

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

The two-State solution: a key prerequisite for achieving peace and stability in the Middle East

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PLENARY II International efforts to achieve the two-State solution

Paper presented by

Mr. Gilbert Roger
Senator, Socialist Party of France
Vice-President, Foreign Affairs Committee
President, France-Palestine Amity Group
Paris

Reviving the State-building agenda,
promoting diplomatic recognition of the State of Palestine,
prioritizing the rule of law

Mr President,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Honourable Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 11th December 2014, the French Senate adopted by 153 votes against 146, the motion for a resolution calling on the French Government to recognize the State of Palestine, of which I am the first signatory. On 2nd December, the French National Assembly also adopted a similar draft resolution. It was after an article was published in the newspaper *Le Monde* on 21st October 2014, in which I launched an appeal to the French government to recognize the State of Palestine, that French parliamentary initiatives from various left-wing political groups began to emerge. I would like to welcome the historic adoption of these two texts by both Houses of the French Parliament.

Indeed, France is a founding country of the European Union, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and a friend of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Its voice, therefore, has weight on the international scene, and was expected to be heard on the matter. France is strong when it represents a public interest greater than itself. It already proved this in 2011 by voting in favour of Palestine becoming a full Member of UNESCO, then by approving Palestine as a UN non-member State in November 2012. From the French Revolution to de Gaulle and Mitterrand, each time France has carried the aspirations of those who struggled to make a difference, it has always had a greater influence, compared to its actual weight. This is what makes us a special country and a great nation.

Twenty years ago, Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat received the Nobel Peace Prize for the Oslo Agreements, which, a year after they had been signed, still seemed to promise a peaceful coexistence between the Israeli and Palestinian States. This dream, destroyed by broken promises on both sides, will never see the light of day if nothing is done to bring the conflicting parties together.

The resolutions now adopted by both Houses of the French Parliament are a first step towards establishing an equal relationship between Israel and Palestine and make the recognition of the State of Palestine a prerequisite for genuine negotiations, which are very much desired by the French Government.

They reinforce recent initiatives by some Member States of the European Union, such as Sweden, which has recognized the State of Palestine, but also the British and Spanish Parliaments, which have called for this recognition. These political steps undertaken in Europe have occurred at a time when the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has evidently been

at a standstill. The long and intense negotiations, in which the United States were heavily involved, failed in the spring of 2014, and were followed last summer by the deadly conflict in Gaza, killing 2,160 people on the Palestinian side, 83% of which were civilians. The failure of diplomacy has once again pushed back the prospect for a final settlement of the conflict, giving way to military compromise and other reconstruction conferences. Once again, and once too many.

The European initiatives for the recognition of the Palestinian State led the European Parliament to support in "principle" the recognition of the Palestinian State and the two-state solution, through a resolution developed by five political groups and adopted by 498 votes against 88 on 17th December 2014. The Parliament also decided to launch an initiative called "Parliamentarians for Peace" aimed at bringing together European, Israeli and Palestinian Parliamentarians to advance the prospects of peace. I obviously support this initiative. Indeed, I wish to remind us all that Europe has a diplomatic role to play in the area, as the main aid contributor to the Palestinian territories. France must regain the diplomatic initiative and lead its Quartet partners – the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations – towards a new dynamic.

The Palestinian Authority, meanwhile, carries on with its own diplomatic initiatives. It secured a vote in the UN Security Council on 30th December for a resolution demanding an end to Israeli occupation in the West Bank by the end of 2017. The draft, which provided for negotiations on Palestine's final status within the next twelve months, received only eight votes out of fifteen, when nine would have been needed for it to be adopted. Only two countries, the United States and Australia, voted against. Five members, including the United Kingdom, abstained. France distinguished itself by voting for this resolution.

On 31st December 2014, Mahmoud Abbas also signed an application for membership to the Rome Statute, which opens the possibility to take legal action against Israeli officials for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. This application to join the International Criminal Court was formally presented to the United Nations on 2nd January. The Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, approved the request on January 7; Palestine effectively became a Member on 1st April.

For the international community, recognizing the State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, living side by side in peace and security, means conforming to international law. In the name of the inalienable right to self-determination, the Palestinian people is entitled to adopt a State, which must be established according to standards approved by the international community, and which presided over the creation of the State of Israel. This recognition would also secure the existence of the State of Palestine, which today is very seriously threatened by the continuation and escalation of Israeli settlement.

We must remember that to invoke the right to self-determination is not contrary to negotiations. Palestine cannot continue to be the exception to international standards. However, Palestinian leaders must not evade the difficult choices that both parties have to make, and negotiations will be needed to govern relations between Israel and Palestine. Negotiations will have to address all aspects of the final status, especially refugees, Jerusalem, settlements and borders.

The recognition of a Palestinian State by the international community is the only choice that will lead to peace and ensure that both Israelis and Palestinians live in freedom and safety. I do not think that it is too soon for this initiative, since the Palestinian territories have been occupied for 47 years, and the Oslo process has been stalled for 20. I think on the contrary that it is time to act before it is too late. The recognition would be a first step towards the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It would be a message to democrats, whether Palestinian or Israeli, to encourage them in their fight for peace, and let them know that their fight is likely to succeed.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius is currently working on the submission of a draft resolution to the UN Security Council aiming to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within 18 months. France may officially recognize the State of Palestine at the end of this period. Were the draft put to a vote in the UN Security Council, it would call to implement the principle of two States for two peoples. It would require the creation of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The negotiations should also set a plan to ensure the security of Israel and Palestine through effective border controls, in order to prevent the resurgence of terrorism and weapon infiltration. The draft resolution would also address the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, in order to respect the sovereignty of the demilitarized Palestinian State, including by providing for a phased and full withdrawal of the Israeli army within an agreed transition period. Regarding Palestinian refugees, the resolution would demand a fair, balanced and realistic solution based on a compensation system. As for Jerusalem, the draft resolution would emphasize the need to make it the future capital of both future States.

In the event this draft resolution could not be submitted to the UN Security Council due to the United States' opposition, Mr Laurent Fabius has rightly proposed a change in method in the form of an international conference, which would be organized in Paris. A deadline for negotiations would be set alongside the event, which would be supervised by the Arab League, the European Union and the G5, consisting of Germany, the United States, France, Japan and the United Kingdom. This international conference would take the necessary measures to restore confidence between Israel and Palestine, in order to start paving the way towards a negotiated resolution of the conflict based on the two-state solution. These negotiations, which would no longer be under the auspices of the sole United States as in the past, but would be monitored by the Arab League, the European Union and the G5, would help the Palestinian issue out of deadlock on the basis of an all-party consensus.

As a French parliamentarian, and following the vote on the two resolutions calling on the French Government to recognize the State of Palestine, I believe it is time for France to face its responsibilities and to officially recognize the State of Palestine. Each day that goes by without a lasting peace settlement between Israel and Palestine undermines a little further the very possibility of the existence of a viable State of Palestine, since the dogged colonization of the occupied territories is slicing into the land of the alleged future State. Since September 2014, 400 hectares of land in the West Bank have been annexed, 1,000 new housing units in Har Homa and Rant Shlomo have been announced, and several Palestinian homes have been confiscated in Silwan.

Finally, I will closely follow the outcome of the draft resolutions to the UN Security Council as well as the organization of an international conference in Paris, and I will continue to support all those who campaign for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Thank you.
