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**B2. PALESTINIAN PRES. MAHMUD ABBAS,
ADDRESS TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON THE OCCASION OF PALESTINE'S
APPLICATION FOR UN MEMBERSHIP, NEW
YORK, 23 SEPTEMBER 2011 (EXCERPTS).**

President Abbas's speech, which ended with the announcement that an application for membership in the United Nations had just been filed, consisted primarily of a comprehensive overview of the Palestinian position, past efforts, and current situation and included a clear statement of purpose, goals, and conditions for renewed negotiations. Addressing relentless settlement expansion and Israel's refusal to commit

to terms of reference as called for by international law and UN resolutions, he stated frankly that it was "no longer possible to redress the issue of blockage of the horizon of the peace talks with the same means . . . that have been repeatedly tried and proven unsuccessful" and declared that negotiations were futile "without clear parameters and in the absence of credibility and a specific timetable," and in the continuing presence of an entrenched occupation that "continues to change the demography of our country in order to . . . alter the borders." Abbas was greeted enthusiastically upon his return home on 25 September by thousands of Palestinians who praised his actions at the UN General Assembly session as an assertion of Palestinian rights and principles, even while being skeptical that they would result in substantive change. The speech, delivered in Arabic, was taken from the PLO's Negotiations Affairs Department website at www.nad-plo.org.

. . .

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Question Palestine is intricately linked with the United Nations via the resolutions adopted by its various organs and agencies and via the essential and lauded role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East—UNRWA—which embodies the international responsibility towards the plight of Palestine refugees, who are the victims of Al-Nakba (Catastrophe) that occurred in 1948. We aspire for and seek a greater and more effective role for the United Nations in working to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in our region that ensures the inalienable, legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people as defined by the resolutions of international legitimacy of the United Nations.

. . .

A year ago, at this same time, distinguished leaders in this hall addressed the stalled peace efforts in our region. Everyone had high hopes for a new round of final status negotiations, which had begun in early September in Washington under the direct auspices

of President Barack Obama and with participation of the Quartet, and with Egyptian and Jordanian participation, to reach a peace agreement within one year. We entered those negotiations with open hearts and attentive ears and sincere intentions, and we were ready with our documents, papers and proposals. But the negotiations broke down just weeks after their launch.

After this, we did not give up and did not cease our efforts for initiatives and contacts. Over the past year . . . we did not ignore any formal or informal party of influence and stature to be addressed. We positively considered the various ideas and proposals and initiatives presented from many countries and parties. But all of these sincere efforts and endeavors undertaken by international parties were repeatedly wrecked by the positions of the Israeli government . . .

The core issue here is that the Israeli government refuses to commit to terms of reference for the negotiations that are based on international law and United Nations resolutions, and that it frantically continues to intensify building of settlements on the territory of the State of Palestine.

Settlement activities embody the core of the policy of colonial military occupation of the land of the Palestinian people and all of the brutality of aggression and racial discrimination against our people that this policy entails. This policy, which constitutes a breach of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, is the primary cause for the failure of the peace process, the collapse of dozens of opportunities, and the burial of the great hopes that arose from the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 between the [PLO] and Israel to achieve a just peace that would begin a new era for our region.

The reports of United Nations missions as well as by several Israeli institutions and civil societies convey a horrific picture about the size of the settlement campaign, which the Israeli government does not hesitate to boast about and which it continues to execute through the systematic confiscation of the Palestinian lands and the construction of thousands of new settlement

units in various areas of the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem, and accelerated construction of the annexation Wall that is eating up large tracts of our land, dividing it into separate and isolated islands and cantons, destroying family life and communities and the livelihoods of tens of thousands of families . . .

The occupation is racing against time to redraw the borders on our land according to what it wants and to impose a fait accompli on the ground that changes the realities and that is undermining the realistic potential for the existence of the State of Palestine.

. . .

This policy will destroy the chances of achieving a two-State solution upon which there is an international consensus, and here I caution aloud: This settlement policy threatens also to undermine the structure of the Palestinian National Authority and even end its existence.

In addition, we now face the imposition of new conditions not previously raised, conditions that will transform the raging conflict in our inflamed region into a religious conflict and a threat to the future of a million and a half Christian and Muslim Palestinians, citizens of Israel, a matter which we reject and which is impossible for us to accept being dragged into.

