STATEMENT BY MR. PRANAB MUKHERJEE, MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF INDIA AT THE MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE NAM COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE, AT TEHRAN, IRAN ON JULY 30, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to express my gratitude to you for convening this meeting, and also my congratulations on your effective Chairmanship of this important Committee. I recall India's special connection with this body ever since its establishment at the VII NAM Summit in New Delhi twenty five years ago.

Mr. Chairman,

West Asia and the Gulf region are of obvious importance to India, given our long civilizational links. Over the course of this year, particularly over the recent days, we have been concerned with the situation in West Asia. We continue to urge an end to the cycle of violence, the ongoing blockade of Gaza, the expansion of settlements and the construction of the separation wall. Just now, H.E the Foreign Minister of Palestine has very clearly depicted a picture of the situation since the Annapolis Conference last year. He reminded us of the commitments made there, and also of the commitments of Israel and Palestine under the Road Map. From the briefing by the Foreign Minister, it seems that we are not getting anywhere on this issue, which we believe is political in nature and cannot be resolved by force.

India's commitment to the Palestinian cause, as well as its solidarity with the Palestinian people, are well-known and I need not reiterate it. In keeping with India's support to the Middle East Peace Process in all its tracks, we have consistently supported the Palestinian people in realizing their legitimate aspirations for a sovereign, independent

and viable State of Palestine, existing side-by-side in peace with the State of Israel. India remains convinced that a just and comprehensive solution can be achieved, based on the principle of "land for peace' and in accordance with the series of UN Security Council resolutions, some of which you also referred to, such as 242, 338, 1397 and 1515. The Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map offer ways forward.

Mr. Chairman,

India has always rendered assistance to the Palestinian people, including in capacity building and national reconstruction. India announced humanitarian assistance equivalent to US $ 2.3 million, following economic sanctions imposed by Israel and the West in 2006. At the Paris Donors' Conference for Palestine in December 2007, India pledged US$ 5 million for development projects and committed to provide training to 400 Palestinian officials under our ITEC Programme. Our project assistance proposals include construction of the Mahatma Gandhi Library and Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College in Gaza. At the recent Ministerial conference on capacity-building for Palestine, held in Jakarta earlier this month, we announced an increase in the allocation of technical training opportunities for Palestine. But from what has been presented by H.E the Foreign Minister of Palestine just now, it appears that additional Budgetary Support will be required by Palestine, and we will all need to consider what we can do.

Mr. Chairman,

We thank you for your active promotion of the Palestinian cause. India pledges to continue to work with other members of this Committee in our noble endeavour to collectively support the Palestinian cause.

We endorse the draft statement circulated by our Palestinian friends. We look forward to it being issued at our Ministerial Conference today.

With this brief intervention, once again I thank you, Mr. Chairman

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