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Statement by

**H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas
President of the State of Palestine
Chairman of the Executive Committee
of the Palestine Liberation Organization
President of the Palestinian National Authority**

**before
United Nations General Assembly
Sixty-sixth Session**

**New York
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Mr. President of the General Assembly of the United Nations,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I extend my congratulations to H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his assumption of the Presidency of the Assembly for this session, and wish him all success.

I extend today my sincere congratulations, on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian people, to the government and people of South Sudan for its deserved admission as a full member of the United Nations, wishing them progress and prosperity.

I also congratulate the Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his election for a new term at the helm of the United Nations. This renewal of confidence reflects the world's appreciation for his efforts, which have strengthened the role of the United Nations.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Question Palestine is intricately linked with the United Nations via the resolutions adopted by its various organs and agencies and via the essential and lauded role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA - which embodies the international responsibility towards the plight of Palestine refugees, who are the victims of *Al-Nakba* (Catastrophe) that occurred in 1948. We aspire for and seek a greater and more effective role for the United Nations in working to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in our region that ensures the inalienable, legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people as defined by the resolutions of international legitimacy of the United Nations.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A year ago, at this same time, distinguished leaders in this hall addressed the stalled peace efforts in our region. Everyone had high hopes for a new round of final status negotiations, which had begun in early September in Washington under the direct auspices of President Barack Obama and with participation of the Quartet, and with Egyptian and Jordanian participation, to reach a peace agreement within one year. We entered those negotiations with open hearts and attentive ears and sincere intentions, and we were ready with our documents, papers and proposals. But the negotiations broke down just weeks after their launch.

After this, we did not give up and did not cease our efforts for initiatives and contacts. Over the past year we did not leave a door to be knocked or channel to be tested or path to be taken and we did not ignore any formal or informal party of influence and stature to be addressed. We positively considered the various ideas and proposals and initiatives presented from many countries and parties. But all of these sincere efforts and endeavors undertaken by international parties were repeatedly wrecked by the positions of the Israeli government, which quickly dashed the hopes raised by the launch of negotiations last September.

The core issue here is that the Israeli government refuses to commit to terms of reference for the negotiations that are based on international law and United Nations resolutions, and that it frantically continues to intensify building of settlements on the territory of the State of Palestine.

Settlement activities embody the core of the policy of colonial military occupation of the land of the Palestinian people and all of the brutality of aggression and racial discrimination against our people that this policy entails. This policy, which constitutes a breach of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, is the primary cause for the failure of the peace process, the collapse of dozens of opportunities, and the burial of the great hopes that arose from the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel to achieve a just peace that would begin a new era for our region.

The reports of United Nations missions as well as by several Israeli institutions and civil societies convey a horrific picture about the size of the settlement campaign, which the Israeli government does not hesitate to boast about and which it continues to execute through the systematic confiscation of the Palestinian lands and the construction of thousands of new settlement units in various areas of the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem, and accelerated construction of the annexation Wall that is eating up large tracts of our land, dividing it into separate and isolated islands and cantons, destroying family life and communities and the livelihoods of tens of thousands of families. The occupying Power also continues to refuse permits for our people to build in Occupied East Jerusalem, at the same time that it intensifies its decades-long campaign of demolition and confiscation of homes, displacing Palestinian owners and residents under a multi-pronged policy of ethnic cleansing aimed at pushing them away from their ancestral homeland. In addition, orders have been issued to deport elected representatives from the city of Jerusalem. The occupying Power also continues to undertake excavations that threaten our holy places, and its military checkpoints prevent our citizens from getting access to their mosques and churches, and it continues to besiege the Holy City with a ring of settlements imposed to separate the Holy City from the rest of the Palestinian cities.

The occupation is racing against time to redraw the borders on our land according to what it wants and to impose *a fait accompli* on the ground that changes the realities and that is undermining the realistic potential for the existence of the State of Palestine.