All of these actions taken by Israel in our country are unilateral actions and are not based on any earlier agreements. Indeed, what we witness is a selective application of the agreements aimed at perpetuating the occupation. Israel reoccupied the cities of the West Bank by a unilateral action, and re-established the civil and military occupation by a unilateral action, and it is the one that determines whether or not a Palestinian citizen has the right to reside in any part of the Palestinian Territory. And it is confiscating our land and our water and obstructing our movement as well as the movement of goods. And it is the one obstructing our whole destiny. All of this is unilateral.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1974, our deceased leader Yasser Arafat came to this hall and assured the Members of the General Assembly of our affirmative pursuit for peace, urging the United Nations to realize the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, stating: "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."

In 1988, President Arafat again addressed the General Assembly, which convened in Geneva to hear him, where he submitted the Palestinian peace program adopted by the Palestine National Council at its session held that year in Algeria.

When we adopted this program, we were taking a painful and very difficult step for all of us, especially those, including myself, who were forced to leave their homes and their towns and villages [in what is now Israel], carrying only some of our belongings and our grief and our memories and the keys of our homes to the camps of exile and the Diaspora in the 1948 Al-Nakba, one of the worst operations of uprooting, destruction and removal of a vibrant and cohesive society that had been contributing in a pioneering and leading way in the cultural, educational and economic renaissance of the Arab Middle East.

Yet, because we believe in peace and because of our conviction in international legitimacy, and because we had the courage to make difficult decisions for our people, and in the absence of absolute justice, we decided to adopt the path of relative justice—justice that is possible and could correct part of the grave historical injustice committed against our people. Thus, we agreed to establish the State of Palestine on only 22% of the territory of historical Palestine—on all the Palestinian Territory occupied by Israel in 1967.

We, by taking that historic step, which was welcomed by the States of the world, made a major concession in order to achieve a historic compromise that would allow peace to be made in the land of peace.

In the years that followed—from the Madrid Conference and the Washington negotiations leading to the Oslo agreement, which was signed 18 years ago in the garden of the White House and was linked with the letters of mutual

recognition between the PLO and Israel, we persevered and dealt positively and responsibly with all efforts aimed at the achievement of a lasting peace agreement. Yet, as we said earlier, every initiative and every conference and every new round of negotiations and every movement was shattered on the rock of the Israeli settlement expansion project.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I confirm, on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, which will remain so until the end of the conflict in all its aspects and until the resolution of all final status issues, the following:

1. The goal of the Palestinian people is the realization of their inalienable national rights in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on all the land of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, which Israel occupied in the June 1967 war, in conformity with the resolutions of international legitimacy and with the achievement of a just and agreed upon solution to the Palestine refugee issue in accordance with resolution 194, as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative which presented the consensus Arab vision to resolve the core the Arab-Israeli conflict and to achieve a just and comprehensive peace. To this we adhere and this is what we are working to achieve. Achieving this desired peace also requires the release of political prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons without delay.
2. The PLO and the Palestinian people adhere to the renunciation of violence and rejection and condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, especially state terrorism, and adhere to all agreements signed between the [PLO] and Israel.
3. We adhere to the option of negotiating a lasting solution to the conflict in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy. Here, I

declare that the [PLO] is ready to return immediately to the negotiating table on the basis of the adopted terms of reference based on international legitimacy and a complete cessation of settlement activities.

4. Our people will continue their popular peaceful resistance to the Israeli occupation and its settlement and apartheid policies and its construction of the racist annexation Wall. They receive support for their resistance, which is consistent with international humanitarian law and international conventions and has the support of peace activists from Israel and around the world. This reflects an impressive, inspiring and courageous example of the strength of this defenseless people, armed only with their dreams, courage, hope and slogans in the face of bullets, tanks, tear gas and bulldozers.
5. When we bring our plight and our case to this international podium, it is a confirmation of our reliance on the political and diplomatic option and is a confirmation that we do not undertake unilateral steps. Our efforts are not aimed at isolating Israel or de-legitimizing it; rather we want to gain legitimacy for the cause of the people of Palestine. We aim only to de-legitimize the settlement activities and the occupation and apartheid and the logic of ruthless force, and we believe that all the countries of the world stand with us in this regard.

