

**Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative
in the Security Council Open Debate on "The situation in the Middle East,
including the Palestinian Question" on January 23 2013**

Mr. President,

1. At the outset, please allow me to express our appreciation to you Mr. President, for convening this quarterly open debate on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. I would like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian question. I would like to join others to welcome the participation of Foreign Minister of the Observer State of Palestine, H. E. Dr. Riad Al Malki in today's debate and thank him for his statement. I also would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel for his statement.

2. Mr. President, amidst unprecedented transformation of the Arab World, the continuing stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process, is clearly not in the interest of the region. There have been no direct talks between Israel and Palestine, for more than two years. Efforts of the international community including those of the Quartet towards resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine have yielded no results.

3. Against this backdrop, the overwhelming vote in the General Assembly on November 29 last year, upgrading the status of Palestine to a non-member state is a positive development. It is a decisive achievement for Palestine in the history of its long and arduous struggle to reach its final goal of an independent and viable Palestinian State. India, which has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora, co-sponsored this resolution. India will continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

4. Mr. President, developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since the historic vote in the General Assembly have been most unhelpful for the Palestinian cause. The intensification of settlement activities by Israel, despite widespread international condemnation, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are creating new realities on the ground, thereby threatening the very premise of a two-state solution. We join others in urging Israel to end the settlement activity in order for the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

5. Mr. President, settlements, roadblocks and the related infrastructure of occupation continue to cause severe hardships to the Palestinian population. These are also adversely affecting the normal functioning of Palestinian state institutions. The Palestinian Authority is facing a severe financial crisis. The financial crisis could erode the significant progress made in building Palestinian state institutions, if immediate attention is not given to the issue. There is an urgent need to support the Palestinian Authority to meet its budgetary shortfalls.

6. The blockade of Gaza is in its sixth year. It is affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. While Israel has taken several measures to allow flow of essential goods into Gaza, these cannot be a substitute for lifting the blockade. Recent hostilities in Gaza are again a stark reminder to the international community of the dangers, that continuing stalemate in the Peace Process can bring about. We hope both parties will continue to uphold the ceasefire agreement and implement its provisions in good faith.

7. The recent rapprochement between various Palestinian factions is indeed welcome. We hope that efforts towards promotion of reconciliation will bear fruit soon, leading to the formation a Unity Government, holding of elections, reunification of Palestinian state institutions, and measures for reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

8. Mr. President, India has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian people. India was the first non-Arab State to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1975 and in 1988 became one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine.

9. India has also extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority since its establishment and has been a partner in the socio-economic development of Palestine in its quest for a life of dignity and self-reliance. Our assistance has been for humanitarian relief, development projects, establishment of educational and training facilities, budgetary support etc. This year, India has pledged an amount of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support to Palestine. India also contributes US\$ 1 million annually to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Following the three MoU's signed during the visit of President Abbas to India in September 2012, India is in the process of implementing projects in the fields of Information & Communication Technology, Vocational Training and Construction of Schools. In addition, India is implementing development projects in Palestine with Brazil and South Africa as partners in IBSA.

10. India supports a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its Capital, side by side and at peace with Israel as endorsed in various United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the Quartet Road Map. Let me also state here that progress on Lebanese and Syrian track remains critical for lasting peace in the region. We remain hopeful that environment conducive for direct talks can be achieved in the near future. India stands ready to play its part in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

11. Lastly, Mr. President, we remain seriously concerned at the deteriorating security situation and continuing violence in Syria. We strongly condemn all violence and violations of human rights irrespective of who their perpetrators are. We also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be committed in Syria. We urge all the parties to stop violence and engage in an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the conflict through peaceful means based on the

internationally approved political and legal basis including the UN Security Council resolutions 2042 and 2043 and the Joint Communique of the Geneva Action Group.

I thank you.

BACK TO SECURITY COUNCIL