

*Permanent Observer Mission  
of Palestine  
to the United Nations*



البعثة الرقبة الدائمة  
لفلسطين  
لدى الأمم المتحدة

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*Statement by*

*H.E. Dr. Salam Fayyad  
Prime Minister  
of the Palestinian National Authority*

*before*

*the High-Level Meeting of  
the United Nations General Assembly*

*on*

*the Dialogue of Religions and Cultures,  
under agenda item 45: "Culture of peace"*

*New York  
12 November 2008*



Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express our deep appreciation to you for convening this important meeting. We are pleased and honored to see you presiding over the work of the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly, and we are confident that, through your able and wise leadership, the Assembly's work during this session will be crowned with success. I also wish to express our profound appreciation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, for his noble, laudable efforts to promote the culture of tolerance and understanding among religions and to launch a global initiative to promote a dialogue between religions and cultures.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come to you from the land of divine messages to mankind. I come to you from the land of Palestine, where tolerance has been rooted in the history of the Palestinian Arab people. In the footsteps of the Prophets that walked this blessed land and on the basis of total faithfulness to the spiritual, civilization, and cultural heritage of Palestine that has embraced tolerance and coexistence among the religions over the centuries, the Palestinian Arab people - Muslims and Christians - have preserved the culture of tolerance and coexistence despite the historical injustice that has been imposed upon them for over sixty years, and they have prayed with every prayer call from every mosque, church, and temple a hymn of compassion and peace.

I come to you from Jerusalem and Bethlehem, cities of peace and love, which have embraced coexistence throughout the ages, and whose people suffer today from the pains of isolation and the cruelty of siege, walls, discrimination as well as destruction of their homes and even confiscation of cemetery lands. They look to you to bring an end to the chains of occupation and injustice, which have brought nothing but hatred, fear, and intolerance to our land.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our world is still suffering from all forms of religious extremism and racial discrimination and foreign occupation, which are the causes of the hatred, extremism and intolerance that are contrary to the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, which calls for exertion of joint efforts to strengthen international relations, and to provide capacities for building an exemplary human society. This requires the expansion and deepening of the dialogue and affirmation of it as a civilized means for cooperation,



security, peace and well-being of peoples. Despite the passage of more than sixty-three years since adoption of the Charter, which calls for tolerance, coexistence and peace on this earth, many peoples throughout the world continue to suffer from the pains of irrational and irresponsible practices and policies, which are governed by a sense of the arrogance of power, and racial, religious or ethnic superiority. On the other hand, the forces of good have always challenged those calling for extremism, confrontation and superiority. They have succeeded in many cases in confronting these abhorrent phenomena and have contributed to the success of the model of coexistence, thus helping in the maintenance of international peace and security and promoting the building and development of friendly relations among nations and peoples, based on respect for the principle of equal rights of peoples, including their right to self-determination.

Herein is the importance of this noble initiative for dialogue among religions and for religious tolerance as called for by the mosaic of human diversity and necessitated by the heritage of the human experience, which has proven that the civilizations of nations and peoples did not arise in human history without having interacted with other civilizations. This is what has enabled humanity to formulate the common values of coexistence, which call for freedom and equality among all human beings, regardless of their race, religion or culture, and for the establishment of justice and peace in the world. Indeed, tolerance and coexistence between religions is a requirement necessitated by human life and coexistence between human beings on this planet.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to preserve this noble human requirement, which all religions without exception have called for, we must promote and deepen dialogue aimed at achieving peace between human beings and avoid conflicts, suppress all acts of aggression and arrogance, ensure respect for the distinctions and differences among religions, cultures and civilizations of peoples, and encourage the quest for positive interaction between civilizations, cultures and religions. It is incumbent on all Member States, collectively and individually, under the aegis of the United Nations, to work hard to uphold mutual respect between religions, to maintain the right to religious belief and human dignity, and to consolidate full equality of rights through promotion of a culture of tolerance and understanding.

The only means to achieve success in this regard is by means of dialogue as a framework for international relations and by addressing the root causes that fuel intolerance and extremism in all forms. We must also work to raise communities based on real religious tolerance and non-discrimination on the basis of religion, race, color, or gender and we must respond decisively to the phenomenon of defamation of religions and their symbols and those who claim the inevitability of a clash of civilizations. In addition, there must be a cessation of defamation and stereotypical caricatures of peoples, which are promoted by some media. In this context, we emphasize the importance of the Mecca Appeal issued by the World Islamic Conference for Dialogue, held in June 2008



under the auspices of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and the Madrid Declaration of the World Conference on Dialogue of July of this year.

The international community is faced with overall responsibility and is challenged to respond firmly to all the abhorrent phenomena undermining coexistence and to formulate policies that ensure compliance with covenants and treaties that make this dark side of human history part of the painful past, rather than its continuation as a threat to our present and future. There can be no choice but to succeed in the face of these abominable phenomena and their promoters and put an end to such phenomena, because the consequences of failure would be catastrophic for the future of our children and for all mankind.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we speak about religious tolerance, we must speak about the City of Jerusalem, the City of peace, the land of prophets, the first of the two Qiblas, and the third holiest shrine of Islam, the place of the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the place of resurrection of Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him). The Holy City has suffered from occupation for over forty-one years during which the City has been subjected to a serious of practices and violations aimed in essence at altering the character and status of the Holy City, harassment of its Palestinian inhabitants, Muslims and Christians, to force them to leave and abandon the City, and the imposition of facts on the ground which threatens the prospects of achieving an agreement on the final status of the Holy City.