I am here to say on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestine Liberation Organization: We extend our hands to the Israeli government and the Israeli people for peace-making. I say to them: Let us urgently build together a future for our children where they can enjoy freedom, security and prosperity. Let us build the bridges of dialogue instead of checkpoints and walls of separation, and build cooperative relations based on parity and equity between two neighboring States—Palestine and Israel—instead of policies of occupation,

settlement, war and eliminating the other.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the unquestionable right of our people to self-determination and to the independence of our state as stipulated in international resolutions, we have accepted in the past few years to engage in what appeared to be a test of our worthiness, entitlement and eligibility. During the last two years our National Authority has implemented a program to build our state institutions. Despite the extraordinary situation and the Israeli obstacles imposed, a serious extensive project was launched that has included the implementation of plans to enhance and advance the judiciary and the apparatus for maintenance of order and security, to develop the administrative, financial, and oversight systems, to upgrade the performance of institutions, and to enhance self-reliance to reduce the need for foreign aid. With the thankful support of Arab countries and donors from friendly countries, a number of large infrastructure projects have been implemented, focused on various aspects of service, with special attention to rural and marginalized areas.

In the midst of this massive national project, we have been strengthening what we seek to be the features of our State: from the preservation of security for the citizen and public order; to the promotion of judicial authority and rule of law; to strengthening the role of women via legislation, laws and participation; to ensuring the protection of public freedoms and strengthening the role of civil society institutions; to institutionalizing rules and regulations for ensuring accountability and transparency in the work of our Ministries and departments; to entrenching the pillars of democracy as the basis for the Palestinian political life.

When division struck the unity of our homeland, people and institutions, we were determined to adopt dialogue for restoration of our unity. We succeeded months ago in achieving national reconciliation and we hope that its implementation will be accelerated in the coming weeks. The core pillar of this reconciliation was to turn to the people through legislative and presidential elections

within a year, because the State we want will be a State characterized by the rule of law, democratic exercise and protection of the freedoms and equality of all citizens without any discrimination and the transfer of power through the ballot box . . .

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no longer possible to redress the issue of the blockage of the horizon of the peace talks with the same means and methods that have been repeatedly tried and proven unsuccessful over the past years. The crisis is far too deep to be neglected, and what is more dangerous are attempts to simply circumvent it or postpone its explosion.

It is neither possible, nor practical, nor acceptable to return to conducting business as usual, as if everything is fine. It is futile to go into negotiations without clear parameters and in the absence of credibility and a specific timetable. Negotiations will be meaningless as long as the occupation army on the ground continues to entrench its occupation, instead of rolling it back, and continues to change the demography of our country in order to create a new basis on which to alter the borders.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a moment of truth and my people are waiting to hear the answer of the world. Will it allow Israel to continue its occupation, the only occupation in the world? Will it allow Israel to remain a State above the law and accountability? Will it allow Israel to continue rejecting the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice and the positions of the overwhelming majority of countries in the world?

. . .

At a time when the Arab peoples affirm their quest for democracy—the Arab Spring—the time is now for the Palestinian Spring, the time for independence.

The time has come for our men, women and children to live normal lives, for them to be able to sleep without waiting for the worst that the next

day will bring; for mothers to be assured that their children will return home without fear of suffering killing, arrest or humiliation; for students to be able to go to their schools and universities without checkpoints obstructing them . . . for sick people to be able to reach hospitals normally, and for our farmers to be able to take care of their good land without fear of the occupation seizing the land and its water, which the wall prevents access to, or fear of the settlers, for whom settlements are being built on our land and who are uprooting and burning the olive trees that have existed for hundreds of years. The time has come for the thousands of prisoners to be released from the prisons to return to their families and their children to become a part of building their homeland, for the freedom of which they have sacrificed.

. . .

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We profoundly appreciate and value the positions of all States that have supported our struggle and our rights and recognized the State of Palestine following the Declaration of Independence in 1988, as well as the countries that have recently recognized the State of Palestine and those that have upgraded the level of Palestine's representation in their capitals. I also salute the Secretary-General, who said a few days ago that the Palestinian State should have been established years ago.

. . .

I would like to inform you that, before delivering this statement, I submitted, in my capacity as the President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, an application for the admission of Palestine on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, as a full member of the United Nations.

I call upon Mr. Secretary-General to expedite transmittal of our request to the Security Council, and I call upon

the distinguished members of the Security Council to vote in favor of our full membership. I also call upon the States that did not recognize the State of Palestine as yet to do so.

. . .

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your support for the establishment of the State of Palestine and for its admission to the United Nations as a full member is the greatest contribution to peacemaking in the Holy Land.

I thank you.