

22 July 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the International Meeting on the Question of Palestine**

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address the participants of the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, and would like to particularly recognize the continuing and important work of the General Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights in organizing and hosting this meeting.

The theme of today's meeting is "the responsibility of the international community to uphold international humanitarian law, and to ensure the protection of civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in the wake of the Gaza war." But I would remind all of us that in many ways, for the 1.5 million Palestinian civilians who live there, the Gaza war has not ended. In the midst of Israel's 22-day assault against Gaza that ended on 19 January 2009, the General Assembly passed Resolution ES-10/18 that called not only for an immediate ceasefire but specifically called upon "all Member States to urgently extend the necessary support to international and regional efforts aimed at alleviating the critical humanitarian and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, and emphasizes in this regard the need to ensure the sustained opening of border crossings for the free movement of persons and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip."

Your meeting convenes today, more than six months later. And yet the blockade continues. And, I am sorry to say, our Organization and the Member States of the United Nations, despite our now six-month-old commitment to "ensure the sustained opening of border crossings for the free movement of persons and goods," stand silent. The United Nations' obligations under the Charter and UN resolutions, as well as under international humanitarian law, remain unfulfilled.

There is no "free movement" out of Gaza for patients, students, or children and parents eager seeking care, opportunity or to rejoin families. Building materials, basic foods and other goods are routinely denied entry into Gaza. A host of recent reports from the United Nations and other inter-governmental organizations, as well as from Amnesty International and numerous Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations attest to the still dire conditions on the ground. While perhaps a hundred truckloads of humanitarian goods enter Gaza from Israel each day, UNRWA officials on the ground reported immediately after the ceasefire in Gaza, 'that just 18 months ago, 600 trucks were coming in every day, and there was still a humanitarian emergency in Gaza.'

With governments and the United Nations standing mute, unwilling or unable to provide assistance or protection to the people of Gaza, international civil society has taken the lead. Ships carrying humanitarian aid and human rights activists, accompanied by Nobel peace laureates, parliamentarians

and journalists representing people around the world, are stopped in international seas, far outside Israeli territorial waters, by the naval forces of the Occupying Power, the ships taken forcibly to Israel and their passengers accused of illegal entry. The humanitarian goods are taken into custody. Convoys of trucks driven by ordinary people from a host of countries, all committed to human rights, laden with humanitarian supplies are now making their way by land across Egypt, to bring relief and solidarity to the people of Gaza.

We in the United Nations would do well to follow their example in bringing international pressure to bear on the Occupying Power to abide by the requirements of international law, particularly that of the 4th Geneva Convention. Those means are taking shape in the global call for boycott, divestment and sanctions to bring about an end to the violations of international humanitarian law.

We should note that we in the United Nations have our own history of finding non-violent means of pressing for an end to such violations. More than a quarter of a century ago, on April 28, 1982, the General Assembly meeting in Emergency Session passed resolution ES 7/4, which, in Article 9(b) urges all governments “to renounce the policy of providing Israel with military, economic and political assistance, thus discouraging Israel from continuing its aggression, occupation and disregard of its obligations under the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.”

The resolution also (in Article 8) “condemns all policies which frustrate the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, in particular providing Israel with military, economic and political assistance and the misuse of the veto by a permanent member of the Security Council, thus enabling Israel to continue its aggression, occupation and unwillingness to carry out its obligations under the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.” And while that obligation of Member States remains largely unmet, I would like to point out the important example of the decision by the Government of the United Kingdom earlier this month, to cancel five contracts involving arms sales to the Israeli military in response to actions taken in Gaza during the assault of December-January earlier this year. The Wall Street Journal quoted Foreign Minister David Miliband’s acknowledgement that the contracts involved spare parts for a warship that shelled Gaza during the war, and reported that U.K. and European Union statutes forbid exported weapons “to be used for internal repression or external aggression.”

During the Gaza crisis I reminded all Member States of the United Nations that “the UN continues to be bound to an independent obligation to protect any civilian population facing massive violations of international humanitarian law – regardless of what country may be responsible for those violations.”

That reminder holds true today. It is the reason that your conference here in Geneva is so important. As talk of the “responsibility to protect” circulates throughout the United Nations system, we must keep in mind that that responsibility, if it is to be accepted and respected throughout the world and not only in the capitals of the most powerful, must be used on behalf of all who are in need of protection. The work of this Conference, and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in the General Assembly, provides us with one more venue in which to take up that collective responsibility.

I commend you, once again, for your efforts and wish you all a most productive meeting.

Thank you.