

23 November 2015

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Question of Palestine and the Situation in the Middle East**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we meet today amidst a Middle East in turmoil.

Conflicts in Syria and Yemen; a major refugee crisis and violent extremism, are combining to create growing instability across the region.

In this context, the Question of Palestine takes on even greater significance.

Let me therefore reaffirm the General Assembly's resolute position that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until that question is resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international law.

Earlier today, I attended the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

That event was organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People which was established over forty years ago.

It was established because by then no progress had been made on key United Nations principles – on the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war; on equal rights and on self-determination of peoples.

Regrettably, these principles continue to be violated to this very day.

This reality is reflected by the fact that we have witnessed a new wave of violence across the occupied Palestinian territory in recent months.

The latest escalation in violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank is particularly concerning.

I call for all involved to bring an end to the violence and for strict compliance with international law.

I would also like to stress the importance of upholding the historic status quo at the Holy Sites, including the Haram Al-Sharif.

In the end, the Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a responsibility to avoid inflammatory actions, prevent escalation and defuse tensions.

The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.

The demolition of Palestinian houses and the construction of new settlements on occupied Palestinian land will not contribute to peace.

On the contrary, they will only increase tensions and become a further impediment to peace.

In the Middle East, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, serves as a pillar of stability for some 5 million Palestine refugees.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that UNRWA's core programmes foreseen in that mandate – education, health, relief and social services – are delivered in the most efficient manner.

Thanks to the support of the donors and hosts, UNRWA has made tremendous progress in enhancing the human capital of Palestine refugees.

It have also helped ensure the protection of the Palestine refugee community.

In addition, it has been called upon to manage crises of varying intensity in all five fields of operation. It is a very challenging agenda.

The General Assembly is the UN body from where UNRWA's mandate originates.

I therefore see it as my responsibility to ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that UNRWA's mandate is carried out, until a political settlement between Israel and Palestine is reached.

Excellencies, on 30 September 2015, we raised the flag of the State of Palestine at the UN Headquarters in New York.

It was a symbolic acknowledgement of the contribution of the Palestinian people to addressing our common challenges.

But it was also a reminder of the urgent need for a peaceful settlement on the ground.

I call on the international community, therefore, to help both parties to return to meaningful negotiations.

We must open the way to fulfil the vision of an independent, sovereign, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security with Israel, within mutually recognized borders based on the pre-1967 lines.

On this Organization's momentous 70th anniversary, let us therefore recall the ideals of peace, unity and human rights.

And let us use those ideals to inspire new momentum to find a lasting solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Thank you.