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**72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Speech by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas**

As delivered

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY PRESIDENT: In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Your Excellency, Secretary-General of the United Nations, President of the United Nations General Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, peace be upon you.

Twenty-four years have passed since the signing of the Oslo Accords, an interim agreement that set a five-year period for bringing an end to the Israeli occupation, granting hope to the Palestinian people that they would soon achieve independence within their state and achieve peace between Palestinians and Israelis. What is left of this hope today?

President, ladies and gentlemen, we recognize the State of Israel on the 1967 borders, but Israel continued refusal to recognize these borders has put into question the mutual recognition we signed in Oslo in 1993.

Since my speech before your august assembly last year when I appealed for 2017 to be the year for ending the Israeli occupation of the territory of the State of Palestine, the Israeli government has relentlessly pursued its settlement campaign on our land in contravention of all international conventions and the relevant resolutions on the question of Palestine. It has also persisted with its flagrant disregard for the two-state solution, resorting to procrastination policies and tactics and devising pretexts to evade its responsibility to end its occupation of the territory of the State of Palestine. Instead of addressing the underlying issues and resolving the root causes of the conflict, it has tried to divert international attention towards secondary issues, actually caused by its colonial policies, which we call, just as the international community continues to do, for an end to the Israeli occupation of the territory of our state, it incites and makes false accusations, pretends there is no Palestinian partner and imposes unreasonable obstructive conditions. Israel is well aware, as you are, all that it’s occupation breeds incitement and violence. And this military occupation by Israel of our land has now lasted for over half a century.

Ten years ago we agreed together to establish a tripartite committee compromising the United States, Palestine, and Israel in order to address the issue of incitement, and that the decision lies with the United States. And this committee has worked for some time, but then it was canceled. And since then we have been calling for the revival of this committee to no avail. So who is doing the incitement now? Who is now trying to maintain incitement?

What is strange—it is thus very strange to hear some of those who hold the responsibility to end this occupation referring to it as a half-occupation or an alleged occupation. So what do you mean by alleged occupation? For 50 years we have been languishing under the yoke of occupation, and now somebody who is responsible is saying that this is an alleged occupation? I believe this is not fair and incorrect and unacceptable.

The continuation of this occupation is an affront to Israel and the international community. The United Nations bears a legal, political, moral, and humanitarian obligation to end this occupation and enable the Palestinian people to live in freedom and prosperity in their independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem, the occupied East Jerusalem, as its capital on the 4th of June 1967 borders. This is your responsibility. This is the responsibility of the international community.

Beyond any doubt, draining the quagmire of colonial occupation of our lands and ending its unjust oppressive and illegal practices against our people would have a great bearing to fight terrorism and deprive terrorist groups of one of the key rallying cries they exploit to promote their obscurantist ideas.

Therefore, we reiterate that ending the Israeli occupation of our land is of urgency, and it is needed to supplement the efforts that we are all undertaking to confront such groups. We Palestinians are against internal and international organizations regardless of its nature, its source, or its character. We are standing against international terrorism and we are fighting it.

President, ladies and gentlemen, we have explored every avenue and exerted far-reaching efforts to achieve peace with our Israeli neighbors and together with the Arab and Islamic states have adopted an invaluable initiative, the Arab Peace Initiative, aimed at resolving the Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflict. According to this initiative, upon Israel’s withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, namely Golan and Lebanese farms occupied in 1967, the Arab and Islamic states would recognize Israel and normalize relations with it.

So what was the response of Israel to this initiative? Fifty-seven Arab and Islamic states said they are ready that if Israel withdraws from those territories occupied in 1967, all these states will immediately recognize Israel and normalize relation with it. And Israel is not interested.

There was also the Quartet Roadmap in 2003 put forward by the Quartet for Peace, endorsed by the Security Council, and accepted by Palestine. It was also rejected by the Israeli government, so Israel is above the law.