The United Nations Security Council and General Assembly and other organs have adopted numerous resolutions in this regard, all of which affirm that any measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied City of Jerusalem are illegal, null and void and has no validity whatsoever. These resolutions have also called for the cessation of all violations of the sanctity of the City. Regrettably, however, none of these resolutions have been respected or implemented. We must therefore stress on this occasion that any situation where Holy Places are being violated or where one group or religion attempts to impose control, regardless of the pretext, is unacceptable. Continued silence about such a wrongful situation threatens the foundations of religious tolerance and serves only to escalate the conflict and create more intolerance and hatred.

This makes it imperative for the international community to give Jerusalem and its inhabitants the protection and support they deserve, to address all illegal practices that contravene the principles of justice and rules of international law, and to provide protection for the city and its unique spiritual, religious and cultural status as envisaged in the relevant U.N. resolutions on this issue. This will undoubtedly ease tensions, fears and



hatred, and enhance dialogue towards achievement of the desired goals of freedom, peace and tolerance.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is nothing that has been said from this rostrum or in any forum about Jerusalem that might change the historical fact that East Jerusalem is a Palestinian Territory occupied since 5 June 1967 or that contradicts the necessity of applying relevant resolutions of international legitimacy in connection with Israeli withdrawal from the City as well as the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The choice of the Palestinian people, as affirmed and detailed in the Palestinian peace initiative of 1988, is that East Jerusalem is the capital of the future independent Palestinian State. The Palestinian people look to the international community to provide urgent and effective assistance to end the occupation to enable them to exercise their legitimate rights, at the forefront of which is the right to establish their independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital on the borders of 1967. This will pave the way for ending intolerance, hatred and racism and is the key to peace, security and stability throughout the region.

Such an achievement will ensure the freedom of all peoples from all religions and nationalities to reach the holy places permanently. This is what the Palestinian people, Muslims and Christians, have been accustomed to throughout history and they look forward to its continuation for all believers of all the monotheistic religions. This is what they are committed to in the Declaration of Independence of 1988 as well as in the constitutional principles governing the work of the Palestinian National Authority. Today, we renew before you this commitment.

The walls of the old city in East Jerusalem encompass the minarets of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the bells of the Church of Nativity and these, along with every stone, rock and corner in its streets and quarters represents the summation of its enormous capacity for coexistence among civilizations and cultures and a source of hope for its inhabitants to end the chains of occupation. Do not let this hope, amid the pleas of Um Kamel Al-Kurd to restore her home which was confiscated by the settlers, or the hope of all mothers in the Holy City to diminish. This is the responsibility of all of us.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

If the suffering of the Palestinian people - from their displacement and living in exile, confiscation of land and water resources, and the unprecedented escalation of settlement activities and the subjugation to settlers' terrorism and imposition of a severe siege, particularly on the Gaza Strip, where the freedom of more than 1.5 million people - continues unabated, it would jeopardize international efforts to establish peace on the basis of the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, which received international



consensus and the economic, political and moral investment of the international community. This requires an intervention to ensure that all the parties implement United Nations resolutions and adhere to the principles and foundations of justice and provisions of international law. I am sure that you understand the results and repercussions of not doing so, not only on the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, but on the whole region and on international peace and security. You also understand on the other hand what the Arab Peace Initiative provides of broad prospects to end the conflict in our region and to achieve security and harmony.

This matter should prompt us all to intensify efforts and our serious commitment to the settlement of this decades-long conflict, and to put an end to the longest occupation in modern times and to enable the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital on the basis of the 1967 borders. This would pave the way for real possibilities for cooperation and coexistence, would consolidate the principles of tolerance and close this tragic chapter and enable our people to build their own future and actively contribute to the progress and prosperity of mankind.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When Palestine spoke for the first time from this rostrum, the late President Yasser Arafat raised the olive branch, a symbol of peace in the land of peace, which is deeply rooted in our land as a symbol of coexistence and tolerance. We reaffirm his message today as we reaffirmed in our Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine, which we will commemorate two days later from now and which was drafted by the late great poet Mahmoud Darwish, the poet of Palestine and humanity, whose body was embraced by the soil of Palestine as he was bid farewell by the old and young people of Palestine as a symbol of our national culture.

The people of Palestine, Muslims and Christians, aspire to peace and justice and are committed to the principles of peaceful coexistence. We will continue to work with utmost responsibility and within our maximum capabilities with all nations and peoples to achieve a lasting peace based on justice and respect for all rights; a peace under which the potential of mankind will flourish to build and to achieve well-being and prosperity and where competition will exist towards the creativity of life and there will be no fear of tomorrow, because we believe that tomorrow will not bring but safety for those who did justice or reverted to justice.

In conclusion, I assure you that we will continue to exert all efforts so that we can move from being a victim of history to a participant in its making, for the benefit of mankind and for the broad prospects of humanity. We are confident that you will assist us.

Thank you all.