

# ISRAEL

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**Statement by  
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Agenda Item 31  
“United Nations Relief and Works Agency for  
Palestine Refugees in the Near East”

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Mr. Chairman,

I wish to congratulate you for the professional manner in which you have conducted these proceedings. I wish also to thank Commissioner-General Karen Abu Zayd for her informative briefing and for her many years of dedicated service.

At the outset, I wish to reiterate Israel's support for UNRWA's important humanitarian mission. The subject of UNRWA is without doubt an important one, which deserves our considered attention. Over its sixty years of operation, UNRWA has displayed an enduring commitment to the extension of vital humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. In so doing, UNRWA has contributed much to improving the lives of many needy people, many of whom have been tragically kept in a position of need by political forces largely beyond their own control.

On behalf of my delegation, I wish to underscore Israel's continued commitment to the understandings expressed in the 1967 Comay-Michelmores Exchange of Letters between Israel and UNRWA. Israel will continue to do its utmost to facilitate UNRWA's operations, subject to the upholding of its own security. Israel is especially devoted to maintaining the close coordination which exists between UNRWA and Israeli officials in the field. We appreciate the comments of Commissioner-General Abu Zayd as to the excellent degree of cooperation that UNRWA enjoys with the Israeli authorities. These comments reflect the real situation on the ground, in contrast with the impression conveyed by some of the statements we have heard in this forum.

Many of those who have made these politicized statements are not engaged in supporting UNRWA in ways that can improve the conditions of the Palestinian refugees on the ground. It is telling in this regard that only one of UNRWA's major state donors in 2008 came from the Arab League.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the cooperative relations described above, there have been unfortunate instances, including recently, in which UNRWA officials have exceeded the Agency's humanitarian mission, by becoming involved in activities of a controversial political nature. Such forays into political terrain cannot be considered to be part of a legitimate advocacy role. They undermine the Agency's neutrality and harm its humanitarian mission. As Israel has reiterated time and again, UNRWA would do well to focus its energies on its humanitarian role, leaving the realm of politics to others.

Moreover, regrettably, Israel was recently barred at the behest of certain states from participating in UNRWA's 60 Year Commemorative Event. It goes without saying that foreclosing a Member State's ability to express its voice on matters of keen interest to itself is not a manner of conduct which befits the spirit of openness we all value.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel recognizes the importance of developing and strengthening the Palestinian economy and Palestinian capacity-building. We have undertaken many steps to promote and substantially improve the West Bank economy. We have proceeded with such steps despite the security risks which continue to be posed by Palestinian terrorist activity.

These steps, complemented by other factors such as increased foreign investment and continued financial support of the international community, have led to significant improvements on the ground. According to IMF estimates, the West Bank is forecasted to obtain unprecedented growth of 7% in the coming period. We have also seen encouraging signs of heightened consumer and social activity in the West Bank, such as the opening of a shopping mall and cinema complex in Nablus, the envisioned establishment of the new city of Rawabi, and others.

According to official Palestinian sources, conveyed recently in the Joint Economic Committee, since 2008, foreign investment in the West Bank has increased by 600%. Economic conferences held in Bethlehem and Nablus have no doubt played a very positive role in this regard. Trade with Israel has also displayed a strong positive trend. During the first quarter of 2009, Palestinian sales to Israel reached 147 million US dollars, an 8% increase in comparison to the parallel quarter in 2008, coupled with a 9.5% increase in purchases from Israel. Employment figures too reveal a significant positive trend, as does the field of tourism. In 2008, one million tourists visited Bethlehem, while 500,000 visited Jericho, increases of 94% and 31% respectively. Hopefully, the global economic crisis will not prove too severe an obstacle to these trends.

These figures reflect a clear, positive, multi-dimensional trend of economic recovery in the West Bank, which is a true source of encouragement. It is to be hoped that insofar as they refer to conditions in the West Bank, the Committee's resolutions on UNRWA will give due expression to these very positive developments.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning to the Gaza Strip, the Hamas maintains its control, whilst adhering to its policies of openly calling for Israel's destruction, brazen engagement in weapons-smuggling and terrorism, and flouting of the Quartet Principles. Between 2001 and January 2009, some 8600 rockets have been launched from Gaza against Israeli towns, the majority of which since Israel's 2005 withdrawal. Nearly one million Israelis already live within range of the rockets, while Hamas continues in its attempts to increase the range yet further. Hamas continues to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip and continues to place its weapons in the midst of the civilian population and near UN facilities, thus deliberately endangering them. Hamas has issued threats to UN staff, including UNRWA, and has tried to obstruct their work. As we are all well-aware, Hamas has confiscated food shipments that were intended for UNRWA and has tried to intervene in determining the contents of UNRWA's curriculum. These are only two examples of the many challenges posed to UNRWA's work by Hamas.

And yet, these simple facts do not appear in the resolution drafts on the current agenda item and are conspicuously absent in many of the vitriolic statements we have heard. There is not a single word on Hamas, not a single word about the rocket firing on Israeli civilians, no mentioning of the arms smuggling to Gaza and the military build-up of Hamas in the midst of a civilian population and in proximity to UN facilities. Thus, while the importance of UNRWA's work cannot be denied, the resolutions that we have in front of us are clearly marked by one-sidedness and politicization.

Mr. Chairman,

Looking ahead, it is the shared goal of Israel, as of all interested parties, to resolve the refugee problem, alongside the other aspects of the conflict. As a permanent status issue, the problem, in all of its complexity, ultimately will be deliberated upon in the context of the political process.

In this regard, I must express our perplexity upon hearing the distinguished Palestinian delegate's appeal yesterday for a redoubling of efforts to promote the resumption of the peace process. This is a strange appeal indeed, given the Palestinian Authority's unyielding refusal to resume talks with Israel despite Israel's repeated calls for them to do so. In any event, allow me, Mr. Chairman, to use this forum to reiterate in clear, unequivocal language what my government has been saying for many months, sadly to no avail: we call upon the Palestinian Authority to resume the bilateral peace talks without delay. This is not a time for excuses and invective. It is a time to talk peace.

Furthermore, there are many tangible steps which can be carried out in parallel with the political track. The daily fabric of life for both Palestinians and Israelis has been sidelined for too long by political deadlock, and ossified political stances. The time is ripe for creative thinking to explore ways of advancing the peace process, both at the political level and on the ground.

In this regard, Israel lauds UNRWA's proclaimed goal, expressed in its Medium Term Strategy for 2010-2015, of ensuring that its beneficiaries enjoy the best possible standards of human development. We share the view that achieving full individual potential, and full involvement as active and productive participants in socio-economic and cultural life, beyond being worthy goals in their own right, are factors critical to creating the conditions for achieving a political solution and lasting peace.

It is this vision of peace which must guide us in our practical search for ways to advance the political process. Bold visions, if they are to be realized, require bold and imaginative policies. Let us hope that our shared vision of a peaceful future for both Palestinians and Israelis will ensure that we enter a new phase of tolerance, mutual understanding, common dignity and peace.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

