

**Statement by H.E. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine,
Delivered Before the United Nations Security Council
20 February 2018**

Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, President of the Security Council,

Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Excellencies Members of the Security Council,

Seventy years have passed since Palestine's Nakba, from which 6 million Palestine refugees continue to suffer from the cruelty of exile and loss of human security. They continue to wander the world after the loss of their peaceful and stable lives in their homeland. They are part of the 13 million Palestinians, whose country has not yet been recognized as full Member State of the United Nations, despite the numerous resolutions reaffirming their right to self-determination and statehood on their national land.

We are the descendants of the Canaanites that lived in the land of Palestine 5,000 years ago and continuously remained there to this day. Our great people remain rooted in their land. The Palestinian people built their own cities and homeland and made contributions to humanity and civilization witnessed by the world. They established institutions, schools, hospitals, cultural organizations, theaters, libraries, newspapers, publishing houses, economic organizations, businesses and banks, with wide regional and international influence.

All of this existed before and after the Balfour Declaration issued by the British Government in 1917, a declaration by which those who did not own, giving to those who had no right. The British Government bears responsibility for the catastrophic consequences inflicted on the Palestinian people as a result.

Since then, and although our people remain under occupation, they continued their journey in building and developing their country with the establishment of their National Authority in 1994. Our national institutions are recognized by international organizations for their merit and work, which is based on the rule of law, accountability and transparency, and empowerment of women and youth in an environment of tolerance, coexistence of civilizations and non-discrimination. Moreover, we continue to strive to unite our people and land and to ensure one authority, one law, and one gun, and are determined to convene parliamentary and presidential elections.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Our conviction is deep and our position is clear regarding the use of arms of any kind. We not only call for the dismantlement of nuclear weapons, but are also opposed to conventional weapons, which have caused such vast destruction of States in our region and around the world. We have thus been committed to fostering a culture of peace,

rejection of violence, pursuit of sustainable development and the building of schools, hospitals, industrial zones, agricultural farms and technological production, as opposed to establishing weapons factories and purchasing tanks and fighter jets, for we wish for our people to live in freedom and dignity, far from wars and destruction and far from terrorism and extremism, which are being relentlessly combatted in all areas of the globe. Accordingly, we have become party to 83 security agreements with States around the world, including the United States, Russian Federation, European countries and others.

Why are we here today?

After a long journey and efforts to create a political path based on negotiations and leading to a comprehensive and just peace, as you are aware, we participated in the Madrid Conference in 1991 and signed the Oslo Accords in 1993, which affirmed the imperative of reaching a solution of all the permanent status issues before 1999. Unfortunately, this has not become reality.

Nevertheless, we persisted in our efforts to attain peace. We engaged in dialogue at Wye River and Camp David. We participated in the Annapolis Conference; we engaged in dialogue with the former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, and met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in the presence of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and George Mitchell; and we accepted President Putin's invitation to meet with Mr. Netanyahu in Moscow, but he has regrettably evaded participating in such a meeting. We engaged with all seriousness with former Secretary of State John Kerry. But the Israeli Government's intransigence caused the failure of all of these efforts. After all of this, how can it be said that it is we who reject negotiations?

Confronted with this deadlock, we have neither given up, nor have we lost hope. We have come to the United Nations, believing in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which affirms, inter alia, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and affirms the right of peoples to self-determination, which are among the issues this august Council will address tomorrow. We continue to engage with all of its agencies and bodies in our search for an end this occupation of our land and people. Yet, in spite of all of this, the international community has failed to implement the relevant UN resolutions, even to this day.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Is it logical that, despite the adoption of 705 General Assembly resolutions and 86 Security Council resolutions in our favor, none of them have been implemented? Is it logical that Israel violates its obligation to implement resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), the implementation of which Israel's admission to the UN was conditioned upon, as pledged in writing by its Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett at that time?

Israel is acting as a State above the law. It has transformed the occupation from a temporary situation as per international law into a situation of permanent settlement colonization and has imposed a one-State reality of Apartheid. It has closed all doors to realizing the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Here, we must reaffirm, as we have done in the past, our problem is not with the followers of Judaism. Judaism is a monotheistic religion as are Christianity and Islam.

Our problem is only with the occupiers of our land and those denying our independence and freedom.

Mr. President, Excellencies Members of the Council,

We met with the President of the United States, Donald Trump, four times in 2017, and we have expressed our absolute readiness to reach a historic peace agreement. We repeatedly reaffirmed our position in accordance with international law, the relevant UN resolutions and the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Yet this administration has not clarified its position. Is it for the two-State solution, or for one-State? And, then, in a dangerous, unprecedented manner, this administration undertook an unlawful decision, which was rejected by the international community, to remove the issue of Jerusalem “off the table” and to recognize the City as Israel’s capital and to transfer its embassy to the City. It did so ignoring that East Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and is our capital, which we wish to be a City open to all faithful of the three monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

It is also strange that the United States still lists the Palestine Liberation Organization on its terror list and imposes restrictions on the work of our mission in Washington under the pretext of Congressional decisions since 1987. And, most recently, it has decided to punish the Palestine refugees by way of reduction of its contribution to UNRWA, in spite of the fact that it supported the Agency’s establishment and has endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for a just and agreed solution for the plight of the refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III).

