

**Statement by Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations at the High-level Segment of the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16), New York , Friday 16 May 2008**

Thank Mr. Chairman

The Palestinian People confront the same challenges the developing world face but they also face unique obstacles and have special needs as a people living under foreign occupation, where they are deprived of control over their resources , commercial activity, land, and other activities vital to economic development .This also directly impacts the Palestinian people's ability to overcome challenges in areas like agriculture, rural development, land development, and the growing threat of desertification .

Mr. Chairman,

Drought and desertification in Palestine are due to scarcity of water, limited land and rapid population growth. But this harsh reality is further exacerbated by illegal actions undertaken by the Israeli occupation, including land confiscation ,which has slashed Palestinian green lands, forests ,and biodiversity from 4.3% in 1998 to below 1.5% in 2004 .This dramatic loss of green lands and biodiversity is also due to the Israeli occupation's continued and methodical building of illegal settlements and the wall . These actions are further supported by a policy that has entailed the uprooting of millions of trees, including 1.5 million olive trees .In other cases, like Gaza ,Israeli [the] occupation's military attacks ,razing of land, and siege on basic commodities like fuel have turned 75% of Palestinian fields in northern Gaza into parched and arid deserts.

The illegal exploitation and degradation of the natural resources of the occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel, the Occupying Power, have also contributed to drought and desertification in Palestine .Here, allow me to remind that the illegal separation Wall in the West Bank will de facto annex approximately 46% of the West Bank's most valuable water resources, including the rich Western Aquifer and at least over 10% of its most fertile land. In fact the occupation power already uses 73 per cent of the water available from Palestinian West bank aquifers, while Palestinians are only allowed to use 17 per cent.

In fact, an important contributing factor is the continued illegal confiscated Palestinian agricultural land for the benefit of a regime of illegal settlements, walls , checkpoints, and roadblocks that form the cornerstones of the occupation. To maintain this colonial regime, Palestinians are banned from access to water, land, and other natural resources while their towns and valleys are turned into dumping grounds for untreated chemical and other hazardous waste. In fact, Israel, the Occupying Power, has reserved 40% of the land in the West Bank to the exclusive use of Israeli settlers, who reside illegally in the Occupied Palestinian Territory .

Across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, thousands of dunams of parched and destroyed Palestinian fields provide painful testament to the occupation's systematic destruction of the Palestinian agriculture as a way of life and an important sector of the local economy. Consequently, thousands of Palestinian families whose livelihoods were destroyed now live in the misery imposed on them by the same destructive

policies that have made of destroying Palestinian agriculture a goal achieved with devastating precision.

And when it comes to contamination, there is no greater source of environmental devastation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ,including East Jerusalem, than the illegal settlements and the approximately 200 factories they host. These factories produce toxins such as lead, Zinc ,aluminum, Cadmium and others, which devastate the land, agriculture, and underground water in the area.

Mr. Chairman

There is a collective international responsibility to protect the right to development for people, in particular the most vulnerable, such as those living under occupation. This must be a global objective whose importance supersedes all political considerations. Consequently, the international community should make it clear that in our efforts to protect the right to development, we will not accept to abandon the peoples under occupation suffering or give the false impression that inexcusable and illegal actions by foreign occupation powers are condoned.

For this reason, we are confident that the CSD will not shy away from addressing the special needs of peoples living under occupation out of fear of being accused of politicization, which I must stress is nothing more than a pretext to obstruct defending the occupied peoples' right to development. Like all other peoples, they too deserve to live a decent and dignified life that enables them to achieve their development goals by creating an enabling domestic environment; an environment free from the punitive restrictions and oppression of military occupation – one where the ability to progress does not hinge on the permission of the occupier but rather depends on the actual work and energy spent to achieve these goals.

Thank you Mr. Chairman