



PERMANENT
OBSERVER MISSION OF
PALESTINE
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

115 EAST 65TH ST.
NEW YORK NY 10021

TEL 212 288 8500
FAX 212 517 2377



*Statement by Mr. Yussef Kanaan, Senior Adviser of the Permanent Observer
Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, Committee on Information, 7 May
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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me at the outset to extend Palestine's sincere congratulations on your assumption of the Chair of this Committee as well as to the distinguished members of the Bureau, affirming our full confidence in your ability to efficiently steer the work of the Committee. We also express our appreciation to the UN Secretary-General for his reports on the activities of the Department of Public Information and to the Committee for its comprehensive report and valuable efforts in this regard. We extend as well our thanks and appreciation to Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information for his outstanding leadership of the Department and his important and detailed statement at the outset. We also commend all DPI staff and officers for their valuable efforts in carrying out their tasks. My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished delegate of the Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation underlines the importance of the DPI Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, stressing in this regard the historical and permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects, in accordance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The latest resolution regarding the Programme is resolution 63/28, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority, reflecting the broad international support for this Programme and its importance in raising and promoting the international community's awareness of the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East, issues of high priority on the UN agenda. The Programme is instrumental as well in contributing to the creation of an environment conducive to dialogue and understanding and supportive of the peace process to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination and establish their independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

P R E S S R E L E A S E

We express our deep appreciation to the Member States of United Nations for their support of this Programme. We highly value the work of the DPI in this regard, especially the Section of Palestine which plays an important and vital role, including in the organization of the annual international media seminars on the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East. We look forward to the upcoming seminar to be held in Rio de Janeiro on 27-28 July 2009, and in this regard we extend our thanks and appreciation to the Government of Brazil for hosting this seminar.

We also reaffirm the importance of the DPI's work, especially the Section on Palestine, to develop the archives of films and videotape documentaries on the history of the Palestine question. The "digitalization" of such important historical and documentary materials will allow researchers, educational institutions and others to benefit from such information. We thus express our hope that the DPI will continue to give this matter special attention.

My delegation attaches much importance to DPI's continued provision of assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development through the annual training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists from the Occupied Palestinian Territory aimed at developing their media capacity and skills. Participation in this programme is of particular importance despite the obstacles imposed by the Israeli occupying forces through the severe restrictions placed on the Palestinians and the harsh siege imposed on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially on the Gaza Strip. Regrettably, at a time when all speak of the importance of the role of media in promoting dialogue between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, Israel continues with its illegal and inhumane practices and actions against the Palestinian people, obstructing daily life and innumerable opportunities for the Palestinian people to develop and progress, including via such important training programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

Freedom of the press is not just about access and travel restrictions. It is also necessarily about the journalist's ability to work free from the threat of death and/or detention. Despite the fact that international humanitarian law provides protection for journalists and media installations even during military operations, the Israeli occupying forces have continued to target journalists working tirelessly to convey the grim daily reality and truth about illegal Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. This was especially evident during Israel's ruthless military aggression on the Gaza Strip, where Israeli forces purposely targeted Palestinian journalists, killing five and injuring several others, like Basel Faraj, a cameraman with the Algerian Television, who passed away on 7 January 2009 due to injuries sustained on 27 December 2008, when Israel launched its barbaric war against the Palestinian

people in the Gaza Strip. Also, Ehab Al-Wahidi, a cameraman for the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, was killed on 8 January 2009 with his wife and mother-in-law when Israeli occupying forces shelled their home in Gaza City. We must also not forget 23-year old Palestinian Journalist Fadl Shanaa, who worked for Reuters News Agency and was deliberately killed by the Israeli occupying forces in April 2008. Four months later, the Israeli occupation authorities closed an investigation into the killing of Shanaa without taking disciplinary action against the tank crew that killed him.

Israel also banned foreign journalists from entering the Gaza Strip throughout the entire period of the recent military aggression. In this connection, on 9 January 2009, Aidan White, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), said in a press release that "The media crisis in Gaza has become intolerable. The systematic manipulation and control of media trying to report on Gaza and the casualties being sustained inside the territory require a concerted response from the world's media."

In addition to those killed, Israel, the occupying Power, on more than one occasion, has exposed its abject disregard for the lives and safety of Palestinian journalists during the war, targeting media buildings, newspapers, and radio stations. In the interest of time, I will only mention a few examples. On 9 January 2009, Israeli drones fired two missiles at a rooftop clearly marked with TV signs as several journalists were reporting live, injuring one reporter. Three days before that, two journalists were injured in another clearly marked media building as their office was directly targeted by Israeli artillery. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has condemned these attacks. It should be noted that unless Palestinian journalists work with international media organizations, they do not have access to the protective gear they need to wear while covering a conflict zone like Gaza.

Israeli violations were not limited to the Gaza Strip. Israeli occupying forces also targeted Palestinian journalists in the West Bank, including in Occupied East Jerusalem. Scores of Palestinian journalists have been injured by rubber-coated steel bullets and were treated for tear gas inhalation across the West Bank. Scores of others were banned from reaching Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank, isolated by Israel's illegal annexation Wall.

Detention is another threat facing Palestinian journalists. For example, two Palestinian journalists were detained and placed under house arrest in Occupied East Jerusalem for allegedly breaking the military censorship rules during the war on Gaza. Last month in Occupied East Jerusalem, Israeli occupying forces detained Mahmoud Abu Atta, media coordinator of Al-Aqsa Foundation, for documenting the incursion of illegal Israeli settlers into Al-Aqsa compound. Journalist Diyala Jwaihan, correspondent of Quds Net News Agency was also

detained on 14 April 2009 for hours for photographing the illegal Israeli settlers in the compound. She was banned from entering Al-Aqsa compound for 15 days. In this regard, we would like to highlight the irony in Israel's false claim of democracy as it is the only self-professed democracy that openly and officially practices censorship to hide the illegal actions it systematically perpetrates against the people it occupies.

We would like to take this opportunity to call on this Committee and relevant international organizations to step up their efforts to protect Palestinian journalists and ensure that they and their international colleagues can work without Israel's repressive limitations of censorship and employment of military force. Israel should be held accountable for all the war crimes it commits against the Palestinian people, including journalists and media personnel. We also wish to commend all organizations that have worked and continue to work to help Palestinian journalists in coping with these difficult circumstances by way of training, provision of protective gear and first aid kits, or documenting and exposing the grave violations to their rights at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces.

Mr. Chairman,

The Palestinian people have suffered and are still suffering from their continued deprivation to catch up with technological development and advances because of the nearly 42-year Israeli occupation, which covers land and air, and continues to control the frequency spectrum of Palestine imposing countless impediments to growth and development of this sector, thus depriving our people of the right of direct access to telecommunications services and information technology. Achieving development and advancing on the path of knowledge cannot be realized without an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. With this, a lasting, just and comprehensive peace can be achieved, a peace that guarantees for all peoples in the region security and stability and the opportunities to develop and prosper in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.