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November 29, 2016

**Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Special meeting in Observance of the “International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People”**

permanent observer of the African Union: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Oh, thank you, Chair. Let me start by congratulating His Excellency Ambassador Fodé Seck, Permanent Representative of Senegal, for his leadership in steering the work of this very important UN body. And thank all those involved in maintaining the tradition of this meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

It is indeed an opportunity to raise awareness among the international community about the unresolved question of Palestine and to reiterate our full and strong support to the Palestinian people in the early realization of their inalienable right to self-determination.

Allow me now to convey to you the following message of solidarity in support from His – Her Excellency, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. The message reads as follows.

Mr. Chairman, since the inception – since its inception, the Organization of the African Unity and later the African Union has defend the cause of Palestine, placing it as a priority on the agenda of all heads of states and the government summits. The African Union has extended its full support to our sisters and brothers in Palestine, and has adopted many decisions and resolutions, but stress the urgency of achieving without delay an end to the Israeli occupation and a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace agreement leading to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state within the pre-1967 borders.

Regrettably, as we meet today the path towards durable peace remains bleak. We continue to witness helplessly the continuation of the Israeli occupation and the intensification of its illegal settlement activities and all related violence. These illegal actions have undermined all regional and international efforts to revive the peace process in a manner that upholds the internationally recognized parameters.

The lack of implementation of the countless UN resolutions reaffirming the right of Palestinians to statehood has compounded the conflict over decades, and inflicted grave hardships on the Palestinian people. The African Union strongly condemns all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories as well as all acts of violence against civilians and attacks targeting religious sites.

The AU expresses also its grave concern over the critical situation of the Palestinian refugees who continue to face serious protection challenges due to ongoing occupation, armed conflict, and displacement. The African Union reiterates its rejection and condemnation of the land and sea blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and calls for opening of all crossing points to allow free movement of persons and goods.

Mr. Chairman, while we voice here our strong and unanimous desire to see the conclusion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we must never forget that we all have a permanent responsibility towards the Palestinian people, which must be upheld until this question is satisfactorily resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law and principles of justice.

It is our firm conviction that peace cannot be achieved in the Middle East without interest from our community, in particular the Security Council, taking a firm and courageous stand to end occupation of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and establish the independent state with al-Haram al-Šarif as its capital.

It is the duty, moral and legal, of the international community to protect civilians and to put an end to the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

I thank you for your kind attention.