And to break this stalemate in the peace process and to ensure successful peace efforts, there came the French Initiative aimed at salvaging the peace process and the two-state solution, led to holding the Paris Conference earlier this year, which was attended by 70 states. Seventy states, I repeat, and four international organizations. All these efforts were met with the rejection and boycotting by Israel. Furthermore, President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Xi Jinping of China have launched initiatives for peace, and the latest of these peace efforts, all of which we are thankful for, is being led by the United States President, Donald Trump.

Where are these initiatives? And why Israel is not accepting these initiatives? So on our part we have also repeatedly tried to revive the peace process and called on the Israeli Prime Minister to affirm, to only affirm his commitment to the two-state solution and sit with us at the negotiations table to delineate the borders between Israel and the State of Palestine in order to open a path for meaningful negotiations to resolve all other final status issues. Sitting together, resolving the issue of borders, and then discuss other matters. Unfortunately, it was rejected by the Prime Minister.

We continue our genuine efforts for success of the peace process, and despite these efforts Israel continues to breach its commitments and to obstruct efforts by continuing to build settlements everywhere. Building settlements everywhere. There is no place left for the State of Palestine, and this is not acceptable for us and for you. You have the responsibility. Palestine—Israel also rejects the two-state solution, and this poses a real threat to both peoples, the Israelis and the Palestinians alike. And this compels us to undertake a comprehensive strategic review of the entire process.

Ladies and gentlemen, commitment to peace should be from one side. A commitment by one side to peace is never enough to achieve peace. We have warned in the past and continue to warn of Israeli policies. Either we are free, or not free.

We have warned in the past and continue to warn of Israeli policies aimed at entrenching the occupation and colonial effects on the ground in East Jerusalem. We said that these policies fuel religious animosity that could lead to a religious conflict. We have called on the Israeli government to uphold the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites in the city. However, the Israeli government, since its occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, yes, it is an occupying power. Jerusalem is occupied. Israel has repeatedly annexed Jerusalem by a unilateral decision. Israel just decided to annex Golan, and it did so. We rejected that at that time and we still reject it today, alongside the whole international community, including the Security Council. There have been many resolutions adopted by the Security Council, the highest authority in the world, stating that this annexation process is illegal. To whom should we go? The resolution of the Security Council and those of the General Assembly are not implemented. So to whom should we go? We’re not going towards terrorism or violence.

Jerusalem is an occupied city, and Israel’s decisions and practices there are null and void. Null and void, and illegal in their entirety. The same applies to all Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. It is an occupied territory. Israel’s attempts to change the historic status quo in al-Quds, and in particular vis-à-vis the status and integrity of al-Aqsa Mosque, can only be described as playing with fire and an infringement upon our responsibilities, as well as those of brotherly Jordan. Both of us are responsible for the city. We caution the Israeli government of the implications of such an aggression, and we hold it fully responsible for the consequences. Don’t ever try to go towards a religious war. It is really dangerous, for you and for us. We don’t want it. Our conflict is political. Let it remain political. Stay away from religious issues.

President, ladies and gentlemen, despite this ongoing occupation and its oppressive policies and practices, we have been able to build the institutions of our state competently, which has been recognized by a majority of Member States of this organization—138 states among you, the majority of the membership. I seize this opportunity once again to thank all these countries that have recognized the State of Palestine and that have voted for upgrading the status of the State of Palestine at the United Nations. By doing so you are addressing a part of the historical injustice afflicted our people and endured by our people. This also supports the objective of peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East and across the world at large.

Last year, before this august assembly, I stressed in my speech that the status quo in the occupied territory in the State of Palestine is not sustainable. However, as the situation has only deteriorated due to Israeli’s insistence on pursuing its occupation-aggressive policies and endless violations of international law, we must once again, if this is the case, call on Israel as the occupying power to fully respect and uphold all its obligations stemming from this occupation and also bear the consequences. We cannot continue to be an authority without any authority. We cannot remain an authority without any authority or to allow this occupation to continue without costs.