At the same time, the occupying Power continues to impose its blockade on the Gaza Strip and to target Palestinian civilians by assassinations, air strikes and artillery shelling, persisting with its war of aggression of three years ago on Gaza, which resulted in massive destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, and mosques, and the thousands of martyrs and wounded.

The occupying Power also continues its incursions in areas of the Palestinian National Authority through raids, arrests and killings at the checkpoints. In recent years, the criminal actions of armed settler militias, who enjoy the special protection of the occupation army, has intensified with the perpetration of frequent attacks against our people, targeting their homes, schools, universities, mosques, fields, crops and trees. Despite our repeated warnings, the occupying Power has not acted to curb these attacks and we hold them fully responsible for the crimes of the settlers.

These are just a few examples of the policy of the Israeli colonial settlement occupation, and this policy is responsible for the continued failure of the successive international attempts to salvage the peace process.

This policy will destroy the chances of achieving a two-State solution upon which there is an international consensus, and here I caution aloud: This settlement policy threatens to also undermine the structure of the Palestinian National Authority and even end its existence.

In addition, we now face the imposition new conditions not previously raised, conditions that will transform the raging conflict in our inflamed region into a religious conflict and a threat to the future of a million and a half Christian and Muslim Palestinians, citizens of Israel, a matter which we reject and which is impossible for us to accept being dragged into.

All of these actions taken by Israel in our country are unilateral actions and are not based on any earlier agreements. Indeed, what we witness is a selective application of the agreements aimed at perpetuating the occupation. Israel reoccupied the cities of the West Bank by a unilateral action, and reestablished the civil and military occupation by a unilateral action, and it is the one that determines whether or not a Palestinian citizen has the right to reside in any part of the Palestinian Territory. And it is confiscating our land and our water and obstructing our movement as well as the movement of goods. And it is the one obstructing our whole destiny. All of this is unilateral.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1974, our deceased leader Yasser Arafat came to this hall and assured the Members of the General Assembly of our affirmative pursuit for peace, urging the United Nations to realize the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, stating: "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand".

In 1988, President Arafat again addressed the General Assembly, which convened in Geneva to hear him, where he submitted the Palestinian peace program adopted by the Palestine National Council at its session held that year in Algeria.

When we adopted this program, we were taking a painful and very difficult step for all of us, especially those, including myself, who were forced to leave their homes and their towns and villages, carrying only some of our belongings and our grief and our memories and the keys of our homes to the camps of exile and the Diaspora in the 1948 *Al-Nakba*, one of the worst operations of uprooting, destruction and removal of a vibrant and cohesive society that had been

contributing in a pioneering and leading way in the cultural, educational and economic renaissance of the Arab Middle East.

Yet, because we believe in peace and because of our conviction in international legitimacy, and because we had the courage to make difficult decisions for our people, and in the absence of absolute justice, we decided to adopt the path of relative justice - justice that is possible and could correct part of the grave historical injustice committed against our people. Thus, we agreed to establish the State of Palestine on only 22% of the territory of historical Palestine - on all the Palestinian Territory occupied by Israel in 1967.

We, by taking that historic step, which was welcomed by the States of the world, made a major concession in order to achieve a historic compromise that would allow peace to be made in the land of peace.

In the years that followed - from the Madrid Conference and the Washington negotiations leading to the Oslo agreement, which was signed 18 years ago in the garden of the White House and was linked with the letters of mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel, we persevered and dealt positively and responsibly with all efforts aimed at the achievement of a lasting peace agreement. Yet, as we said earlier, every initiative and every conference and every new round of negotiations and every movement was shattered on the rock of the Israeli settlement expansion project.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I confirm, on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, which will remain so until the end of the conflict in all its aspects and until the resolution of all final status issues, the following:

1. The goal of the Palestinian people is the realization of their inalienable national rights in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on all the land of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, which Israel occupied in the June 1967 war, in conformity with the resolutions of international legitimacy and with the achievement of a just and agreed upon solution to the Palestine refugee issue in accordance with resolution 194, as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative which presented the consensus Arab vision to resolve the core the Arab-Israeli conflict and to achieve a just and comprehensive peace. To this we adhere and this is what we are working to achieve. Achieving this desired peace also requires the release of political prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons without delay.

