We also regret the death of a UN peacekeeper in UNIFIL. Security Council resolutions that proscribe terrorist groups operating in this region need to be implemented. The early and effective prosecution of such groups is essential. Only such action endorsed by the Council will deter such groups in other parts of the world from committing acts of terror.

Mr. President,

9. As a nation which took proactive and effective steps in evacuating and safeguarding the lives of thousands of our citizens as well as many other nationals from 48 countries, including from 4 of the 5 Permanent Members of this Council, we urge all parties in Yemen to return to the negotiating table forthwith. As I have stated earlier in my statement dialogue remains the effective solution to resolve all problems.

10. We not only managed to safely evacuate 4,741 Indians but also 1,947 foreign nationals from 48 countries till 18 April under most difficult circumstances. Our approach in the evacuation process has been guided by the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kukumbakkam" or the "world is one family".

11. We assisted nationals of Australia, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Canada, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, Myanmar, Mexico, Moldova, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Somalia, Sweden, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, the UK, Uzbekistan, the US, the UAE, Uganda, Ukraine and Yemen. This received worldwide appreciation.

12. On Syria, we reiterate our support to a Syrian-led, comprehensive political solution to the ongoing crisis, in alignment with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. The humanitarian crisis arising out of the situation has to be addressed effectively. It is with this conviction we pledged and contributed US \$ 2 million to the UN Syrian Humanitarian Response Plan in 2014 and pledged another US \$ 2 million during the recently held 3<sup>rd</sup> International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait. We would like to urge all parties to demonstrate the requisite political will, exercise restraint, and commit to seeking common ground in accommodating their differences.

I thank you.

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