We are fast approaching this point. If they don’t want the two-state solution and they don’t want peace, let them bear their responsibilities and the consequences of these responsibilities, because we’re not going to bear any responsibilities in this case. The two-state solution today is in jeopardy. We cannot as Palestinians stand still in the face of this threat targeting our national, political, and social existence on our land and endangers original and international peace and security.

We will have to take steps or look for alternatives to preserve our national existence. And at the same time to keep open the prospects for peace and security. However, all the options that we are seeking will be peaceful. Peaceful, peaceful.

In such a situation it is our right to search for alternatives that preserve our rights and protect our land and our people from any and—from an entrenching system of apartheid that came to an end in South Africa a long time ago, but it still exists in Palestine. Is this acceptable? Can the world accept an apartheid regime in the 21st century in Palestine? Why it is that?

On the other hand, we have called on the International Criminal Court. This is our right. If nobody wants to listen to us, then let us seek all avenues. So we have called on the International Criminal Court to open an investigation and to prosecute Israeli officials for their involvement in settlement activities and aggressions against our people and we will continue to pursue our accessions to international conventions, protocols, and organizations, as Palestine has acquired Observer status in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/19 of 2012. I will call for convening of the Palestinian National Council in the near future to operationalize this strategic review.

President, ladies and gentlemen, we as Palestinians and Arab and the whole world have the choice of the international law and the two-state solution on the borders of 1967 and we will grant every chance for the efforts being undertaken by President Donald Trump and the Quartet and the international community at large to achieve a historic agreement or deal. We have heard that they are seeking a historic deal and we would like to thank them. We hope that this will take place.

So we stress the two-state solution enabling the State of Palestine to live side by side with the State of Israel in security and peace. But if the two-state solution were to be destroyed due to the creation of a one-state reality with two systems, apartheid, from the unchecked imposition of this occupation that is rejected by our people and the international community, this would be a failure, and neither you, nor we, will have any other choice but to continue this struggle and demand full equal rights for all inhabitants of historic Palestine. This is not a threat, but we are warning of the realities and the consequences as a result of ongoing Israeli policies that are gravely undermining the two-state solution. What do they want? Let them talk about other issues, but our choice will remain the two-state solution.

Our problem, ladies and gentlemen, is with the Israeli colonial occupation and not with Judaism as a religion. Judaism for us Palestinians, for Christians and Muslims, will never be considered a threat. It is an Abrahamic religion like Islam and Christianity. God Almighty says, in the Quran, in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, we do not distinguish between his messengers, so all messengers are equal, Muhammad, Jesus, and others.

All these religions are equal and we are not distinguishing between profits or messengers. And on this occasion, we are congratulating the Jews for the occasion—or on the occasion of the New Year, and we will also congratulate—and we would like congratulate Muslims for the New Hijri Year starting tomorrow. So this is a demonstration of rapprochement between religions.

President, ladies and gentlemen, we have dutifully upheld our responsibilities towards our people in the Gaza Strip, in spite of the division since 2007. Since then, we have provided all forms of support on our own to our people in Gaza, who are gravely suffering from the cruel Israeli blockade. We have repeatedly affirm that no one is more conscious about the interests of our people in Gaza Strip. We are keen on achieving the interests of our people in Gaza. We said that there will be no state in Gaza, and there will be no Palestinian State without the Gaza Strip.

State in Gaza, this is a false dream and our state will only complete with the Gaza Strip. And today I must express my relief at the agreement reached in Cairo as a result of Egyptian efforts. We are thankful for these efforts aimed at nullifying the measures taken by Hamas following the division, including the formation of a government. Now the government has been canceled and now there’s commitment to the national unity or national consensus government to enable it exercise its authority in Gaza Strip and to allow for general elections to be held. This agreement has been reached and we are satisfied with this agreement, and next week our government is going to the Gaza Strip to assume its responsibilities. We wish the government all success.

