

Statement by H.E. Mr. Mohammad Khazaei
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran
on the "Question of Palestine"
Before the 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly
New York, 25 November, 2008

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Mr. President,

I wish to begin by taking the opportunity, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, to reiterate the solidarity of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Palestinian people in their courageous and unwavering struggle to defend and realize their inalienable rights, particularly their right for self-determination.

I also wish to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to the UN Secretary General for his informative reports on the Question of Palestine, and to the Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their tireless efforts to address the pains and arduous circumstances of the people of Palestine.

Mr. President,

Sixty long years have passed since the Palestinian territories have been occupied; innocent Palestinians have been driven out of their homeland; their lives and livelihoods have been torn apart; and the vicious Zionist policies and practices have brought about continuous misery, death and sufferings to defenseless Palestinian men, women and children. Many Palestinians have been born under occupation; grown under occupation; and then have died under occupation. Throughout all these years Palestinians have been subjected to various kinds of Israeli crimes and atrocities, including, *inter alia*, massacres, persecutions, collective punishments, and deprivations, simply because of their wish to exercise their legitimate and inalienable rights, especially the right to live in their own homeland free from occupation, humiliation and torment.

As a result of the occupation of Palestine; at least 7 million Palestinians are now refugees which, as indicated in the report of the Committee, constitute the world's oldest and largest refugee population, and more than 11,000 Palestinians, including hundreds of minors and women, are kept in appalling conditions in Israeli prisons or detention camps. It is a common knowledge now that nearly all the detainees, in particular children, had been subjected to torture, humiliation, abuse and beating by Israelis during detention. In the last 40 years, as mentioned in the report of the Committee, 700,000 Palestinians, that constitute one fifth of the entire Palestinian population of the Occupied Palestinian Territory had been detained and imprisoned. Moreover, at least 5,500 Palestinians have been killed and more than 32,600 wounded by Israeli forces since the start of the second intifada in 2000.

Mr. President, I invite the international community to carefully study the report before us today. This report puts on display a few examples of the crimes of the Israeli regime against humanity. As the said report well illustrates, the period under review has not been any better than the past six decades and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has even deteriorated. The Zionist regime has continued and increased its violation of the most basic rights of the Palestinian people. As a result, Palestinians are enduring an unprecedented and intolerable level of sufferings. In the said period, the Israeli army has continued to conduct military operations in Palestinian population centers, causing the deaths of, and injury to, many Palestinian civilians. For instance, only on 1st of March 2008, 59 Palestinians were killed in one day, among them women and children. Extrajudicial and targeted killings, house demolitions and arrests have continued unabated and, based on the report at hand, even there has been a marked increase in Israeli's demolition of Palestinian homes in 2008.

The report also stresses that due to the inhumane blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and because of the collective punishment carried out against the entire Palestinian population there, more than 1.5 million Palestinians living in the Strip continue to face a humanitarian crisis with the women and, in particular, children-who account for more than 56 per cent of the population- experiencing the most dramatic impacts of this brutal Israeli crime. Moreover, in violation of international law and numerous UN resolutions, and in pursuance of its policy of creating fait accompli on the ground, the said regime has continued to expand Israeli settlements and the construction of the illegal and apartheid wall, in blatant contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Mr. President, Dear Colleagues,

As we are discussing the Question of Palestine here today with heavy hearts, more and more innocent Palestinians are perishing. People are in dire need for their basic food and health care necessities. Babies are born in cities where hospitals are closed down because of the blockade, or in houses where there is no electricity; no basic services and even no drinking water. Mothers are giving birth to children under constant fear of attacks by their enemy and in no hopes to be able to raise their children. They, legitimately, expect this Organization, this Assembly and the Security Council to be more attentive to their pains and more effective in addressing their sufferings. They are asking this important question as to where are those who have self-proclaimed themselves as human rights champions? Ironically and sadly the said so-called human rights advocates not only are not concerned about the sufferings of the oppressed but even support the abhorrent crimes of the oppressor.

Mr. President,

While the General Assembly has reaffirmed, time and again, that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects, effective measures to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories are yet to be taken by the international community. As you rightly mentioned yesterday, Mr. President, failing to address this question in a fair and effective manner is the single greatest failure in the history of the United Nations. This failure has undoubtedly emboldened the Israeli regime in its continuation of occupation of the Palestinian territory as well as other Arab lands namely the occupied Syrian Golan heights and Lebanese territories.

The report clearly displays the fact that, as in the past, the reporting period has been characterized by the dichotomy between the Israeli regime's mischievous and hypocritical peace gestures on the one hand and a deteriorating situation on the ground resulting from increased Israeli atrocities, on the other.

We believe that the Palestinian Question lies at the heart of the Middle East crisis. Undoubtedly, a durable peace in Palestine and the Middle East will only be possible through justice, full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland, end to discrimination, end to occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and a democratic mechanism through which all inhabitants of Palestine as well as Palestinians driven out of their homeland would have the possibility to determine their future in a democratic and peaceful fashion.

Before concluding, **Mr. President**, I wish to place on record that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations and distortions raised against my country by the representative of a regime in the Assembly today. It is ridiculous that the representative of a regime that possesses hundreds of nuclear warheads and is not a party to the NPT or other international instruments on WMDs raises such groundless allegations against my country whose nuclear program is absolutely peaceful and the IAEA, including in its latest report, has attested to the peacefulness of its program. These allegations are indeed preposterous and are made in order to distract the international community's attention from the abhorrent Israeli crimes in the Palestinian territories and from the obvious fact that the said regime poses the most serious and immediate threat to regional and international peace and security.

Thank you Mr. President