

Statement by Mr. S. Srinivas Prasad, Minister, at the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (4th Committee) on Agenda Item 54: UNRWA on 10th November, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

We express appreciation for the convening of the debate on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We thank the Secretary - General under whose auspices this important conference is convened. We also thank the President of the General Assembly for his very pertinent keynote address.

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to join earlier speakers in expressing our happiness and appreciation for the commendable work done by the UNWRA in the last 65 years. We particularly commend the dedication, diligence and perseverance with which UNRWA continues to conduct itself to fulfill its mandate in the best possible manner. On this occasion, I would like to reiterate India's unwavering support for the just cause of Palestine and solidarity with the Palestinian people for their struggle and our support to UNRWA in meeting its mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

It's unfortunate that since the General Assembly passed its resolution 302(IV) on 8 December 1949 establishing UNRWA; sixty five years have passed without finding an amicable solution to the Palestine Question. In fact, the problem has compounded over the years and UNRWA is at a difficult juncture in its 65-year history, facing unprecedented operational challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

Given the current fragile and unpredictable situation and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East region, the role of UNRWA in providing critical assistance to the Palestinian refugees has assumed even greater significance. UNRWA's continued and dedicated pursuit of its mandate has truly become an epitome of the international community's commitment to the well-being of the Palestinian refugees. India appreciates UNRWA for successfully

and diligently carrying out its mandate of serving over 5 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under extremely difficult conditions. This also includes UNRWA's emergency assistance to more than 1.3 million Palestine refugees in acute distress within areas of operations as a result of armed conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory and in neighboring countries. India also acknowledges and commends the invaluable cooperation extended to UNRWA's work by host countries.

Mr. Chairman,

India supports a negotiated solution, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

India's continuing support to the Palestinian people is highlighted by the recent visit (Oct. 12-13) of India's President, Shri Pranab Mukerjee to Palestine. This was the first ever visit of an Indian Head of State to Palestine and saw cordial and successful meetings with Palestinian leadership.

Mr. Chairman,

Apart from political support for the Palestinian cause, India continues to support development and nation-building efforts of Palestine by consistently extending technical and financial assistance. During President Mukerjee's visit, India not only increased slots for Palestinian students under its flagship Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program. The President of India, during his visit to Ramallah, inaugurated the India-Palestine Center for Excellence in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Al-Quds University and also handed over a cheque worth USD 5 million as a budgetary support to the Palestinian authority. Govt. of India has also announced its decisions to set up another such center in Gaza with similar aims at an estimated cost of USD 1 million and an IT Park in Ramallah at an estimated cost of USD 12 million, as well as a Palestinian Institute of Diplomacy at an estimated cost of USD 4.5 million. This is part of India's larger capacity building initiatives in Palestine.

We continue to contribute US \$ 1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India pledged and contributed US\$ 4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. We are implementing development projects in Palestine, jointly with Brazil and South Africa within the framework of IBSA, and have pledged US \$ 1 million for a new project to reconstruct the Atta Habib medical centre in Gaza.

Mr. Chairman,

We firmly believe that dialogue is the only viable option in the search for a just, durable and comprehensive peaceful solution of the Palestinian issue. Diplomacy and statesmanship have to prevail over hatred and violence; there is no other road to a lasting peace. We call for all to show restraint, to avoid provocation and unilateral actions and to return to the peace process. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process, for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.
