

STATEMENT BY MR. SALEEM I. SHERVANI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 15 – THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE 63<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 25, 2008



Mr President,

Thank you for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that demands our collective attention: The situation in the Middle East. This discussion is appropriately timed, as it follows the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people yesterday.

Mr President,

As a nation with age-old historic and cultural connections to each of the communities that make up the Middle East, India has an abiding interest in the early resolution of this problem that has troubled the region since the inception of the United Nations. India follows with close concern developments in this ancient and holy land. We have perused with attention the reports of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Middle East and on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine. For India, commitment to the Palestinian cause is a cornerstone of our foreign policy even prior to our own independence. We recognize that a resolution of the problems in the Middle East begins with addressing the Question of Palestine. However, we

are also aware that genuine peace in the region also requires resolution of other issues on the remaining tracks of the Middle East Peace Process, including restoration of other Arab lands that remain under occupation.

It is in this context that despite the hope engendered by the Annapolis meeting almost exactly one year ago, the lack of substantive progress remains a matter of abiding concern. Despite praiseworthy efforts within the region to resolve divisions in the Palestinian community, the situation created by the events of June 2007 persists. We watch with grave concern as Gaza remains cut off, and barriers to free movement persist in the West Bank. These problems are accentuated by the relentless expansion of the separation wall, in the face of international opinion, and of illegal settlements in the occupied territories. Such activities create new facts on the ground and fresh grievances in an old conflict, and can only have the effect of making any future solution harder to reach. At the same time, the expansion of Palestinian capacity to secure towns on the West Bank is paralleled by a rise in violence perpetrated by settlers. All acts of violence—no matter by whom—only vitiate the atmosphere for a result-oriented dialogue based on trust, without which no solution is possible. This is in no party's interest, as it makes it hard for the parties to make the necessary compromises to resolve the key issues relating to an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, a solution to the problem of refugees, and the question of Jerusalem.

At the same time, several of the fundamental issues relating to the occupation of other Arab territories in Lebanon and the Syrian Golan remain unresolved. These too add to a sense of frustration and desperation within the affected states. Such issues have the potential of exacting an immediate and long-term impact on the lives of the people, potentially contributing more fuel to an already combustible situation.

It is for this reason that India consistently urges all parties to eschew violence and exercise restraint. All too frequently, violence has broken out, exacerbating sufferings and misery in the region, with profound repercussions for the entire world. The international community clearly has an immediate interest in a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the problems besetting the Middle East. Under the present circumstances, the possibility of creating a sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine seems difficult. And yet the international community is committed to it, through its relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515. Our collective commitment can only be meaningful if we collectively strive to ensure that all parties to the conflict abide by their commitments under the Roadmap. We therefore urge the Quartet to do much more to push the process forward towards the desired outcome at the earliest. India remains in support of a political solution, based on the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which remain the main and widely endorsed frameworks for an agreement.

Mr. President,

While resolution of the six decade-long tragedy of Palestine will have an important impact on the situation in the Middle East, as I noted earlier, peace in the Middle East also requires forward movement on other tracks of the peace process. India is

encouraged by regional efforts to resume the process of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and we commend in particular the effort facilitated by Turkey to re-energize the Syria-Israel track. We look forward to the early resolution through dialogue of the long-standing occupation of the Syrian Golan, to which this General Assembly annually commits itself.

At the same time, India recognizes the important progress made by countries of the region in assisting in resolving the political confrontation within Lebanon earlier this year. This creditable effort was an important step towards returning Lebanon to the path of stability and economic development. We commend Qatar for its role in this regard. We also welcome the decision to establish diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon as a positive step in ensuring regional support for the stabilization of Lebanon. In the coming months, it will be essential for the international community to support the positive steps taken since the election of a President of the Lebanese Republic, including through expansion of assistance in building government capacity to fully assert its authority in all Lebanese territory. Much remains to be done, but we are confident in the wisdom and determination of the Lebanese people in ensuring that their tragic past is never repeated.

At the same time, it is important for the international community to help address other issues that are used as a means to sustain space for parallel structures of authority to flourish. For this it is essential that all parties concerned abide fully by their commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions, and the processes begun under UNSCR 1559 and 1701, in particular. The practice of citing actions by other parties as a pretext for not abiding by these commitments only hinders the Government of Lebanon, which is of no benefit to any of the parties.

Mr. President,

The truism that all peace is indivisible is most clearly exemplified by the situation in the Middle East. In our interconnected world, we cannot allow the tragedy of the Middle East to continue to fester as it has for decades. An opportunity is at hand for us to collectively arrive at a just, lasting and durable solution to the various inter-related tracks that constitute the Middle East problem. We must seize the moment, in our collective interest, so as to enable the vision of an independent, viable and sovereign State of Palestine, living side-by-side and in peace with Israel, and a larger Middle East whose constituent nations remain at peace with each other and with the world at large.

I thank you.

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