

Remarks of PA President Mahmoud Abbas to the 68th United Nations General Assembly

The full transcript of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's speech in New York, NY on September 26, 2013.

Mr. President of the General Assembly of the United Nations,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I extend my congratulations to H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremid on his outstandingly successful presidency of the previous session of the General Assembly, and I congratulate Mr. John Ashe upon his assumption of this session's Presidency and wish him all success.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address you today, and for the first time in the name of the State of Palestine, before the United Nations General Assembly, after your historic decision last 29 November to raise Palestine's status to that of an observer State. As representatives of your Governments and of your peoples, you have championed justice, right, and peace, and thereby affirmed your refusal of occupation, and stood for principles and ethics and on the side of peoples yearning for freedom. For this, I present you again today with my deepest thanks and gratitude, in the name of Palestine and of its people. The Palestinian people celebrated this resolution, because they rightly felt that they did not stand alone in the world, but that the world stands with them, and because they realized that the result of your overwhelming vote meant that justice is still possible and that there still is room for hope.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I assured you last year that our quest to raise Palestine's status does not aim to delegitimize an existing State - Israel, but to consecrate the legitimacy of a State that must exist, which is Palestine. I have also affirmed in front of you that our quest does not aim to affect the peace process, nor is it a substitute for serious negotiations. To the contrary, our quest is supportive of the path of peace and has revived a comatose process. As we have repeatedly affirmed, and as we have proven in practice, the State of Palestine, which abides by the United Nations Charter, by international humanitarian law and by the resolutions of international legitimacy, will exercise its role and uphold its responsibilities in the international system in a positive and constructive manner, and in a way that reinforces peace.

A new round of negotiations began a few weeks ago thanks to the appreciated, tireless efforts of the President of the United States, Mr. Barack Obama, and of the US Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry. I affirm before you that we have begun these negotiations and that we shall continue them in good faith and with open minds, strong determination and an insistence on success. I assure you that we shall respect all of our commitments and foster the most conducive atmosphere for the continuation of these negotiations in a serious, intensive manner and provide the guarantees for its success, aimed at reaching a peace accord within nine months.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we engage in this new round of negotiations, we must recall and remind that we do not start in a vacuum or from point zero, nor are we lost in a labyrinth without a map, nor do we lack a compass so as to lose sight of the finish line and of the destination. The goal of peace that we seek is defined and the objective of these negotiations is clear to all, and the terms of reference, basis and foundations of the peace process and of the agreement we seek are longstanding and are within reach. As for the goal of peace, it is embodied in redressing the historic, unprecedented injustice that has befallen the Palestinian people in Al-Nakba of 1948, and the realization of a just peace, the fruits of which can be enjoyed by the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, as well as by all the peoples of our region.

The objective of the negotiations is to secure a lasting peace accord that leads immediately to the establishment of the

independence of a fully sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on all of the Palestinian lands occupied in 1967, so that it may live in peace and security alongside the State of Israel, and the resolution of the plight of Palestine refugees in a just agreed upon solution, according to United Nations resolution 194, as called for by the Arab Peace Initiative. Here, we reaffirm that we refuse to enter into a vortex of a new interim agreement that becomes eternalized, or to enter into transitional arrangements that will become a fixed rule rather than an urgent exception. Our objective is to achieve a permanent and comprehensive agreement and a peace treaty between the States of Palestine and Israel that resolves all outstanding issues and answers all questions, which allows us to officially declare an end of conflict and claims.

The terms of reference and parameters of these negotiations, its goals, and the basis of the agreement we seek are found in your historic decision to raise Palestine's status, as well as in the countless resolutions of this august body and the resolutions of the Security Council, and in those of the Arab League, of the European Union, of the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In fact, over the years, these parameters have come to form an international consensus.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty years ago, precisely on 13 September 1993, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, signed with the Government of Israel a Declaration of Principles Agreement (Oslo Accords), in the presence of our departed leader, Yasser Ararat, and Yitzhak Rabin, the late Israeli Prime Minister, and of former President Bill Clinton on the White House lawn in Washington.

On 15 November 1988, the Palestinian National Council adopted our program for the achievement of peace, thereby taking an extremely difficult decision and making a historical and painful concession.

