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Statement by H.E. Ambassador Somaia Barghouti, Senior Adviser, before the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-fifth Session, 28 February 2011: (Please Check Against Delivery)

My delegation is honored to address this Commission and would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chair, and the other members of the Bureau on your election; we pledge our full support and cooperation.

Before proceeding with our statement, my delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General (SG) for his report on the situation and assistance to Palestinian women and stress the importance we place on this report. Having said that, we regret having to repeat our deep concern regarding the continued distortion of the context of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which is unequivocally one of foreign occupation; the root cause of this conflict. It is a situation that unquestionably impacts all aspects of the situation on the ground and of the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian population under occupation. This trend of distorting and/or omitting the real facts on the ground in reports by the United Nations, including those of the Secretary-General to the CSW such as the one before us, must be rectified in future reports.

Mr. Chairman,

The role of Palestinian women, their advancement and empowerment have been influenced, and to a certain extent, determined in the most negative way, by 43 years of military occupation. It is without a doubt that Palestinian women have borne the brunt of Israel's illegal policies and practices that have gravely affected their political, economic and social development. Day in and day out, we continue to witness unbearable human suffering and flagrant human rights violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population, which have had severe implications not only on the advancement and empowerment of Palestinian women, but their well-being and even their survival. Their right to life, to return to their homes and property, to food, to livelihood, to housing, to education, to health, to development and to freedom of movement, just to name a few, have all been consistently and systematically infringed by the occupying Power in gross violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Chairman,

The situation in the besieged Gaza Strip remains critical and tragic. For more than three years, Israel, the occupying Power, has collectively punished, imprisoned and deprived more than 1.5 million Palestinians living in Gaza of their basic human rights. Mass unemployment, extreme poverty, displacement food insecurity and the skyrocket increase in food prices caused by shortages have left four in five Palestinians in Gaza dependent on humanitarian aid. To compound the already grave situation, more than two years have passed since the December 2008 Israeli military aggression in the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian people are still being prevented from reconstructing and rehabilitating their communities and lives. The debilitating effects of that military aggression and the blockade continue to impair the socio-economic and humanitarian conditions and to cause serious psychological trauma among the Palestinian civilian population, in particular women and children. We continue to call for the illegal blockade to be lifted and call for accountability for the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces and for justice to be reached for the victims.

At the same time, in the occupied West Bank, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction of settlements and so-called outposts, the transfer of more settlers, home demolitions and evictions, the construction of the Wall, the imposition of hundreds of checkpoints and other colonization measures have not ceased for a single moment, and in fact have intensified, especially in Occupied East Jerusalem. The cumulative impact of this illegal Israeli policy on the contiguity, integrity, unity and viability of the Palestinian territory has been destructive. Moreover, it has had an equally devastating impact on the drive for the peace that the entire Palestinian population yearns for and poses the most serious threat to the prospect of achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

Mr. Chairman,

The formidable and daunting challenges posed by the Israeli occupation and all of its illegal and brutal policies continue to make the achievement of tangible results towards the advancement of Palestinian women improbable, if not impossible to realize. However, with great resilience and determination Palestinian women are making every effort to overcome all the obstacles placed before them.

At the national level, Palestinian women continue to strive to reach the goal of national liberation and social emancipation by integrating human rights, equality and empowerment in national policies, development framework and laws. Also, they believe the necessity of improving the technical and organizational capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and civil society organizations in order to institutionalize gender equality and empowerment. There are also many projects to combat violence against women through the "Empowerment of Community-Based Organizations" and others, which aim at elimination of gender-based violence in Palestinian society within the framework of Security Council resolution 1325. Furthermore, the issue of full equality between women and men has been set as a top priority in the state-building plan launched by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in August 2009 entitled, "Ending the Occupation,

Establishing the State.” PM Fayyad has called and stressed for the equal involvement and participation of women in achieving this internationally backed initiative.

Mr. Chairman,

It cannot be overemphasized the importance of increased assistance and support to Palestinian women by the international community and the United Nations, including the Commission on Status of Women and UN Women, especially at this critical time. We call on all men and women worldwide to march hand in hand with the Palestinian people to demand an end to Israel’s occupation in order to allow for the true advancement and empowerment of Palestinian women to occur in their independent, free and democratic State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.