The United States has contradicted itself and contradicted its own commitments and has violated international law and the relevant resolutions with its decision regarding Jerusalem. So, it has become impossible today for one country or State alone to solve a regional or international conflict without the participation of other international partners. Therefore, to solve the Palestine question, it is essential to establish a multi-lateral international mechanism emanating from an international conference and in line with international law and the relevant resolutions.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Faced with Israel’s policies and practices in violation of international law and Israel’s non-compliance with and non-implementation of agreements signed, our Central Council, the highest Palestinian parliamentary body, decided several weeks ago to review the relationship with Israel, considering that we have become an Authority without authority and the occupation has become one without cost and that Israel must uphold its obligations as an occupying Power.

In spite of this, I confirm to you our commitment to maintain our institutions and achievements, which we have realized on the ground in Palestine as well as in the international arena. We are determined to remain committed to the political, diplomatic, legal path, far from violence, and through political negotiations and dialogue, which we have never rejected.

We will continue to extend our hands to make peace and will continue to exert efforts to bring an end to the Israeli occupation based on the two-State solution on the 1967 borders and international legitimacy as per the relevant resolutions in order to achieve

our national aspirations. At the same time, we will continue to oppose any attempts, regardless by whom, to impose solutions that contradict this legitimacy.

We have been granted the status of non-member Observer State by the General Assembly and, on that basis, we have become a State party to 105 international treaties and organizations. We have been recognized by 138 States. All of this has further strengthened the status of the State of Palestine, which continues to strive for recognition by the rest of the States in the world, among them Member States of the Council that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine, even while knowing that recognition of the State of Palestine is not a substitute for negotiations, but rather would enhance the prospects for success of negotiations.

In the coming period, we will intensify our efforts to achieve admission to full membership in the United Nations and to guarantee international protection for our people. We hope for your support for these efforts aimed at ensuring the rights of 13 million Palestinians, who yearn for an independent homeland just like all other peoples of the world and yearn for their State to take its rightful place in the international community.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

We come here before your august Council in the midst of the deadlock of the peace process due to the US decision regarding Jerusalem, Israel's ongoing illegal settlement activities, its violation of the resolutions of this Council, and its disrespect of the signed agreements. We are here because of the Palestinian side's desire to continue working positively and courageously in the building a culture of peace, rejecting violence, saving the principle of two-States, and attaining security and stability for all, to restore hope to our people and the peoples of the region, and to find a way out of the stalemate and crisis we are in.

Driven by our conviction in a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, which is our strategic choice for the sake of the coming generations in our region, including the Palestinians and Israelis, I present to this august Council a peace plan that addresses the core problems that have undermined peace efforts across the decades. Our plan includes the following:

First: We call for the convening of an international peace conference by mid-2018, based on international law and the relevant UN resolutions, with broad international participation and including the two concerned parties and the regional and international stakeholders, foremost among them the Permanent Members of the Security Council and the international Quartet, as was the framework for the Paris Peace Conference and as envisaged for the conference to be convened in Moscow as per resolution 1850 (2008). The outcomes of this conference should be as follows:

Acceptance of the State of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations and a call on the Security Council to achieve that, taking into account General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012, and guaranteeing international protection for our people.

Mutual recognition between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Formation of an international multilateral mechanism that will assist the two parties in the negotiations to resolve the permanent status issues defined in the Oslo Accords (Jerusalem, borders, security, settlements, refugees, water and prisoners), conduct those negotiations on the basis of international law and the relevant UN resolutions, and implement what is to be agreed upon within a set timeframe and with guarantees for this implementation.

Second: During the period of negotiations, all parties must refrain from unilateral actions, particularly those that would prejudice the outcome of a final solution, as set forth in Article 31 of the Oslo Accords of 1993. Foremost must be the cessation of settlement activities in the territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and suspension of the decision regarding Jerusalem and halting transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including in particular resolutions 476 (1980), 478 (1980), 2334 (2016), and General Assembly resolution ES-10/19. At the same time, the State of Palestine would refrain from further joining organizations, as we have previously committed ourselves to. (Namely 22 international organizations out of 500 organizations and treaties.)

Third: Implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative, as adopted and endorsed, and the conclusion of a regional agreement upon achievement of a peace agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis.

In this regard, we must reaffirm the terms of reference for any upcoming negotiations and they are as follows:

Respect for international law and the relevant resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) through to resolution 2334 (2016), and the Arab Peace Initiative, and the signed agreements.

Preservation of the principle of the two-States, i.e. the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, and rejection of partial solutions and a State of provisional borders.

Acceptance of minimal land swaps, in equal value and ratio, with the agreement between the two parties.

East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine and an open city for the faithful of the three monotheistic religions.

Ensuring the security of the two States without undermining the independence and sovereignty of either of them through the existence of an international third party.

A just and agreed solution for the Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194 (III) and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and, pending a just solution, continuation of the international commitment and support to UNRWA.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

We are ready to undertake the longest journeys to the farthest places in the world in order to realize our rights. But we are not ready to move one inch if anyone wants us to forsake these rights.

We will present any agreement reached with Israel to a general referendum among our people, respecting democracy and reinforcing legitimacy.

We have knocked on your door today, you who comprise the highest international body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. We have presented our vision for peace. Hopefully it will be received with wisdom and justice. We are ready to begin negotiations immediately in order to achieve the freedom and independence of our people, just like all other nations, and to achieve peace and security for all in our region and the world, so that future generations can enjoy the benefits of this peace, following the enormous sacrifices by our people of that dearest to them, among them our martyrs, wounded and prisoners.

This Security Council is the highest entity to which the peoples of the world seek sanctuary and protection; after this Council, we rest our issue to the Almighty. For, if justice for our people cannot be attained here, then to where should we go?

I thank you, Mr. President.