However, as representatives of the Palestinian people, we have long been aware of our responsibilities towards our people and had the necessary courage to accept a two-State solution: Palestine and Israel on the borders of 4 June 1967, establishing a Palestinian State on 22% of the land of historic Palestine. Thus, we did our part to realize a historic settlement, uphold our obligations, and fulfill all that the international community set as requirements from the Palestinian side in order to attain peace. At the same time that the PLO affirmed its choice of peace as a strategic option and of a solution resulting from negotiations, it firmly repudiated violence and affirmed an ethical, principled rejection of terrorism in all its forms, especially State terrorism, and affirmed our respect of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions. As a genuine historical breakthrough, the signature of the Oslo Accords caused an unprecedented political dynamism, fostered great hopes and generated high expectations. The PLO worked with dedication to implement it in order to end the occupation and to realize a just peace.

But after the passage of twenty years, the picture appears dispiriting and bleak, the great dreams shattered, and the goals more modest. As much as we felt in those days that peace was at hand, we realize today how far we are away from it. For the goal of the Accords was not achieved, its provisions not implemented, and its deadlines not respected. And, all the while, the continuation of intense settlement construction, which aims to change the facts on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, has violated the spirit of the agreement, struck at the core of the peace process, and caused a deep fracture in its cornerstone - that of the two-State solution.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The start of a new round of negotiations is good news, but it cannot be sufficient grounds for relaxing vigilance or give the international community an exaggerated sense of tranquility. The negotiations we are undertaking with the Israeli Government under the auspices of the United States require that the international community exert every effort to make them succeed, namely by international and regional organizations, as well as by individual States upholding the international consensus on the goal of peace, the objectives of the negotiations, the terms of reference and the basis for a permanent peace agreement. At the same time, the international community is asked to remain alert to condemn and stop any actions on the ground that would undermine negotiations - and I refer here, above all, to the continuation of settlement construction on our Palestinian land, particularly in Jerusalem. There is an international consensus - among the countries of the world, international and regional organizations and the International Court of Justice - on the illegality and illegitimacy of these settlements. The position of the European Union with regard to settlement products is a positive model of what is possible to be done in order to ensure an environment supportive of the negotiations and the peace process. At the same time, it is imperative that the near-daily attacks on the religious sites in Occupied Jerusalem, at the forefront of which is A1-Aqsa Mosque, where the continuation of such attacks will have dire consequences.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

History teaches us - and it is the best teacher - that waging war, occupation, settlements and walls may provide temporary quiet and a momentary domination, but they certainly do not ensure real security nor guarantee a sustainable peace. Such policies may create a specific reality on the ground, but they certainly do not create a right, nor do they provide legitimacy. Such policies may impose a weak stability, but they cannot prevent an inevitable explosion, because such policies in fact fuel inflamed situations to explosion. But above all, such policies are incapable of extinguishing the aspiration of a people for freedom and cannot eradicate their living memory or eradicate their narrative. Therefore, what is required is to heed the lesson of history, to abandon the mentality of force and occupation, to recognize the rights of others, and to deal on an equal footing and parity to make peace. What is required is to stop relying on exaggerated security pretexts and obsessions in order to consecrate occupation, and to stop contriving demands that push the conflict from its defined political terrain towards the abyss of religious conflict in a region burdened with such sensitivities - a matter that we categorically refuse.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that the Israeli people want peace, and that its majority supports a two-State solution. We have always expressed our firm positions and have always explained them at the negotiations table with the Israeli Government and in the meetings and contacts we have intensified in the recent years with a wide spectrum of actors in Israeli society. Our message stems from the idea that the two peoples, the Palestinian and the Israeli, are partners in the task of peacemaking. This is why we keep reaching out to the Israeli side saying: let us work to make the culture of peace reign, to tear down walls, to build bridges instead of walls, to open wide roads for connection and communication. Let us sow the seeds of good neighborliness. Let us envision another future that the children of Palestine and of Israel enjoy with peace and security, and where they can dream and realize their dreams, a future that allows Muslims, Christians and Jews to freely reach places of worship; and a future in which Israel will gain the recognition of 57 Arab and Muslim countries and where the States of Palestine and Israel will coexist in peace, in order to realize each people's hopes for progress and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While we discuss the realization of peace between Palestine and Israel as an imperative to achieve a comprehensive peace between the Arab countries and Israel, according to the resolutions of the United Nations; we bear in mind the current volatile reality and unprecedented dynamics gripping our region. Palestine does not interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries, but we have clearly affirmed our stance beside the demands of the peoples, their choices, and their peaceful popular movements to achieve these demands, along with the programs and roadmaps they have adopted to reach their goals.