2. The PLO and the Palestinian people adhere to the renouncement of violence and rejection and condemning of terrorism in all its forms, especially State terrorism, and adhere to all agreements signed between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel.

3. We adhere to the option of negotiating a lasting solution to the conflict in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy. Here, I declare that the Palestine Liberation Organization is ready to return immediately to the negotiating table on the basis of the adopted terms of reference based on international legitimacy and a complete cessation of settlement activities.

4. Our people will continue their popular peaceful resistance to the Israeli occupation and its settlement and apartheid policies and its construction of the racist annexation Wall, and they receive support for their resistance, which is consistent with international humanitarian law and international conventions and has the support of peace activists from Israel and around the world, reflecting an impressive, inspiring and courageous example of the strength of this defenseless people, armed only with their dreams, courage, hope and slogans in the face of bullets, tanks, tear gas and bulldozers.

5. When we bring our plight and our case to this international podium, it is a confirmation of our reliance on the political and diplomatic option and is a confirmation that we do not undertake unilateral steps. Our efforts are not aimed at isolating Israel or de-legitimizing it; rather we want to gain legitimacy for the cause of the people of Palestine. We only aim to de-legitimize the settlement activities, the occupation and apartheid and the logic of ruthless force, and we believe that all the countries of the world stand with us in this regard.

I am here to say on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestine Liberation Organization: We extend our hands to the Israeli government and the Israeli people for peace-making. I say to them: Let us urgently build together a future for our children where they can enjoy freedom, security and prosperity. Let us build the bridges of dialogue instead of checkpoints and walls of separation, and build cooperative relations based on parity and equity between two neighboring States - Palestine and Israel - instead of policies of occupation, settlement, war and eliminating the other.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the unquestionable right of our people to self-determination and to the independence of our State as stipulated in international resolutions, we have accepted in the past few years to engage in what appeared to be a test of our worthiness, entitlement and eligibility. During the last two years our national authority has implemented a program to build our State institutions. Despite the extraordinary situation and the Israeli obstacles imposed, a serious extensive project was launched that has included the implementation of plans to enhance and advance the judiciary and the apparatus for maintenance of order and security, to develop the administrative, financial, and oversight systems, to upgrade the performance of institutions, and to enhance self-reliance to reduce the need for foreign aid. With the thankful support of Arab countries and donors from friendly countries, a number of large infrastructure projects have been implemented, focused on various aspects of service, with special attention to rural and marginalized areas.

In the midst of this massive national project, we have been strengthening what we seeking to be the features of our State: from the preservation of security for the citizen and public order; to the promotion of judicial authority and rule of law; to strengthening the role of women via legislation, laws and participation; to ensuring the protection of public freedoms and strengthening the role of civil society institutions; to institutionalizing rules and regulations for ensuring accountability and transparency in the work of our Ministries and departments; to entrenching the pillars of democracy as the basis for the Palestinian political life.

When division struck the unity of our homeland, people and institutions, we were determined to adopt dialogue for restoration of our unity. We succeeded months ago in achieving national reconciliation and we hope that its implementation will be accelerated in the coming weeks. The core pillar of this reconciliation was to turn to the people through legislative and presidential elections within a year, because the State we want will be a State characterized by the rule of law, democratic exercise and protection of the freedoms and equality of all citizens without any discrimination and the transfer of power through the ballot box.

The reports issued recently by the United Nations, the World Bank, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) and the International Monetary Fund confirm and laud what has been accomplished, considering it a remarkable and unprecedented model. The consensus conclusion by the AHLC a few days ago here described what has been accomplished as a “remarkable international success story” and confirmed the readiness of the Palestinian people and their institutions for the immediate independence of the State of Palestine.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no longer possible to redress the issue of the blockage of the horizon of the peace talks with the same means and methods that have been repeatedly tried and proven unsuccessful over the past years. The crisis is far too deep to be neglected, and what is more dangerous are attempts to simply circumvent it or postpone its explosion.

