

**STATEMENT ON AGENDA ITEM 35: QUESTION OF PALESTINE BY  
MR. A. GOPINATHAN, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,  
AT THE 57<sup>TH</sup> REGULAR SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY**

Mr. President,

The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People provided the international community with an opportunity to reiterate its steadfast support for the realization of the cherished goals and aspirations of the people of Palestine. India reaffirms its solidarity with the people of Palestine, who have striven valiantly over the past decades for the restoration of their legitimate rights. India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people is firm and unshakable and based on a rich and varied interaction over the ages.

Mr. President,

India's support for the Palestinian cause is based on principles, is consistent and is unwavering. We are committed to a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (1962), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and the principle of "Land for Peace". We support the inalienable and legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a homeland as well the right of all

states of the region, including Israel and Palestine to, exist peacefully within secure and recognised borders.

We recall our earlier statements where we had emphasised that President Arafat who enjoys wide support and respect, is the symbol of Palestinian nationhood. We remain convinced that the Palestinian people stand on the threshold of a new era wherein their national aspirations, for which they have struggled so long, can be realised. We remain vitally interested in peace, development and stability in the region and are ready to assist in whatever way we can.

Mr. President,

The tragic cycle of violence that has engulfed the Middle East region since September 2000 has been damaging to peace and stability. It is a source of deep concern to all of us. This violence has led to the most tragic loss of hundreds of lives and grievous injuries to thousands. We condemn such acts. As recent events have demonstrated, these have neither enhanced Israel's security nor served the cause of

peace. If anything, such acts have only put more impediments to the collective quest for a lasting peace in the Middle East. The continued military operations by Israel or acts of retaliatory violence serve no purpose except causing loss of life, mostly of innocent civilians, including women and children, and making the divide between the peoples of Palestine and Israel even sharper. Immediate cessation of military operations and withdrawal by Israel and ceasefire are, therefore, the most urgent steps. These brook no delay as the price is being paid by the innocent on both sides, quite needlessly.

Mr. President,

The extent of the continuing humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza has been highlighted by the Secretary General's personal humanitarian envoy Ms. Catherine Bertini who visited the region last August and, more recently, by the release of the report of the UN Special Coordinator (UNSCO) for the Middle East on "the impact of closure and other mobility restrictions of Palestinian productive activities". The UNSCO report shows that the Palestinian economy is in severe depression, with only international aid stemming a possible total breakdown. According to the report, unemployment in the Occupied Territories is around 50%, poverty levels have reached 70% in Gaza and 55% in the West Bank; while income losses are estimated at \$ 7.6 million a day, a total loss of \$ 3.3 billion since

October 2000. The Secretary General has reported that despite high-level Israeli assurances of increased cooperation with the aid agencies, there have been only marginal improvements on the ground.

We urge the Government of Israel to do all that is possible to alleviate the social and economic plight of the Palestinian population by lifting closures and blockades, allowing unhindered access to humanitarian supplies and by releasing the balance finances due to the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. President,

There is a general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The efforts of the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the field of health, education and creation of employment need to be encouraged and assisted. Infrastructural development is an area of critical importance. The challenge posed by the present requirements of financial and technological support merits the urgent attention of the international community. Regional cooperation, complemented by international efforts, is an essential prerequisite for enhancing peace and prosperity in the region.

India congratulates the Palestinian Legislative Council for

approving the new Cabinet appointed by President Arafat. We also applaud the decision made by the Palestinian Authority to initiate a process of reforms, intended to benefit the Palestinian people. We see this as an important step in the process of nation-building.

India remains ready to engage with the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian people in their reconstruction efforts in Gaza and the West Bank. Two India-aided projects in Gaza – the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at Al Azhar University and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College in Deir Al Balah – have been completed. India has sent medical supplies for use of hospitals in West Bank and Gaza. The Government of India has a

substantial on-going programme for human resources development for the Palestinian National Authority. We are ready to do more.

While it is incumbent on all of us to work together to advance the peace process in West Asia, ultimately it is the parties themselves that have to shoulder the major responsibility for achieving a permanent and lasting solution. A spirit of accommodation and political will must imbue the negotiation process. They must harness all their energies to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in vital mutual interest.

Thank you, Mr. President.