President, ladies and gentlemen, also in my speech before this assembly last year, I appealed to the British government, the government of Great Britain to rectify the grave injustice it’s inflicted upon the Palestinian people when it issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917 promising Jews a national homeland in Palestine despite the fact that Palestine was inhabited by the Palestinian people. Ninety-seven percent of the population at that time were Palestinians. We were disregarded. Again, Palestine was inhabited by the Palestinian people, and was among the most progressive and prosperous countries and should not have been colonized or placed under the mandate of a great power.

The British government has not taken any step until this moment to correct this historical injustice against our people. It should apologize and provide us with compensations and recognize the State of Palestine. We talked to them at length and so far, they haven’t responded. What is even worse that in November they want to celebrate the 100th anniversary of this crime against our people. The silence of the international community as to the Israeli aggressive policies has emboldened Israel to continue such policies.

Let me remind you that Israel has violated international resolutions since its establishment. It has violated the United Nations Charter and continues to do so, as well as Resolutions 181, 194, 242, dividing Palestine. And it said through Articles 42, it says that those who conduct aggression against the land of others will be defeated by force. Israel has taken a large part of our territory and it was not deterred by the United Nations.

There is also Resolution 194, providing for the return of refugees at that time. However, the United Nations has not adopted any resolution. And there is also another resolution calling for withdrawal, Resolution 338, and Resolution 2334 of the Security Council last year. So where is this resolution? If the United Nations cannot implement its resolutions, who will implement these resolutions? Israel doesn’t want to. Israel is above the law. Is it above the law?

Ladies and gentlemen, there is double standard in dealing with countries. This is your responsibility. President, to salvage the peace process and the two-state solution, I urge this organization and your honorable states to do the following.

First, actively pursue efforts to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine within a set time frame. Let’s say within this time frame, the occupation will come to an end. It is no longer enough to issue generic statements calling for the end of occupation and the achievement of peace without a deadline. Efforts must be made to implement the Arab Peace Initiative, including the just solution for the Palestinian refugee question in accordance with Resolution 194. The Arab Initiative was great in addressing the issue of refugees when mentioning a just and agreed-upon solution, not imposed upon a certain party, in accordance with Resolution 194. Where is the mistake? So these resolutions were disregarded by Israel and Israel has ridden roughshod over these resolutions. To whom should we go? To whom should we complain?

Second, act to bring to a halt all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, as demanded in numerous United Nations resolutions including the most recent, Resolution 2334, in addition to the operative paragraphs of the Fourth Geneva Convention. So an occupying power should not expel the people from their land. This is the text of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Who is responsible for implementing these texts? Israel says no, and what are we saying as international community?

Third, ensure international protection to the land and people of the State of Palestine until the end of the occupation, as we are unable to provide protection to our people, given all the forces, the arms that we are facing every day. Who would protect us if you don’t? Many a time we have tabled draft resolutions, and these go in vain.

Fourth, demand that Israel endorses and commits to the borders of 1967 as the basis for the two-state solution, and set such borders in line with international resolutions. Once we delineate the borders, each party can act in its territory as it pleases, without affecting or damaging the rights of the other party. Now Israel builds wherever it wishes, demolishing houses every day. Even schools are being demolished, hospitals. Nobody raises an eyebrow.

Now I—fifth, I must ask you, all the Member States of the United Nations, those who have recognized Israel, they should state that they recognized Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, thus aligning themselves with international resolutions and reaffirming their commitments to these resolutions, even those recognized Israel on the basis of 181. Resolution 181 was violated. Allow me to ask a question. Where is—where are the borders of Israel that you are recognizing? Where are these borders? How can you recognize a state that has no borders? It has not even decided on its own borders. And the international law states that the state is a land with borders, and Israel has no borders. So how can you recognize a state that has no clear borders?

