

**STATEMENT BY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,
MARÍA FERNANDA ESPINOSA**

The International Day of Solidarity with the
Palestinian People
28 November 2018

Your Excellency, Cheikh Niang, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable rights of the Palestinian people,

Your Excellency, Dr. Riyad H. Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations,

Your Excellency, Ma Zhaoxu, Permanent Representative of China and President of the Security Council,

Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for being here.

We mark the **International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People** at a time when the need for such solidarity has never been greater.

I would like to start by thanking the *Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People* for their leadership in organizing this event.

When I consider the concept of ‘solidarity’ I am immediately drawn to the theme of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly: ‘Making the UN Relevant to All’.

I would like to emphasize this point: *relevant to all*. Our solidarity with the Palestinian people must not be rooted just in sympathy. As worthy as that is, the Palestinian people are entitled to more than that. As we seek to respond to the needs of people everywhere, in order not to leave anyone behind, we owe the Palestinian people an obligation to do everything in our power to end their current nightmare.

As we stand with the Palestinian people on this day, we must use this opportunity to fight the desensitization that occurs when suffering and death becomes a daily reality and the media does not even report on them on the back pages.

The state of the Palestinian people remains a scar on our collective conscience and we all have a responsibility to press the urgency of the need for expeditious resolution. I call on world leaders, including religious and other leaders, to make the Palestinian question a priority that deserves utmost attention.

Because it is not enough to say that we stand with people if we do not exercise the political will needed to make the stand count.

Colleagues, I would like to note two areas of concern, and one area of opportunity.

My first concern relates to the **ongoing humanitarian situation** in Palestine.

According to the Office of Humanitarian Affairs, 43 per cent of the Palestinian population are refugees and half of these are below the age of 18.¹

Furthermore, food insecurity, a basic human right and one of the Sustainable Development Goals, afflicts 47 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip.²

Average water consumption, meanwhile, stands at 79 and 66 litres per person in the West bank and Gaza Strip respectively, well below the recommended ration of 100 litres per person per day.³

I could go on.

If we are to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people then we must address these challenges, even as we push for implementation of the two-state solution. We cannot leave an entire people and entire generations to suffer.

This brings me to my second concern, that of **funding and resources for UNRWA**, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

Years of budget cuts have left the agency with a chronic shortfall, restricting their efforts to reach the Palestinian people.

¹ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-facts-and-figures>

² <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-facts-and-figures>

³ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-facts-and-figures>

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those Member States who stepped up and helped fill the gap. The \$122 million that was received has prevented an immediate shut down of key UNRWA services, including areas such as primary education and food security, and this is commendable.

At the same time, this solution is not tenable; a long-term fix to the underfinancing of UNRWA and more support in general to the people of Palestine is necessary.

Which brings me to my final point and call to action.

Colleagues,

We need to accelerate the implementation of the **Sustainable Development Goals** in the Occupied Territories to improve the lives and livelihoods of the Palestinian people.

With sufficient investment, and with support from UNRWA and other UN and multilateral partners, we can help to empower women and girls; expand access to education; create jobs and livelihoods; and ensure access to affordable healthcare.

These efforts not only directly benefit the people themselves; they can reduce exclusion and marginalization and further increase the prospects for the peace process.

Friends,

In the General Debate of the General Assembly in September, world leaders declared their firm support for multilateralism and called for a strong UN. For the Palestinian people, the paralysis of the peace process may be seen as a reflection of the weak state of multilateralism and the delivery capacity of the UN.

The only outlet to the Palestinian question is therefore to honor existing UN resolutions, to reboost dialogue and find a truly lasting political solution.

Let us demonstrate our commitment to the Palestinian people by strengthening multilateralism and making the United Nations work for all people-for human rights, peace and security and sustainable development.

Thank you.