

29 November 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Plenary Meeting:
Question of Palestine and the Situation in the Middle East**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I address my remarks today on the Question of Palestine, and the Situation in the Middle East.

Today's meeting takes place at a time when the Middle East region is being rocked by instability.

Brutal conflicts in Syria and Yemen, a refugee crisis that is flooding neighboring countries, the virulent spread of extremism and terrorism, and the ongoing construction of settlements on Palestinian territory, are combining to create a highly combustible situation across the region.

For many, the prospects for peace and security feel desperately out of reach.

We are all gravely concerned about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situations in many parts of the Middle East. I call on parties to make genuine efforts to find peaceful solutions and to cooperate closely with UN and humanitarian agencies to enable them to deliver urgently needed humanitarian, food, and medical assistance.

The occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 continues to violate key United Nations principles, including those relating to territorial integrity, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, equal rights, and self-determination of peoples.

It is a situation that has reverberations around the region. As this Assembly has said, achieving a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the attainment of comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

The ongoing role of the United Nations in the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine is clear, with the General Assembly repeatedly affirming that the UN has 'permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects and in accordance with international law'.

To this end, I call for all involved to urgently take concrete steps to bring an end to the violence, to comply strictly with international law, to restore political trust, to build a climate for peace, and to resume meaningful negotiations.

This includes by all leaders refraining from provocative actions, incitement, and inflammatory rhetoric, which is incompatible with advancing a negotiated two-state solution, and only serves to perpetuate the cycle of violence and conflict.

It includes by freezing the building of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory, which the General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed to be illegal and to have a detrimental impact on efforts to resume and advance the peace process.

It includes by respecting the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif, in both words and practice.

And it includes all parties taking confidence-building measures aimed at improving the situation on the ground, promoting stability, building trust and fostering the peace process.

To this end, I would like to acknowledge the work being undertaken by civil society to promote a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

Despite setbacks over the years, I remain hopeful that renewed international efforts can help to pave the way to realizing the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, security and prosperity within recognized borders, based on pre-1967 lines.

Excellencies, I would like to take the opportunity of today's debate to acknowledge the vital work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

For over 65 years, UNRWA has played a critical role in supporting the welfare and development of some 5 million Palestinian refugees. This includes through education, health, relief and social services, support for camp infrastructure, provision of microfinance and emergency assistance, and efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls.

The generational impacts of UNRWA's work to support Palestinian refugees cannot be overstated, and I sincerely thank UNRWA's donors and hosts for their support. This support, including the responses to UNRWA's emergency appeals, have helped to provide education and opportunity for Palestinian youth, and to counter potential radicalization that has affected so many other populations with high levels of youth unemployment.

UNRWA's mandate originates from the General Assembly, and it is therefore to you that I turn to express my deep concern at the serious funding gap that has emerged and which is threatening UNRWA's ability to continue its work of providing relief to Palestine refugees.

I urge all Member States to respond generously and expeditiously to UNRWA's efforts to fill its \$74 million funding gap, and to ensure that it has sufficient funds to be able to carry out its activities in an effective and predictable manner.

Excellencies,

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be long-standing, and the situation in the Middle East may be complex, but we – the international community – must never let this discourage us, or undermine our commitment to finding a just, lasting and sustainable peace.

So long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues, it poses a threat to international peace and security.

And so long as it continues, the lives of millions of Palestine people, refugees, and others across the region will be negatively impacted by unrest and instability.

I therefore urge all parties and stakeholders to be courageous and committed in their efforts to find a lasting, peaceful political solution to bring this conflict to an end.

I thank you.