Further, while we condemned the crime of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, we have affirmed our rejection of a military solution and the need to find a peaceful political solution to fulfill the aspirations of the Syrian people.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people were born in Palestine and in exile after the 1948 Al-Nakba. But after the passage of 65 years, they are still its direct victims. Since the start of this year, 27 Palestinian citizens have been killed and 951 have been wounded by the bullets of the occupation, and 5000 fighters for freedom and peace are held captive in occupation prisons. So, does anyone deserve more than the Palestinian people ending this occupation and realizing a just and immediate peace?

This year and in the last few years, Palestine refugees continue to pay - despite their neutrality – the price of conflict and instability in our region. Tens of thousands are forced to abandon their camps and to flee in another exodus searching for new places of exile. So, is there anyone more deserving than the Palestinian people to obtain justice, like the rest of the peoples of the world? 4 Since the beginning of the year, construction continues on thousands of settlement units and construction tenders have been issued for thousands of others on our occupied land, while yet more, large areas of land are expropriated or declared off limits, and 850 homes and structures have been demolished.

Palestinians are forbidden from planting their own land and from using the majority of the area of our country. They are prevented from using the water of their own country to irrigate their crops. The wall and checkpoints continue to tear apart the lives of the Palestinian people and to destroy the economy. The siege grows tighter, along with attacks and

oppressive discriminating measures against Occupied Jerusalem, its holy places and its citizens. In Gaza, an unjust blockade continues to be imposed on our people. So, is there anyone more deserving than the Palestinian people to gain freedom and independence now?

Since the beginning of the year, 708 terrorist attacks have been perpetrated by settlers against our mosques and churches, and against olive trees, farming fields and homes and property of Palestinians.

Is there any doubt in anyone's mind that the Palestinian people are the most in need of security? Is there a nobler mission on the international community's agenda than realizing just peace in the land of the monotheistic faiths, the nativity of Jesus Christ - peace be upon him, the ascent of the Prophet Muhammad - peace be upon him, and the resting place of Abraham, the father of the prophets, peace be upon him?

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Palestinian people, as they continue to be steadfast on their land, also continue to build their institutions, to strengthen internal unity, to achieve reconciliation by returning to the ballot box, to wage peaceful, popular resistance to counter the oppression of occupation and settlements and settler terrorism, and continue to adhere to their rights. The Palestinian people do not want to remain "out of place" in the words of Edward Said. Our people wait for a day when its cause ceases to be a fixed item on the agenda of the United Nations. Our people want to have freedom, God's gift to humanity, and to enjoy the grace of living an ordinary life. For we - as Mahmoud Darwish wrote - "cultivate hope", and we "shall one day be what we want": a free sovereign people on the land of the State of Palestine.

Mr. President,

I am personally one of the victims of Al-Nakba, among the hundreds of thousands of my people uprooted in 1948 from our beautiful world and thrown into exile. Like hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees, I have known as a youth the pain of exile and the tragedy of the loss of loved ones in massacres and wars, and the difficulties of building a new life from zero. And we tasted in refugee camps in exile the bitter taste of poverty, hunger, illness and humiliation, as well as rising to the challenge of affirming one's identity. Our people have walked the path of armed revolution and rose from the ashes of Al-Nakba and collected the shards of its soul and its identity to present its cause to the world and consecrate the recognition of its rights. We have walked a long, difficult path and sacrificed dearly, and yet we affirmed at all times our active quest for peacemaking.

I have signed, in the name of the PLO twenty years ago, the Declaration of Principles Agreement, and we have worked faithfully and diligently to implement it, affirming our respect for our commitments and the credibility of our positions. The successive setbacks did not shake our strong faith in the objective of a just peace, and we shall continue tirelessly and unwaveringly to see it realized. My own hope is to see the day where a just peace reigns so that the generation of Al-Nakba can pass on to its children and grandchildren the flag of an independent State of Palestine.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Time is running out, and the window of peace is narrowing and the opportunities are diminishing. The current round of negotiations appears to be a last chance to realize a just peace. Merely thinking of the catastrophic and frightening consequences of failure must compel the international community to intensify efforts to seize upon this chance.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The hour of freedom for the Palestinian people has rung. The hour of the independence of Palestine has rung. The hour of peace has rung.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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