It is neither possible, nor practical, nor acceptable to return to conducting business as usual, as if everything is fine. It is futile to go into negotiations without clear parameters and in the absence of credibility and a specific timetable. Negotiations will be meaningless as long as the occupation army on the ground continues to entrench its occupation, instead of rolling it back, and continues to change the demography of our country in order to create a new basis on which to alter the borders.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a moment of truth and my people are waiting to hear the answer of the world. Will it allow Israel to continue its occupation, the only occupation in the world? Will it allow Israel to remain a State above the law and accountability? Will it allow Israel to continue rejecting the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice and the positions of the overwhelming majority of countries in the world?

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come before you today from the Holy Land, the land of Palestine, the land of divine messages, ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the birthplace of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people in the homeland and in

the Diaspora, to say, after 63 years of suffering of an ongoing Nakba: Enough. It is time for the Palestinian people to gain their freedom and independence.

The time has come to end the suffering and the plight of millions of Palestine refugees in the homeland and the Diaspora, to end their displacement and to realize their rights, some of them forced to take refuge more than once in different places of the world.

At a time when the Arab peoples affirm their quest for democracy - the Arab Spring - the time is now for the Palestinian Spring, the time for independence.

The time has come for our men, women and children to live normal lives, for them to be able to sleep without waiting for the worst that the next day will bring; for mothers to be assured that their children will return home without fear of suffering killing, arrest or humiliation; for students to be able to go to their schools and universities without checkpoints obstructing them. The time has come for sick people to be able to reach hospitals normally, and for our farmers to be able to take care of their good land without fear of the occupation seizing the land and its water, which the wall prevents access to, or fear of the settlers, for whom settlements are being built on our land and who are uprooting and burning the olive trees that have existed for hundreds of years. The time has come for the thousands of prisoners to be released from the prisons to return to their families and their children to become a part of building their homeland, for the freedom of which they have sacrificed.

My people desire to exercise their right to enjoy a normal life like the rest of humanity. They believe what the great poet Mahmoud Darwish said: *Standing here, staying here, permanent here, eternal here, and we have one goal, one, one: to be.*

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We profoundly appreciate and value the positions of all States that have supported our struggle and our rights and recognized the State of Palestine following the Declaration of Independence in 1988, as well as the countries that have recently recognized the State of Palestine and those that have upgraded the level of Palestine's representation in their capitals. I also salute the Secretary-General, who said a few days ago that the Palestinian State should have been established years ago.

Be assured that this support for our people is more valuable to them than you can imagine, for it makes them feel that someone is listening to their narrative and that their tragedy and the horrors of *Al-Nakba* and the occupation, from which they have so suffered, are not being ignored. And, it reinforces their hope that stems from the belief that justice is possible in this in this world. The loss of hope is the most ferocious enemy of peace and despair is the strongest ally of extremism.

I say: The time has come for my courageous and proud people, after decades of displacement and colonial occupation and ceaseless suffering, to live like other peoples of the earth, free in a sovereign and independent homeland.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to inform you that, before delivering this statement, I, in my capacity as President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, submitted to H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, an application for the admission of Palestine on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, as a full member of the United Nations.

I call upon Mr. Secretary-General to expedite transmittal of our request to the Security Council, and I call upon the distinguished members of the Security Council to vote in favor of our full membership. I also appeal to the States that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to do so.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The support of the countries of the world for our endeavor is a victory for truth, freedom, justice, law and international legitimacy, and it provides tremendous support for the peace option and enhances the chances of success of the negotiations.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your support for the establishment of the State of Palestine and for its admission to the United Nations as a full member is the greatest contribution to peacemaking in the Holy Land.

I thank you.