Sixth, I call on all states to end all forms of direct and indirect involvement with and support to the illegal Israeli colonial settlement regime on the land of the occupied State of Palestine, in accordance with UN resolutions and with the affirmed positions of the states in this regard. And similar to the international community’s approach towards the apartheid regime in South Africa, we should not deal with settlements, we should not condone settlements. The blacklist of countries who are dealing illegally with Israeli settlements should be exposed and revealed.

Seven, I urge those states that have not recognized the State of Palestine yet to do so. I don’t understand how recognizing the State of Palestine on the borders of 1967—there could be minor amendments between the two parties, but the foundation or the basis is 1967. So our borders are well-known. Where are the borders of Israel? I don’t understand how recognizing the State of Palestine harms the chances of peace, especially since we, Palestinians, have recognized Israel on the 1967 borders.

Eighth, we look to the Security Council to approve our application for full membership of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. What do we lack? What is there that is missing? Every day we prove that we are eligible for such status. All those who support the two-state solution should recognize the two states, not one state. Palestine and Israel. If you recognize Israel you should recognize Palestine.

Ninth, we urge the international community to continue to provide economic and financial support to the Palestinian people to achieve self-reliance. If the occupation comes to an end, we will tell you thank you. We will be self- reliant. Unfortunately, because there is occupation, we can only seek assistance, and we are grateful to you because you are rendering such assistance. Help us to get rid of occupation, and we would thank you for your help.

We also urge you to continue providing support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA, in order for it to continue rendering humanitarian assistance. In this respect, we are warning that there are attempts to eliminate Item 7 on the agenda of the Human Rights Council, or to change the mandate of UNRWA. And also there are efforts to obstruct the issuance of the list of companies operating in Israeli settlements. This is a black list. Why should we hide this list? It is similar to terrorism. Everybody should see this list to know who violates international law and who respects such law. So again, the black list of companies operating in Israeli settlements in the territory of the occupied State of Palestine.

Tenth, we once again affirm our commitment to respect human rights and international conventions, and to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, and all other treaties and conventions that we have acceded to. Anything that we have acceded to or adopted we respect it, and we go side by side with the international community. We are a part of this international community.

President, the State of Palestine will reflect on these imperatives in draft resolutions as appropriate to be presented to the United Nations General Assembly.

We call upon you, all of you, to vote in favor of these resolutions with the clear aim of preserving the two-state solution, and salvaging and promoting the chances for achieving peace, and to achieve prosperity for the Israelis and Palestinians alike, and the peoples of the region at large.

In closing, allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to salute our great people who remain steadfast in their homeland despite their suffering, those who are struggling against foreign occupation peacefully. The culture of peace is prevailing among Palestinians, among all Palestinians. Who are those people who joined Daesh, ISIL? None of them is from Palestine. What does this mean? I salute our people in Jerusalem who have given one of the most bright examples of peaceful popular resistance against the Israeli colonial occupation. When they prevented them from praying, they prayed outside. They were praying and they were victorious.

I salute our people in exile and in diaspora. I salute our people who remain steadfast in the West Bank, and also the besieged Gaza Strip. I salute our glorious martyrs and our courageous prisoners who are there in the Israeli jails. I tell them all that freedom is coming. It is inevitable. It will come. And that occupation shall come to an end. It will either be the independence of the State of Palestine to live side-by-side in peace and security with the State of Israel on the 1967 borders, or equal, or if they want, if they wish, equal rights for all of the inhabitants of the land of historic Palestine from the river to the sea. Will they accept so?

When South Africa was liberated from the apartheid regime, Nelson Mandela said, I am grateful to the whole word and the United Nations that have contributed to and supported the end of apartheid in South Africa, and it so happened. But Nelson Mandela added, our victory is not complete until the victory is rendered to the Palestinian people. So we are entrusted, and you are entrusted to end apartheid in Palestine. All of us, even the super power, they should stand by us. This is a trust. You should fulfill the trust. Are you going to do so?

Thank you. I hope so.